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Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families opposes Senate Bill 295, which would create administratively burdensome and repetitive checks on eligibility in SNAP (food assistance) and Medicaid.

At first reading, Senate Bill 295 sounds laudable. No one wants people enrolled in these essential programs to have substantial lottery winnings, or to be in prison, or to have increased incomes that would make them no longer eligible. But DHS **already checks for these changes** and is required by federal law to do so. This bill would require those checks more often, and in a way that **state officials have testified would be impossible in some cases and “cost prohibitive, not cost neutral” in others – all while yielding very little if any useful information.**

Other states’ experience tells us it that it will make little difference with program integrity but instead will make the data collection system more burdensome not only for families, but for the government too.

State officials testified in committee that their accuracy checks of these programs already include:

- Quarterly wage matches with the National Directory of New Hires, and monthly checks from that same directory for any new applicants or those up for recertification in SNAP;
- Checks with Department of Workforce Services records at the time of application and at renewal of enrollment for both SNAP and Medicaid;
- Regular and on-demand checks with Workforce Services to check for changes in income;
- Monthly checks for Arkansas Works beneficiaries to check for income changes;
- Daily checks of incarceration lists for Medicaid and SNAP beneficiaries;
- Monthly checks of death records for Medicaid or SNAP enrollees who may have died;
- Checking out-of-state SNAP transactions that may indicate a change in residency.

Senate Bill 295 doesn’t consider how we’re modernizing our accountability system in Arkansas. It’s a goal of outside interests to pass legislation like this, but we’re already building integrity into a modernized system here.

The proponents of this legislation have admitted that Arkansas has lower than average fraud rates already. We’re doing it correctly here. We know that every dollar misspent is a dollar that isn’t going to families who truly need the help. But SB 295 is not a common-sense approach. It will increase bureaucratic red tape and make it harder for Arkansans to stay healthy, put food on the table and support their families. Such an approach is especially heartless during a pandemic and economic crisis when so many people’s circumstances are changing from one week to the next, increasing the odds of reporting discrepancies that would cause eligible people to lose their assistance.

As we recover from the pandemic, it is more important than ever that our systems are both efficient and humane. We need to focus on maintaining program integrity in a common-sense way while also remembering that the core purpose of such programs is to ensure that people are healthy and economically secure, that no child and no family goes to bed hungry day after day, week after week.