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Bipartisan Bill Allows Incarcerated Texans to Apply for SNAP Before Release

This simple policy change would reduce recidivism for Texans leaving the criminal justice system.

TEXAS – Feeding Texas is excited to announce bill authors for key legislation focused on supporting formerly incarcerated Texans as they reenter society.

Sen. Royce West (D-Dallas) and Rep. Jeff Leach (R-Plano) filed companion bills in the Senate ([SB 727](#)) and House ([HB 1743](#)) that would support people exiting the criminal justice system by implementing pre-release registration for SNAP benefits. This is not an expansion of benefits, as these individuals are already eligible for the program.

“Early access to SNAP benefits ensures Texans exiting the criminal justice system have immediate resources for food so they can focus on rebuilding their lives,” **said Celia Cole, CEO of Feeding Texas.**

“We are grateful to have bipartisan support from Senator West and Representative Leach for this common-sense policy proposal.”

At any given time, nearly 300,000 Texans are on parole or probation. These Texans reenter their communities with a set of complex needs and challenges, including food insecurity, unstable housing, and impediments to finding and retaining quality employment. Many struggle to reintegrate and a large percentage are rearrested or reincarcerated within a few years of release.

“Ensuring access to food assistance upon release means that Texans leaving the criminal justice system can focus on finding a job and reuniting with family,” **Rep. Leach said.** “This is a simple policy change that would support the reentry process, reduce recidivism, and could help lower incarceration costs for the state.”

Research shows that people exiting the criminal justice system are especially vulnerable immediately after release. SNAP provides basic food assistance and supplements limited income for formerly incarcerated Texans who often have no means of purchasing food for themselves or their families.

“SNAP is a critical part of reentry support for formerly incarcerated Texans,” **said Trisha Cunningham, Feeding Texas Board Chair and President and CEO of the North Texas Food Bank.** “Streamlining the application process would help to alleviate burdens felt by Texans reentering society. We look forward to working with our North Texas legislators as they lead the charge on this issue at the Texas Capitol.”

Federal SNAP rules require that states process applications within 30 days of an individual filing the request. For people with zero resources for food, this is too long to wait. Moreover, recent staffing shortages at the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HSSC) have pushed this processing time to over 60 days.

“For Texans leaving the criminal justice system with no means to afford groceries, delays in processing their SNAP applications can lead to hunger and undermine their reentry,” **Sen. West said.** “Texas should join several other states who have addressed this issue by allowing people who are incarcerated to apply for SNAP prior to their release.”

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Feeding Texas leads a unified effort for a hunger-free Texas. Learn more and find your local food bank at www.feedingtexas.org.