

ASSEMBLY APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 2359

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MAY 19, 2022

The Assembly Appropriations Committee reports favorably and with committee amendments Assembly Bill No. 2359.

As amended, this bill amends an existing law, section 1 of P.L.2021, c.243 (C.44:10-81.3), which requires the Department of Human Services (DHS) to establish a streamlined New Jersey Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) application process for seniors, to instead require the application process be streamlined for all residents of New Jersey. The goal of streamlining the application process is to maximize the enrollment of eligible SNAP participants in New Jersey .

In streamlining the SNAP application process, the Commissioner of Human Services will be required to, at a minimum, update the online application system to ensure the system employs current technology and is user-friendly, with features that include, but are not limited to, easy account creation, easy access, and easy tracking of an applicant's application status.

As amended, the bill requires the DHS to establish a two-year demonstration project under which the DHS will establish and maintain a call center where department employees are available in real-time to assist individuals in navigating the SNAP application process, checking on the status of an application, and troubleshooting any issues with the application. The call center will expire two years after the effective date of the bill, but may be reauthorized by the adoption of legislation reauthorizing the call center, with or without changes to the nature, duties, or operation of the call center.

No later than 18 months after the effective date of the bill, the commissioner will be required to prepare and submit a report to the Governor and the Legislature with the commissioner's findings concerning the effectiveness of the call center and recommendations as to whether the call center should be reauthorized.

The bill directs the commissioner to apply to the Food and Nutrition Service within the United States Department of Agriculture for any necessary waivers or approvals to implement the provisions of the bill.

The bill amends the rulemaking section of P.L.2021, c.243 to grant the commissioner the authority to adopt implementing rules and

regulations immediately upon filing the rules and regulations with the Office of Administrative Law. The rules and regulations will remain in effect for 18 months and may be reauthorized, with or without amendments, in accordance with the provisions of the “Administrative Procedure Act,” P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.). The bill provides that these rules and regulations will apply both to P.L.2021, c.243 and to the provisions of this bill.

As amended, the bill appropriates \$750,000 from the General Fund to the DHS for the purposes of implementing the bill.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amendments revise the bill to amend P.L.2021, c.243, which overlaps with certain provisions of the bill as introduced, to merge the provisions of that enactment with the provisions of this bill. Specifically, the amendments:

(1) remove from P.L.2021, c.243 references to a streamlined application process for senior citizens and instead makes the streamlined application process applicable to all New Jersey residents;

(2) remove the requirements for the streamlined application process set forth in P.L.2021, c.243 to include a simplified application form, increased data sharing, and cross-enrollment in Medicaid; and replace those requirements the requirements for the streamlined application process provided in the bill as introduced, which include easy account creation, easy access, and easy tracking of the applicant’s status;

(3) provide that, instead of expanding senior citizen participation rates in SNAP, the purpose of the streamlined application process is to maximize enrollment of eligible SNAP participants in New Jersey.

The committee amendments revise the bill to provide that, in lieu of establishing a permanent call center, the DHS will be required to create a two-year call center demonstration project. The amendments remove a provision allowing the DHS to contract out to staff the call center; as amended, the call center will be staffed by DHS personnel. The amendments provide that the call center will expire after two years, but may be reauthorized legislatively, with or without changes to the nature, duties, or operation of the call center.

The committee amendments add a requirement for the Commissioner of Human Services to report to the Governor and the Legislature concerning the effectiveness of the call center and recommendations as to whether the call center should be reauthorized.

The committee amendments revise the rulemaking provisions of P.L.2021, c.243 to grant the DHS emergency rulemaking authority, and to provide that the rulemaking section applies both to that enactment and to this bill.

The committee amendments add a section appropriating \$750,000 to the DHS to implement the provisions of the bill.

The committee amendments revise the title and synopsis of the bill to reflect the changes made by the committee.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Office of Legislative Services determines that the Department of Human Services would potentially incur higher administrative costs in order to update the online application system for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to ensure that the system utilizes current technology and incorporates user-friendly features including easy account creation and access, and improved tracking of an applicant's application status. State revenues, additionally, would likely increase under the bill, since the federal government provides matching funds for qualifying State administrative expenditures under SNAP.