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Memorandum

To: All House Members

From: Representative Mike Reese 

Date: March 25, 2011

Subject: Prohibiting Purchase of Tobacco Products at Points of Sale Using Cash Assistance Benefits (i.e., EBT cards and EPPIcards)

I plan to introduce legislation that would amend the state Public Welfare Code to prohibit the use of certain types of payment by consumers to purchase tobacco and tobacco products.

Currently, an individual who is receiving cash assistance (usually TANF or general assistance) is able to use an electronic benefit card (EBT) to purchase tobacco and tobacco products at "points of sale." Under my proposal, tobacco would not be able to be purchased through such means. The Public Welfare Code already prohibits the purchase of liquor and alcohol with EBT cards; this bill simply adds tobacco to that list. This prohibition would also extend to bearers of "EPPIcards," which are issued in lieu of child support checks.

As a state legislator, I feel it is incumbent upon us to help ensure that publicly-funded benefits intended to support the basic necessities of life are used in a responsible manner. Most of our public assistance programs are designed to support families with children, and every dollar spent on tobacco is one less dollar for their care.

I realize that there is no foolproof way to guarantee that individuals who receive EBTs and EPPI cards will employ these benefits for the good of themselves and their families in all cases. However, I strongly believe that we, as stewards of both public monies and the health of our citizens, should make every effort to be proactive so that it is not easy and convenient for recipients to use their benefit cards at a "point of sale" location to purchase tobacco products.

If you would like to co-sponsor this legislation, please contact Jordan Frei by e-mail at jfrei@pahousegop.com.