



Assembly Member **SANDRÉ SWANSON**

News Release

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Swanson's Bill To Offer Additional Transitional Assistance Passes Human Services Committee

(Sacramento)—The Transitional Assistance for Re-Entry Programs Act, AB 1198, passed the Human Services Committee on a 5-2 vote. The bill will allow California to provide critical food services to individuals recently released from incarceration for drug-related convictions.

“This legislation is about removing barriers once a person has paid his or her debt to society, and allowing families, especially children, to avoid being punished when their loved ones or parents return to the community. Furthermore, for incarceration to truly be effective in protecting the public, the State must make every effort at rehabilitation. It’s hypocritical to say that we are trying to reduce the exploding prison population while releasing inmates without critical services to help them transition back into the community” Assemblymember Swanson stated.

AB 1198 revises and continues the reform initiative Assemblymember Swanson began with AB 508, which passed both the Assembly and the Senate, but was vetoed by the Governor. Assemblymember Swanson is confident that AB 1198 addresses the problem more effectively than previous incarnations by allowing all convicted drug felons to participate in the food stamp programs as long as specified drug treatment conditions are met.

Specifically, the bill will allow parolees who have been incarcerated for drug related offenses to receive food stamp and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits. Existing Federal law permanently bars drug related felons from ever receiving these benefits, but allows states to opt out of the ban through legislative action.

AB 1198 creates that legislative action. Because of the important role that food stamps and public assistance play in the lives of individuals reentering society after imprisonment, fourteen states have eliminated the ban entirely, and twenty-one other states have modified the ban to enable those with drug felony convictions to receive food stamps and cash assistance if they meet certain conditions.

“Fundamental to any re-entry program is the ability to take care of yourself and your family. Denying these individuals food, clothing and shelter makes it very difficult for them to support themselves and their families as they leave the criminal justice system and reenter society. More importantly, without support, they are inclined to return to criminal activity and drug use instead of attaining sobriety and gainful employment. AB 1198 will especially help women and single parents, who often have difficulty finding work immediately after release,” Assemblymember Swanson noted.

Available data supports Assemblymember Swanson’s assertion, with the most conspicuous example of California’s correctional breakdown apparent in its unparalleled level of repeat offenders. California has a 70% recidivism rate, the highest in the nation. Only 21% of California parolees successfully complete parole—half the national average—and two out of three inmates returning to prison are parolees. Notably, New York, which completely opted out of the federal ban on TANF and food stamps, has a recidivism rate that is 25% lower than California’s.

The overpopulation crisis in the prisons has also heavily skewed the Legislature's expenditures on incarceration. California currently spends over \$10 billion on prisons, and spending is on track to surpass that budgeted for higher education within the next four years.

Assemblymember Swanson concluded: "We cannot sustain this growth in our prison population. In fact, it is becoming very likely that the State will be forced to parole low-level felons early in order to ease overcrowding. If we are not willing to make this most basic of support available to them, they will be even more likely to return to their criminal ways in order to make ends meet."

The bill now moves forward to the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

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