



Baxter | Cheney Lake | Chugach Foothills | Muldoon | Scenic Park | Stuckagain Heights

SPONSOR STATEMENT

“An Act requiring the Department of Health and Social Services to provide and allow for the submission of an electronic application for certain state benefits; and providing for an effective date.”

House Bill 168 will modernize public assistance applications by creating an option for recipients to apply and re-apply for benefits electronically.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused an increase in applications for public assistance programs and highlighted the need for administrative efficiencies. In 2020, SNAP application processing backlogs cleared up due to COVID-19 related application requirement waivers, but the significant administrative burden will return when those waivers lapse.

Currently, Alaska is one of the last states without a fully electronic application for SNAP benefits. Applicants can fill out a form online, but still need to print, sign, and either send it through the mail or physically deliver to a department location. This creates a high administrative burden for both the applicant and the Division of Public Assistance. A fully electronic application option will increase administrative efficiencies, reduce any current and future application backlogs, and improve processing times.

The Department of Health & Social Services has started working on introducing online applications. HB 168 sets the stage for regulation, appropriation, and implementation of these processes. It ensures a reasonable timeline for implementation and that, once available, online applications will always be available.

Many Alaskans benefit from the services provided by the Division of Public Assistance. The statutes and regulations that guide our responses must keep pace with the needs of our communities. HB 168 will increase accessibility to important resources for families in need, and I urge you to join me in supporting this bill.