FACT SHEET FOR SB0029

SENATE PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE & SAFETY
EXHIBIT #8
DATE: 1-14-05
BILL NO. SB 29

LEGISLATION TO INCREASE FOOD AND BENEFITS FOR LOW-INCOME PEOPLE

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 (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) 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.

- *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.*

- 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 require 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.

For further information, please email Minkie Medora: medora@bigsky.net *or call 406-549-3413. Please let us know if you can help.*

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Public Policy Council
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