



Assembly Member **SANDRÉ SWANSON**

News Release

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

(Sacramento) - A measure to tap more Federal dollars for California while addressing prison recidivism passed the Senate Human Services Committee yesterday. The Transitional Assistance for Re-Entry Programs Act, AB 1198, will allow State government to provide critical food services to those released from incarceration for drug-related convictions. It passed on a 3-2 vote.

"Once a person has paid their debt to society, they and their family should not continue to be penalized for their mistake. Furthermore, it's hypocritical to say that we are trying to reduce the spiraling prison population while releasing inmates without critical services to help them transition back into the community," Assemblymember Swanson stated.

AB 1198 will allow parolees who have served their time for felony drug related offenses to receive food stamp 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. Fourteen states have eliminated the ban entirely, and twenty-one other states have modified the ban to enable those with certain drug felony convictions to receive food stamps and cash assistance if they meet certain conditions. The bill creates that legislative action.

Alameda County Food Bank client Mark Charles Valenzuela testified in support of the bill, "It is already difficult [for those returning from jail] to find full-time employment while putting food on the table. Many of these people have families. They should not have to suffer as well."

Assemblymember Swanson also noted that pressure to reduce California's recidivism rate is intense. Overcrowding continues to be an issue, while the prison budget, nearing \$10 billion is set to surpass that of higher education shortly. Only 21% of California parolees successfully complete parole—half the national average—and two out of three inmates returning to prison are parolees. New York State, which completely opted out of the federal ban on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and food stamps, has a recidivism rate that is 31% lower than that of California.

"The State cannot afford to spend \$49,000 a year to incarcerate people for parole violations they may not have committed if they had access to the most basic necessities. AB 1198 will help lower the recidivism rate. It will especially help women and single parents, who often have difficulty finding work immediately after release," Assemblymember Swanson commented.

The bill now moves forward to the Senate Appropriations Committee.

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