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Drug Tests Should Be Required to Get Unemployment Benefits, S.C. Lawmaker Says

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News Summary

South Carolina residents receiving unemployment benefits should be required to take drug tests, and those who test positive should have their benefits cut off until they complete drug treatment, a state lawmaker says.

The [Associated Press](#) reported Jan. 8 that Sen. David Thomas (R-Greenville) proposed a bill that also would require recipients who fail a drug test to submit to random testing; those who fail a random test would have to get treatment again, and those who fail a second random test would lose benefits for a year under the legislation.

"My concern is as much for those who are addicted or misusing drugs as for the folks that are paying the bills," Thomas said. "Ultimately, I think the question needs to be asked, 'Should unemployment be provided for people with ongoing drug problems, because they're using that unemployment money to feed the habit?'"

Thomas said the state could start with a pilot program to see how many unemployment recipients test positive, then decide if it was worth expanding to include all recipients. "If it's a very small percent, that ends the discussion," he said. "But suppose it's a high number, like 15 percent. That's enough probably to ask the question, 'Well, what do we do? This is a serious problem.' ... If they are on drugs, and it is an issue for them, I can guarantee you that they're not seriously looking for work."

Sue Berkowitz of the South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center called the proposal an invasion of the privacy of people who already are dealing with the trauma of losing a job. Lawmakers in Oklahoma, Texas and Florida have proposed similar measures, but no states currently require drug testing of unemployment beneficiaries.