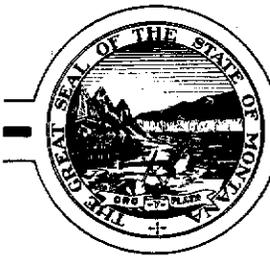


DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



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December 3, 2004

Senator Trudi Schmidt
State Capitol
Helena, MT 59620

SENATE PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE & SAFETY	
EXHIBIT NO.	9
DATE:	1-14-05
BILL NO.	SB 29

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
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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