

Know Your Welfare Rights!

SANCTIONS



An information series prepared by Legal Services of

New Jersey

Have your welfare benefits been reduced or stopped because you did not do what the welfare office told you to do?

DON'T GIVE UP!

If the welfare office believes that you did not participate in a required activity, you will be *sanctioned*. This means that your cash assistance or food stamps will be reduced, or maybe stopped. You could get sanctioned for not cooperating with child support requirements, or for not complying with the welfare work program. Each time you are sanctioned, the penalty is greater than the time before, and the length of time that you cannot receive benefits increases.

What is a work activity? In order to get cash assistance or food stamps, most people must participate in a work activity. This means that a person must work, attend job training, or attend an assigned “work activity.” The work activity could include searching for work, attending meetings or classes, or working at an assigned job.

What if I can't do the work activity that I was told to do? Talk with your caseworker and explain that you have a problem. If the problem can't be resolved, you should ask for a fair hearing to challenge the welfare office's decision.

- Some people do not have to participate in the work program because of a medical reason or because they are taking care of a family member who is disabled. You should ask your caseworker for details about who is exempt from the work activity to see if you qualify.
- If you have a good reason why you can't participate in an activity, you should not be sanctioned. Good reasons include:
 - Medical problems
 - Lack of child care
 - Lack of transportation
 - Caring for a disabled family member
 - Other important personal matters, including court appearances or meetings at a child's school.

What should I do if I get sanctioned? If you are sanctioned and if you have a good reason why you didn't comply with the program, you should **ask for a fair hearing to challenge the sanction**. If you ask for the hearing within 15 days of the date that you receive written notice of the sanction, you can ask that your benefits continue unchanged while you wait for the hearing. Even if you don't have a good reason for not doing as you were asked, you can always get benefits again if you comply with the program requirements.

Get legal help if you have a problem. If you receive public assistance, you can get free legal help by contacting your regional Legal Services office. The telephone number and address for the Legal Services office is listed on the notices that you get from the welfare office, and it is in the telephone book. You can also get legal information by calling LSNJ-LAW™, Legal Services of New Jersey's statewide, toll-free legal hotline, at:

1-888-LSNJ-LAW
(1-888-576-5529)

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