

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2013

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A N A C T

RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES - PUBLIC ASSISTANCE ACT

Introduced By: Senators Bates, Hodgson, Lynch, Walaska, and McCaffrey

Date Introduced: February 12, 2013

Referred To: Senate Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 40 of the General Laws entitled "HUMAN SERVICES" is hereby  
2 amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 6.6

4 PURCHASE OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES, LOTTERY TICKETS, OR TOBACCO WITH

5 DIRECT CASH ASSISTANCE FUNDS

6 **40-6.6-1. Definitions.** – As used in this chapter, the following terms shall, unless the  
7 content clearly requires otherwise, have the following meanings:

8 (1) "Access device", a card, code, or other means of a card that can be used alone or in  
9 conjunction with another access device, to obtain payments, allotments, benefits, money, goods,  
10 or other things of value, or that can be used to initiate a transfer of funds under the federal food  
11 and nutrition act of 2008, 7 U.S.C. section 2011 et seq., or regulations issued pursuant to the  
12 federal food and nutrition act of 2008.

13 (2) "Direct cash assistance", any manner of cash assistance provided by the department of  
14 transitional assistance, including, but not limited to, temporary aid to families with dependent  
15 children, wherein the assistance is provided directly to the recipient, rather than a vendor.

16 (3) "Electronic benefit transfer card", a card that provides benefits through an electronic  
17 benefit transfer.

18 (4) "Electronic benefit transfer transaction", the use of a credit or debit card service,  
19 automated teller machine, point-of-sale terminal or access to an online system for the withdrawal

1 of funds or the processing of a payment for merchandise or a service.

2 (5) "Vacation services", furnishing interstate or foreign travel services solely for the  
3 purpose of recreation, including, but not limited to transportation, lodging and travel agent  
4 services; provided, however, that vacation services shall not include travel related to: a personal  
5 or family emergency, the death of a family member, employment, medical treatment, appearance  
6 before a court of law, court-authorized parental visitation and such other categories of travel  
7 which may be designated, from time to time, by the department as non-recreational travel.

8 **40-6.6-2. Prohibited transactions.** – No person shall knowingly use or accept direct  
9 cash assistance funds held on electronic benefit transfer cards or access devices for the purchase  
10 or sale of the following services or products: alcoholic beverages as defined in chapter 3.2; lottery  
11 tickets; tobacco products as defined in chapter 44-20; visual material or performances intended to  
12 create or simulate sexual conduct or sexual excitement as those terms are defined in section 11-  
13 31-1; firearms and ammunition as defined in section 11-47-2; vacation services; tattoos or body  
14 piercings; jewelry; for gambling or for the payment to the commonwealth of or any political  
15 subdivision thereof of any fees, fines, bail, or bail bonds ordered by a court.

16 **40-6.6-3. Penalties.** – Any eligible recipient of direct cash assistance who knowingly  
17 makes a prohibited purchase in violation of this section shall reimburse the department for such  
18 purchase and, for the second offense, shall be disqualified from the direct cash assistance program  
19 for a period of two (2) months, and, for the third offense, shall be disqualified from the direct  
20 cash assistance program permanently; provided, however, that the department shall only  
21 disqualify an eligible recipient after notice and a hearing.

22 **40-6.6-4. Electronic benefit transfers.** – (a) The department shall maintain policies and  
23 practices as necessary to prevent cash assistance provided under this chapter from being used in  
24 any electronic benefit transfer transaction at: liquor stores; casinos, gambling casinos, or gaming  
25 establishments; retail establishments which provide adult-oriented entertainment in which  
26 performers disrobe or perform in an unclothed state for entertainment, as defined in section  
27 408(a) of the social security act, as amended; adult bookstores or adult paraphernalia stores;  
28 firearms dealers; tattoo parlors; manicure shops or aesthetic shops; rent-to-own stores; jewelry  
29 stores; or on cruise ships. Such establishments shall not accept electronic benefits transfer cards.  
30 A store owner who knowingly allows a prohibited electronic benefits transfer transaction in  
31 violation of this section or subsection (b) of section 40-6.1-1 shall be punished by a fine of not  
32 more than five hundred dollars (\$500) for a first offense, by a fine of not less than five hundred  
33 dollars (\$500) nor more than two thousand five hundred dollars (\$2,500) for a second offense and  
34 by a fine of not less than two thousand five hundred dollars (\$2,500) for a third or subsequent

1 offense.

2 (b) A store owner who knowingly violates this section and who also possesses a license  
3 to sell alcoholic beverages under chapter 3-7 shall be referred to the appropriate licensing  
4 authority for possible disciplinary action pursuant to section 64 of said chapter 138.

5 (c) A store owner who knowingly violates this section and who also possesses a license  
6 to sell lottery tickets under section 42-61-5 shall be referred to the director of the state lottery for  
7 possible disciplinary action.

8 **40-6.6-5. Food stamp trafficking.** – (a) As used in this section, "food stamp benefits",  
9 shall mean benefits issued pursuant to the federal food and nutrition act of 2008, 7 U.S.C. section  
10 2011 to 2029, inclusive, as amended, including such benefits contained on an electronic benefit  
11 transfer card.

