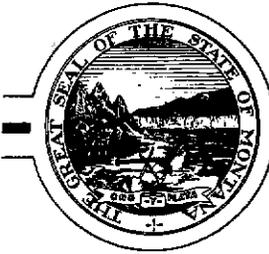


DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

EXHIBIT 7
DATE 3-7-05
SB 29



JUDY MARTZ
GOVERNOR

GAIL GRAY, Ed.D.
DIRECTOR

STATE OF MONTANA

www.dphhs.state.mt.us

PO BOX 4210
HELENA, MONTANA 59604-4210
(406) 444-5622
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December 3, 2004

Senator Trudi Schmidt
State Capitol
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Senator Schmidt:

This letter is in support of LC# 0031, which proposes to eliminate the disqualification for food stamp, and cash assistance benefits for certain paroled individuals who are in compliance with their probation or parole requirements. We believe this change is fiscally and programmatically appropriate.

When federal welfare reform was signed into law on August 22, 1996, the new law prohibited any individual convicted of a drug-related felony from receiving food stamp or cash assistance benefits. States have the option of over-riding this provision, however, if the State Legislature enacts legislation to eliminate the disqualification.

Welfare reform in Montana has been underway for almost nine years. During that time, any individual convicted of a drug-related felony has been denied food stamp and cash assistance benefits. Although their families were eligible to receive benefits, the extra adult returning to the household after parole often made it difficult without the extra benefits to meet the basic needs of the parolee.

Both probation/parole officers and eligibility workers have shared anecdotally the difficulty that families have re-uniting after a parolee returns home. The extra financial and food assistance support may make the parolee's transition back to the community more successful. This not only helps the parolee but also can reduce the cost of recidivism.

A recent snapshot of the caseload indicates that 77 individuals would become eligible for cash assistance, and an additional 145 would become eligible for food stamp benefits. The additional costs of providing these individuals with food stamp and/or cash assistance benefits will not require a significant budget adjustment.

Senator Trudi Schmidt
Page 2 of 2
December 3, 2004

We hope you will consider supporting LC#0031. We believe it is a bill that would strengthen Montana's families and greatly improve the chance of success for individuals who are paroled and in compliance with their probation or parole plan.

Sincerely,



Gail Gray
DPHHS Director

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS



JUDY MARTZ, GOVERNOR

1539 11TH AVENUE

STATE OF MONTANA

(406) 444-3930
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PO BOX 201301
HELENA, MONTANA 59620-1301

November 29, 2004

Minkie Medora
Chair, Food Policy Council
Montana Food Bank Network
5652 Expressway
Missoula, MT 59808

Re: Letter of support for LC0031

Dear Mrs. Medora:

As the Director of the Department of Corrections, I would like to support the legislation to return food stamp and TANF benefits to individuals that have been convicted of a felony of possession, use, or distribution of a controlled substance. I also support repealing the current lifetime ban on these benefits.

It is important that ex-offenders be able to receive these benefits, as it often is the difference between failure and a successful reintegration back into the community, especially while trying to support a family. I do believe that the needed assistance they can receive from these programs will help to keep them from re-offending. I understand that offenders need to be held accountable for their crimes, but by not allowing these benefits, we often punish their children.

Sincerely,


Bill Slaughter
Director

eliminating racism empowering women

ywca

To: Representative Don Roberts
Montana State Legislature
Helena, MT.

From: YWCAs of Montana

Date: January 17, 2005

RE: SB29

As members of the nation's oldest and largest women's organization, we join the voices of others who will urge you to support legislation to restore Food Stamp and TANF benefits to low income people with drug felonies. We believe this legislation will have a positive impact on the families we work with everyday in our local associations. These families all have dependent children, and single females head most of them. All of them struggle to provide food, shelter, and health care for themselves and their families.

Under current Montana law, people cannot receive food stamps or TANF cash assistance if they have had a previous drug-related felony since 1996. This ban does not apply to people who have been convicted and served their time for other criminal offenses, including violent crimes. As a result, families of people with drug-related felonies receive much lower benefits of food stamps and TANF. To make matter worse, the income and assets of the convicted drug felon is counted toward the benefit calculations that other family members may receive, thereby decreasing the family benefit even further. Women head many of the families affected by this ban. According to the Department of Corrections, the top offense for females in Montana in 2003 was drug possession. Many of these women are single parents who have to make a living to support their children once they have completed their sentence term.

In a state that ranks second in the nation for children living in poverty, and where in 2000, 41% of female-headed households with children under 18 lived in poverty, it is imperative that we do everything in our power to reduce the risk for low-income families. Both hunger and obesity are serious public health problems, and paradoxically can co-exist in the same families or individuals. With fewer resources to buy food or to obtain health care or other preventative interventions, people with limited incomes are particularly susceptible to damage from hunger/food insecurity, obesity, or both.

