



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on May 19, 2011

Lottery Winner Permitted to Collect Food Stamps

When GOP presidential hopeful Newt Gingrich called Barack Obama a “food stamp president,” he was charged with using “racially-tinged language.” Of course, Gingrich’s assertions had nothing to do with race and everything to do with the 47 million Americans currently receiving food stamps, including Michigan’s \$2 million lottery winner Leroy Fick, who asserts that he will continue to collect food stamps despite his winnings, and is permitted to do so under the current system.



Fick, 59, of Bay County won his money last June in the Michigan Lottery’s *Make Me Rich!* television show. Despite his newfound wealth, Michigan’s Department of Human Services determined that he may continue to collect food stamps because lottery winnings are considered “liquid assets” and not “income.” Such a loophole allows Fick to remain eligible for the food stamps, which are paid for through tax dollars and intended to help struggling low-income families.

DHS spokeswoman Gisgine Gendereau explains that although federal guidelines do not permit lottery winners to collect social services, the state of Michigan was granted a waiver of those guidelines. Gendereau indicates that she is unsure why or how long ago that waiver was granted, but said at least 40 other states received similar waivers.

“That policy is currently under review,” she asserts. “We are aggressively seeking a change to assure that only those who are truly needy qualify.”

If Fick had opted to receive his winnings on a monthly basis, rather than in one lump sum, the money would have been considered income.

When asked if he feels any sort of guilt for continuing to collect food stamps, Fick replied, “If you’re trying to make me feel bad you’re not going to do it.” He defends his continued collection of food stamps by asserting that the government took out an obscene amount of his winnings for taxes, which he contends buys him a right to the food stamps.

Fick’s attitude prompted one news reporter to respond, “A lot of people are going hungry because of you, but don’t let that get to you.”

Meanwhile, an official at the Michigan Department of Human Services says the agency is working to close the loophole so that others cannot continue to take advantage of the system.



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Michigan lawmakers have [vowed](#) to see that the loophole is closed immediately. State Republican Senator John Moolenaar has already called for legislation that requires lottery officials to submit the Social Security numbers of jackpot winners to DHS and Medicaid officials within seven days of the winnings. The bill also calls for DHS to remove jackpot winners from all public assistance programs.

“More than ever, we must make sure that every penny to the state budget is used wisely,” Moolenaar explained. “It’s important we review this case, learn from it, and prevent such incidents from happening in the future.”

In the Michigan House of Representatives, Democrat Charles Brunner was outraged to learn of the loophole from which Fick is benefiting. “We have thousands of families all over Bay County who are struggling to find jobs, feed their families, and keep their homes, and this guy has the nerve to cheat the system. What’s worse is the state allows it to happen,” Brunner opined.

Naturally, Fick has been overwhelmed with media inquiries, and has hired attorney John Wilson to assuage the controversy. Wilson indicates that Fick may be appearing on a New York television show, though he declined to indicate which one, in order to clear his name.

“He wants people to know he’s not a bad guy,” Wilson explained. “He’s been the scapegoat, when he’s done nothing wrong. It’s the system that needs change.”

Graphic: Logos of the Michigan State Lottery and the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).



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