



Kansas Bans Using Food Stamp Money for Fortunetellers, Other Entertainment

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Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback (R) signed a law reforming the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, restricting the use of cash assistance funds on goods and services such as adult entertainment, fortunetellers, lottery tickets, massage parlors, nail salons, and tattoos.

The new law, sponsored by state Sen. Michael O'Donnell (R-Wichita), takes effect on July 1 and makes into law existing administrative policies set by Brownback's administration.

From Welfare to Work

O'Donnell says the enactment of his bill will help people become less dependent on government assistance and better provide for themselves and their families.

"What we're dedicated to doing is getting people off government assistance and into the workforce," O'Donnell said. "At the end of the day, the best thing we can do for any individual that is in a situation where they need to turn to payments is to make sure they're not in that position again."

By reducing the temptation to spend entitlement money on nonessential goods such as alcohol or lottery tickets, O'Donnell says the new law will encourage people to use cash assistance money for its intended purposes.

"We want to make sure that there is no hindrance or barricade between individuals that are on payments getting into the workforce," O'Donnell said. "Lack of education is the number-one cause of poverty. The money is to be used for necessities for life—shelter, food, vehicles, gasoline, other necessities that are required to help people look for a job or get to the job training skills and programs that we're trying to encourage."

'The Surest Way Out'

Cato Institute Senior Fellow Michael Tanner says welfare programs in general are too large and too numerous.

“We know that work is the surest way out of poverty,” Tanner said. “We don’t want welfare to become a way of life. We have over 120 welfare programs right now, which makes accountability virtually impossible, so there should be greater consolidation of these programs.”

Tanner says reducing the benefits of welfare programs is more effective than simply restricting participation in the programs.

“Overall, we need to reduce the level of welfare benefits that individuals receive,” Tanner said. “In fact, welfare benefits are so high right now that they are often a rational alternative to work. That’s keeping people trapped in dependency for the long term.”

Tanner says entitlement programs such as food stamps were not designed to help people become self-sufficient.

“Big-government policies are not designed to get people off of welfare or out of poverty,” Tanner said. “What they’re designed to do is to make poverty less uncomfortable, and they’ve largely succeeded at that. Malnutrition and ‘the other America’ of the 1960s—we’ve done a good job of doing away with that. But that’s not the same thing as getting out of poverty. We really need to be focused more on how to lift people up, not just how to keep them comfortable in their poverty.”