The cost of restoring these benefits is minimal compared to the severe impact of not providing these benefits to the estimated 222 people affected by the current ban. Contrary to popular misconceptions about welfare, Montana families do not get rich off the system, nor do they stay on welfare very long. In 2002, Montana families receiving TANF received an average of \$375 per month for a family of three. A Montana family stays on TANF for an average of 11 months. Restored benefits will be covered with

federal dollars only, and therefore the DPHHS budget will not require adjustments. The costs of not restoring these benefits will be measured in undue hardships for all members of the affected families, greater stress, and an increased likelihood of putting children in foster homes or leading clients back into the corrections system. The families currently affected by the ban also depend more on emergency food resources, like food banks and soup kitchens, and they require more support services from human service agencies that are already strapped with resources too limited to meet an ever-growing need.

The YWCAs of Montana operate in four Montana cities. We provide shelter for battered women and their children, and transitional housing for homeless women and children. In 2003, we served 865 women and children with emergency shelter and 123 women with transitional and long-term housing. We have over 90 years experience providing for the needs of women, and along the way we have learned that one of the most effective means of preventing long-term dependence is to offer a hand up in times of crisis. We believe that SB29 offers temporary assistance to families who are in desperate need of food stamps and cash assistance to meet their basic needs. We urge you to help these families by passing SB29.

Sincerely,

Gayle Tompkins, Executive Director
YWCA of Billings
909 Wyoming Ave.
Billings, MT 59101
252-6303

Marilyn Ployhar, Interim Director
YWCA of Great Falls
220 2nd St. N.
Great Falls, MT 59401
452-1315

Kathleen Harrington, Executive Director
YWCA of Helena
501 N. Park Ave.
Helena, MT 59601
442-8774

Cindy Weese, Executive Director
YWCA of Missoula
1130 W. Broadway
Missoula, MT 59802
543-6691

March 2, 2005

Kimala A. Pullman, RD, LN
PO Box 277
East Helena, MT 59635

The Honorable Arlene Becker, Chair
House Human Services Committee
Montana State Capitol
Helena, MT 59601

Dear Representative Becker,

I am writing you in support of the Senate Bill 29, a measure to reintroduce food stamp and Temporary Assistance For Needy Families (TANF) benefits to persons with drug-related offenses. Providing these much-needed benefits for people with these offenses is a critical component to allowing them the time they need to make changes critical to staying out of the system.

Denying eligible people these benefits, especially in the case of people with drug-related offenses, does more harm than good; especially considering that many of the people in Montana that fall into this category are single women with children and families who are trying to make a living once their sentence is completed. The cost of NOT providing these benefits has had severe impact on the whole family, causing undue hardships, greater stress, and often leading to putting children in foster homes or the clients back into the correction system.

The education and training that is provided through these programs is critical to helping clients become more employable and providing assistance with job search/job retention. It gives them the tools they need to become self-sufficient. Our correctional facilities are filled to capacity, and place a great financial burden on our state. This bill provides one way that we can help some of the people who get out of the system to **stay** out.

I encourage you to support SB 0029. Thank you very much for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Kimala A. Pullman
Registered Dietitian
(406) 439-2383

FACT SHEET FOR SB29

**LEGISLATION TO INCREASE FOOD AND BENEFITS FOR
LOW-INCOME PEOPLE.
YOUR HELP AND SUPPORT IS NEEDED**

1. Under current Montana law, people who are eligible for food stamps or TANF cannot receive those benefits if they have had a previous drug-related felony since August 22, 1996.
2. This ban on benefits does not apply to people who have served their time for other criminal offenses and who are also qualified based on income.
3. Families of people with drug-related felonies therefore receive much lower benefits of food stamps and TANF assistance. However, income and resources of these persons are counted towards the benefit calculations that other family members may receive. This drops the family benefits further.
4. At this time approximately 222 clients are effected by this ban. Of these, 77 have lost TANF benefits and 145 have lost food stamp benefits.
5. According to the Dept. of Corrections data, the top offense for females in the state for FY 2003 was drug possession. From FY 1994-2002, three of the top ten convictions for females was drug felony
6. Most of these women have children and families. many are single parents and are trying to make a living once their sentence is completed.

- All TANF families must have dependent children in order to qualify for the program.
- The TANF benefits add approximately \$77 to a family's monthly income, a critical amount for these clients.
- All benefits are paid through federal dollars and will not required adjustments in the department's budget.
- The TANF program also includes the Education & Training (E&T) program that makes the clients more employable, provides assistance with job search and job retention. These benefits enable clients to become self-sufficient.
- The cost of NOT providing these benefits has had severe impact on the whole family, causing undue hardships, greater stress and often leading to putting children in foster homes or the clients back into the correction system.

FOOD STAMPS: The Food Stamp program is the single most effective program in reducing hunger and improving the nutrition and health of poor people.

Studies show that overall families with food stamps are careful about their food and have concern about their family's nutrition.

Food stamps enable families to buy nutritious food, gives a consistent food resource and the family does not have to rely on emergency food for their meals.

TANF: Those families that are eligible for TANF benefits are at an even lower income level than those receiving food stamps.

Poor people who have had drug felonies are in desperate need of the cash assistance to meet multiple needs like rent, heating bills, medications as well as food.

Thank you very much

Montana Food Bank Network
Food Policy Council

Public Policy Council
Montana Dietetic Association