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Member of Assembly 60th District

THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

RANKING MINORITY MEMBER
Committee on Governmental Employees

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June 27, 2012

Hon. Sheldon Silver
Speaker of the Assembly
LOB 932
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Speaker Silver,

Upon the conclusion of another legislative session, where New York State government has answered the call for many of the reforms desired by its populace, a glaring breach in state law has placed at risk both our integrity and our ability to assist New York's most vulnerable families. The time has come for the scourge of welfare abuse to be identified and addressed.

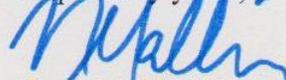
Under current state law, those receiving public assistance can legally use their Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card as if it were their own earned income rather than a "safety net" provided by the New York taxpayer. While most recipients spend their allotted funds on necessities like food and shelter, it is no secret that others take advantage by using their EBT card to finance their smoking habits, indulge in alcohol, or participate in adult-related activities that simply do nothing to maintain the survival and dignity of a human being on his or her way toward self support. Acquiescence to this behavior amounts to nothing less than mockery of the program's intent and, justifiably, casts a poor reflection on us as a legislative body.

As you may be aware, a new federal statute requires states to implement safeguards against the aforementioned abuse by 2014. Non-compliance would result in a forfeiture of 5% of federal welfare funding. In New York's case, we stand to lose approximately \$120 million, placing a substantial burden on our state's delicate financial recovery. It would be an embarrassment if this disservice to New York taxpayers were compounded by a failure to prevent activity that should already be outlawed based on principle.

The State Senate has already passed legislation that would ban the use of welfare and public assistance money for cigarettes, alcohol, gambling, lottery tickets and in strip clubs. Looking forward to the next legislative session, I urge you to advance companion legislation in the Assembly. We are in no position to ask New York taxpayers to cover the \$120 million price tag of our inaction.

I offer my full assistance in pursuing a resolution to this issue. If you wish to discuss this with me in further detail, please contact my office at (718) 987-0197.

Respectfully yours,



Nicole Malliotakis