



For More Information:
Chuck Newton
cnewton@rilin.state.ri.us
401.222.2259/401.480.0612

**MORGAN FILES LEGISLATION
TO COMBAT FOOD STAMP FRAUD**

* * *

**Bill Would Require Photo ID For
Purchases Using EBT Cards**

* * *

**COMPANION LEGISLATION WOULD PROHIBIT EBT
PURCHASES OF ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, LOTTERY TICKETS**

STATE HOUSE, JAN 30 – Abuse of Electronic Benefit Cards (EBT) used in state public assistance and food stamp programs is the target of legislation filed Thursday by State Representative Patricia Morgan (R-Coventry, West Warwick, Warwick).

The bill would require EBT users to present photo ID when making purchases.

Recent arrests by the State Police have shown that EBT cards are involved in a wide variety of fraudulent transactions. Cards are routinely sold at a discount for cash, or stolen and used by unauthorized persons. In one instance, an EBT card issued to an inmate at the ACI was being used fraudulently by another family member.

EBT fraud is commonplace, with the costs reaching into the millions. The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, which supervises the national food stamp program, estimates that losses from abuse are in the neighborhood of \$750 million annually, a figure which has doubled since 2008.

“Food stamps are no longer paper coupons. Instead, the state issues EBT cards that are nothing more than debit cards.

“To sell their benefit, the recipient must give the card to the illegal purchaser. Since the card has the recipients name on it, requiring any person using an EBT card to present photo ID would help stop the abuse. This does rely on retailer staff to check the identification, and this is difficult to ensure. But this is a preventive measure that we expect can be helpful in curtailing fraud.

“I don’t know anyone who doesn’t want to make sure that those in need have adequate food, and that their children go to school with full stomachs. But EBT fraud and abuse steals from the system, and the benefits don’t go to where they are most needed.

In the case of EBT trafficking, the user isn’t buying food, which is the intention of the program, but trading in the card or taking cash at a discount. This kind of fraud drives costs up and threatens the benefit for those families that depend on the food stamp program.

Requiring photo IDs would do much to identify and correct abuses, and is a cost-effective way of dealing with the problem said Morgan.

“We need to do everything we can to prevent the abuse,” said Morgan.

“Approved photo IDs are commonplace, individuals can obtain one at no cost if they do not have one, and this requirement does not need a huge bureaucracy behind it to make it work.

“I think every citizen would have more confidence in the system, and with state government, if we acted to limit abuse,” she said.

Morgan’s proposal is similar to a bill filed this week in Congress by Senator David Vitter of Louisiana. Under his proposed “Food Stamp Fraud Prevention and Accountability Act,” anyone caught using someone else’s EBT card illegally would be banned from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Representative Morgan is also submitted legislation prohibiting use of EBT cards to buy non-essential items such as alcohol, cigarettes, tattoos, gambling and lottery tickets, tattoos, jewelry, pornography or cruises.

“Taxpayers are willing to help people in need, but they are not willing to pay for luxury items. By putting these prohibitions into law, we give our law enforcement officials more tools to prosecute this abusive practice.

“It is common sense to tighten up the use of EBT cards. We should all agree that zero-tolerance for fraud and abuse works to the benefit of all involved,” she said.

[end]