

Benjamin West
New Vineyard
LD 1525

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker and members of the ACF Committee. My name is Benjamin West. I am a resident of New Vineyard and while I am submitting comments 'neither for nor against' LD 1525, I thought I would list the problems with the heating assistance program as I see it now, and what I would like to see for a more effective program going forward. I'll try to keep this brief.

The Negative:

- I think it should be obvious by now that allowing people on assistance receive checks for the wood directly and then go out and purchase the wood themselves just leaves patrons of the program buying other products. The local firewood company that has delivered to the program for many many years said he saw a 90% or more reduction of the people he delivered to every year on the program ordering wood. They were spending the money on other things.

-The program (in some instances) currently is administered by people that simply call the same firewood guy for almost all of the deliveries and then go to the other distributors when their personal favorite (friend or family possibly) firewood person is unavailable. They will say that the firewood company they keep calling is the only one that will deliver on the program, but it is simply not true.

-The program should ideally encourage people to get their firewood earlier in the season when the wood can be green and season as they get closer to winter. Most people on the program are getting green wood that does not burn as efficiently because they are ordering it in the winter time. Seasoned wood ordered in the winter sells at a premium. Tax payer programs should try to avoid this premium.

Things to know:

-Not all firewood is the same. Program should ensure that nobody is delivering loads with softwood mixed in. People that deliver should be told that only hardwood is allowed on the program.

-The people ordering the wood should be given options for who to purchase through, because they'll choose the best firewood if given the option. Or they will choose the most they can purchase with the allowance they are given.

-Not all delivery locations are the same. Some driveways are very hazardous to deliver to, or are not plowed and cleared off well enough to deliver. This is why a flat rate delivery option where every cord has the same price is difficult to offer.

My Suggestions:

-For the reasons listed above, and maybe for some I've forgotten to list, the following is my suggestion for how the program should be administered. Orders should be encouraged as early as possible in the season for the benefit of the firewood contractors who inevitably get busy in the late fall and winter, so the customers will get the best pricing and have time for the wood to season. When the program has a firewood order to purchase, they should email or call the firewood companies that sign up to be on an order list and give them 24 hours to respond with their best price to deliver that load of wood. Or alternatively how much wood they will deliver/sell for the budget of the customer. This will ensure that the firewood is delivered at a good price for the customer as well as the taxpayers, and it gives the firewood company time to check out the delivery customer's delivery situation to make sure they are comfortable with their ability to deliver wood to the customer given the delivery location.

In my mind it's ludicrous to think of the amount of money that is spent by simply giving firewood orders to the same account again and again, with no bid process for the expenditure of tax dollars. Finally, the payments for the program should be administered quickly and regularly, without a lot of paperwork to complete to receive

payment. Firewood distributors on the whole are a paperwork-adverse group of people, and will put a surcharge on wood they have to wait a while or fill out paperwork to get paid for. Let's not complicate something that's very simple.

That's my opinion. If anyone has any follow up questions please feel free to call me at 207-491-7470.

Sincerely,

Benjamin West