



House Health and Human Services
Committee:

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**Sub for Sub SB 95: Authorizing
telephonic signatures for public
assistance applications**

Neutral Testimony by:

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Testimony of:

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Testimony on:

Sub for Sub for SB 95, Authorizing telephonic signatures for public assistance applications

Chair Hawkins, Vice Chair Concannon, Ranking Member Wilson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide neutral testimony to Sub for Senate Bill 95, regarding authorizing telephonic signatures for public assistance applications.

By way of background, DCF administers public assistance programs, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Food Assistance/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and child care. The federal programs have specific regulations tied to funding.

Telephonic signatures

This bill establishes a requirement for DCF to accept telephonic signatures for any public assistance program, including SNAP, TANF and child care. A telephonic signature is a type of electronic signature that uses an individual's recorded verbal assent in place of an ink signature for an application.

Telephonic signatures is a state option introduced in the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, which allowed state agencies to accept "spoken signatures" for SNAP.

The speech analytics system (put in place by an entity enrolling people in public assistance programs) must be capable of storing, indexing and retrieving the telephonic signature as given by the enrollee, and it must be compatible with the other systems with which it would have to interface (or share information).

The Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 requires that these systems record "the verbal assent of the household member and the information to which assent was given." For a signature to be considered a telephonic signature, the system must make an audio recording over the telephone of the household's verbal assent, as well as a summary of what the household is agreeing to.

To be a valid telephonic signature, the recorded verbal assent must be linked to the application itself. This is to ensure the state agency has ready access to the audio file containing the recorded verbal assent. Telephonic signature files must be retrievable and must also comply with federal records retention requirements. Other USDA requirements include:

- Effective safeguards against impersonation, identity theft and invasions of privacy;
- Not denying or interfering with the household's right to apply in writing;
- Promptly providing a written copy of the complete application to the applicant, with instructions for a simple procedure to allow correction of any errors or omission;
- Considering the date of the verbal assent to be the date the application is signed.

State agencies that choose to use a third party should be aware that the telephonic signature files and related data stored on third-party hardware must be transferred to the state agency in a usable format should the third-party relationship with the state agency terminate. The third party cannot retain these records.

To implement telephonic signatures, it was determined that a secure file transfer system and secure storage would be necessary that is dedicated to the handling of applications. The initial costs related to accepting and storing individual telephonic signatures are estimated to total \$24,000 for storage costs and would also utilize existing agency staffing resources. Section D 2 requires the agency to develop the capability to accept telephonic signatures directly. The costs have been estimated at \$ 298,691 which would include purchasing 16 phone lines from a telephony system that would create the audio files. The agency could contract with a vendor only this portion of a telephony system versus contracting a full call center. Additional costs may be needed in the future as this emerging practice evolves and additional regulations are developed but these are not estimable at this time.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide neutral testimony, and I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.