12 (b) An individual commits the offense of food stamp benefits trafficking if the individual  
13 knowingly:

14 (1) Presents for payment or redemption or transfers food stamp benefits in any form,  
15 including transfers to another, who does not, or does not intend to, use the food stamp benefits for  
16 the benefit of the household for whom the benefits were intended, as defied in the regulations of  
17 the department; or

18 (2) Possesses, buys, sells, uses, alters, accepts, or transfers food stamp benefits in any  
19 manner not authorized by the food and nutrition act of 2008, 7 U.S.C., section 2011, as amended.

20 (c) An individual who traffics food stamp benefits, as described in subsection (b) shall:

21 (1) If the food stamp benefits are of a value of less than two hundred fifty dollars (\$250)  
22 or if the item used, transferred, acquired, altered, or possessed has a value of less than two  
23 hundred fifty dollars (\$250), be punished by imprisonment in a jail or house of correction for not  
24 more than one year or by a fine of not more than one thousand dollars (\$1,000), or both such fine  
25 and imprisonment; or

26 (2) If the food stamp benefits are of a value of two hundred fifty dollars (\$250) or more  
27 or the item used, transferred, acquired, altered, or possessed has a value of two hundred fifty  
28 dollars (\$250) or more, be punished by imprisonment in a jail or house of correction for not more  
29 than two (2) years or by imprisonment in a state prison for not more than five (5) years or by a  
30 fine of not more than five thousand dollars (\$5,000), or both fine and imprisonment.

31 (d) If a person is alleged to have committed the offense of trafficking in food stamp  
32 benefits two (2) or more times within a six (6) month period, those offenses may be aggregated  
33 and charged in a single count and the offenses so aggregated and charged shall constitute a single  
34 offense; provided, however, that, if the aggregate value of the food stamp benefits alleged to be

1 trafficked is two hundred fifty dollars (\$250) or more, the person shall be subject to the penalties  
2 prescribed in clause (2) of subsection (c).

3 (e) Crimes under this section may be prosecuted and punished in any county where a  
4 defendant used, transferred, acquired, or possessed food stamp benefits or in the county in which  
5 the state agency responsible for administering food stamp benefits is headquartered.

6 **40-6.6-6. Penalties for organizations.** – (a) As used in this section, "organization" shall  
7 mean a corporation for profit or not-for-profit, partnership, limited partnership, joint venture,  
8 unincorporated association, estate, trust, or other commercial or legal entity; provided, however,  
9 that "organization" shall not include an entity organized as or by a governmental agency for the  
10 execution of a governmental program.

11 (b) An organization commits the offense of organizational food stamp benefits trafficking  
12 if the organization knowingly; (1) uses, sells, transfers, acquires, alters, or possesses food stamp  
13 benefits or electronic benefit transfer cards in any manner not authorized by the food and  
14 nutrition act of 2008, 7 U.S.C., section 2011, as amended, or the regulations of the department; or  
15 (2) presents for payment or redemption food stamp benefits that have been received, transferred,  
16 altered, or used in violation of this section shall be guilty of organizational food stamp benefits  
17 trafficking.

18 (c) If an organization is alleged to have committed the offense of organizational food  
19 stamp benefits trafficking two (2) or more times within a six (6) month period, any of those  
20 offenses may be aggregated and charged in a single count and the offenses so aggregated and  
21 charged shall constitute a single offense.

22 (d) An organization that commits food stamp benefits trafficking as described in  
23 subsection (c) shall:

24 (1) If it is the organization's first offense under this section, be punished by a fine of not  
25 less than five thousand dollars (\$5,000);

26 (2) If it is the organization's second offense under this section, be punished by a fine of  
27 not less than ten thousand dollars (\$10,000); or

28 (3) If it is the organization's third or subsequent offense under this section, be punished  
29 by a fine of not less than fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000).

30 (e) A retail or wholesale organization owner who is convicted of organizational food  
31 stamp benefits trafficking and who also possesses a license to sell alcoholic beverages under  
32 chapter 3-7 shall be referred to the appropriate licensing authority for possible disciplinary action.

33 (f) A retail or wholesale organization owner who is convicted of organizational food  
34 stamp benefits trafficking and who also possesses a license to sell lottery tickets under section 42-

1 61-5 shall be referred to the director of the state lottery for possible disciplinary action.

2 (g) Crimes under this section may be prosecuted and punished in any county where  
3 defendant used, transferred, acquired, or possessed food stamp benefits.

4 **40-6.6-7. Duties of department.** – The department shall develop and make available on  
5 its website for download a sign specifying the department's fraud hotline. Business associations  
6 may also maintain a downloadable form of the sign on the business associations' websites. Such  
7 sign shall be posted in a conspicuous area in any business accepting electronic benefits transfer  
8 cards as a form of payment. Any business accepting electronic benefit transfer cards as a form of  
9 payment shall maintain a list of categories of prohibited products under this chapter at each cash  
10 register.

11 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF  
A N A C T  
RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES - PUBLIC ASSISTANCE ACT

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1           This act would prohibit eligible recipients of direct cash assistance from using direct cash  
2 assistance funds for the purchase of alcoholic beverages, lottery tickets, or tobacco products. It  
3 further requires eligible recipients of direct cash assistance who make a purchase in violation of  
4 this act to reimburse the department for such purchases.

5           This act would take effect upon passage.

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