

A MEMORIAL

REQUESTING THE HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT TO TRACK AND REPORT ON NEW MEXICO SAFETY NET DATA ON PROGRAMS THAT PROVIDE TEMPORARY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO NEEDY FAMILIES AND ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY, TO APPLY FOR ANY FEDERAL WAIVERS THAT INCREASE ACCESS TO PUBLIC BENEFITS AND TO CONDUCT OUTREACH TO INFORM POTENTIALLY ELIGIBLE NEW MEXICANS OF EXISTING PROGRAMS AND ENGAGE COMMUNITY LEADERS AND STAKEHOLDERS OF BARRIERS TO ENROLLMENT IN PUBLIC-BENEFIT PROGRAMS.

WHEREAS, one-fifth of all New Mexicans live at or below the federal poverty level, while nearly one-half of all New Mexicans live below two hundred percent of the federal poverty level, an even more accurate measure of poverty; and

WHEREAS, fourteen percent of New Mexico's children live in extreme poverty, which is measured as fifty percent of the federal poverty level; and

WHEREAS, New Mexico ranks second in the nation in the proportion of residents experiencing food insecurity, first in the nation for children experiencing food insecurity and last in the nation for overall child welfare; and

WHEREAS, nineteen percent of New Mexicans who are eligible for the supplemental nutrition assistance program are not receiving assistance; and

WHEREAS, the temporary assistance for needy families

program, which is designed to assist New Mexico's lowest income families, has seen a thirty-five percent decline in participation since 2011; and

WHEREAS, in 2011 the human services department reduced eligibility for the temporary assistance for needy families program cash benefits and also reduced the amount of cash benefits by fifteen percent; and

WHEREAS, the human services department has increased work participation requirements to meet eligibility for the temporary assistance for needy families program, making those previously exempt from the requirements engage in work activities or be subject to benefit sanctions for noncompliance; and

WHEREAS, nine and six-tenths percent of temporary assistance for needy families cases have been sanctioned for noncompliance; and

WHEREAS, the federal government cut supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits by five and one-half percent in November 2013; and

WHEREAS, seven New Mexico counties have unemployment rates above the national average rate of seven percent; and

WHEREAS, the human services department did not implement a statewide federal waiver from work requirements for New Mexico's childless adults, a waiver option that New Mexico qualifies for because of the state's high unemployment rate;

and

WHEREAS, the human services department has changed the application and eligibility procedures to make a determination of eligibility for public benefits, including a new automated eligibility screening and determination system for public benefits; a new paper application form; and a new online application system; and

WHEREAS, case managers and advocates for the poor report that the current application procedures for public benefits are burdensome and discourage eligible New Mexicans from receiving the benefits to which they are entitled;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO that the human services department be requested to:

A. publicize the number of eligible, but not enrolled, children and adults in each county for the supplemental nutrition assistance program and the temporary assistance for needy families program;

B. publicize data on sanctions placed on public benefit recipients, including how many cases receive sanctions, the reason for the sanctions and the number of children affected by sanctions; and

C. publicize the number of applications for all public benefits received per month, the number processed and the number approved; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the human services department be requested to report to the legislative health and human services committee and the legislative finance committee during the 2014 interim on the impact of:

A. implementation of work requirements for all childless adults in the supplemental nutrition assistance program, including the number of supplemental nutrition assistance program recipients that have been affected; the cost to the state for the implementation and administration of work requirements verification; and how much federal supplemental nutrition assistance program funding New Mexico has lost and will continue to lose; and

B. temporary assistance for needy families program and supplemental nutrition assistance program benefit cuts on vulnerable children in New Mexico, including the number of children who lost temporary assistance for needy families program benefits due to the 2011 benefit adjustments and the number of vulnerable children who would have been eligible for temporary assistance for needy families program benefits if the benefit amount were reinstated at 2011 levels; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the human services department be requested to:

A. apply for all federal waivers for which New Mexico qualifies that increase access to public benefits in New Mexico and implement all qualifying federal waivers

received statewide; and

B. seek and use, to the extent possible, all federal funds provided for the supplemental nutrition assistance program, the temporary assistance for needy families program and all other public benefit programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the human services department be requested to:

A. conduct additional outreach so that New Mexicans who are potentially eligible for public benefits are made aware of existing programs and the steps they must take to apply for those programs; and

B. engage community members and other stakeholders to identify and remove barriers preventing the enrollment of eligible New Mexicans in public benefit programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the human services department be requested to report on action taken in response to the requests in this memorial to the interim legislative health and human services committee and the legislative finance committee in the fall of 2014 and the fall of 2015; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be transmitted to the secretary of human services, the chair of the legislative finance committee, the chair of the legislative health and human services committee and the governor.