

Iowa Coalition Against Domestic – Oppose SSB 1061 – Undermines SNAP/EBT

The Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) represents 22 crime victim service provider agencies across Iowa and the collective experience of agency staff who dedicate their lives to supporting victims of violent crime, specifically survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse. Our direct service providers routinely witness the pain and suffering of crime victims, as well as their stunning resilience in surviving repeated violent acts (often over the course of months and years), inflicted on their minds and bodies by people they know and care about.

We urge you to reject SSB 1061, legislation seeking to address perceived fraud concerns regarding the use of electronic benefits transfer (EBT) cards many Iowans eligible for food stamps use to purchase food. This bill reinforces harmful myths about Iowans who receive food assistance through the SNAP program and is at odds with Governor Reynolds efforts to address profiling by law enforcement based on race and income level.

Bottom line: This legislation is unnecessary. Unauthorized use of an EBT card is already a fraudulent practice and the prevalence of SNAP trafficking fraud is extremely rare. There are urgent food security needs in Iowa and we urge legislators to prioritize addressing these issues instead of a perceived problem with fraud in the SNAP program.

The SNAP program is a lifeline for individuals and children impacted by domestic abuse. Although physical abuse is common in domestic violence relationships, financial abuse is more pervasive and often inflicts longer-lasting damage. Financial abuse is a coercive tactic used by virtually every abusive partner that involves withholding, sabotaging, and stealing a partner's financial assets.

Coercive partners are acutely aware of the link between a victim's financial independence and access to safety. Financial abuse remains one of the most powerful methods of keeping a person trapped in the relationship. Often abusive partners will report survivors as "cheating on benefits" if they try to leave. Legislation like this makes it even easier for abusive partners to pull victims into a police investigation and puts access to food in jeopardy or forces them to return to an abusive relationship to avoid hunger and homelessness.

Financial security is critical to increasing a survivor's chance of escaping abuse but escaping generally means losing financial security. Victims routinely balance the risk of staying in an abusive relationship with the reality of experiencing poverty, including hunger and homelessness if they leave. SNAP and other public safety net programs are essential to providing some economic security to individuals and children fleeing abuse...and often provide the extra boost needed to regain financial security.

Please reject this unnecessary and harmful bill that threatens food security, perpetuates harmful myths about Iowans experiencing food insecurity, and encourages profiling and penalizing low-income Iowans in contrast to efforts by the Governor to address hunger and racial disparities in our criminal legal system.

Senate Labor Subcommittee; January 26, 2021

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