



Report to the Legislature

WorkFirst Pathway to Engagement Services and Specialized Caseloads for WorkFirst Families in Sanction

Chapter 522, Section 207(2), Laws of 2007

December 2007

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**PART I
PATHWAY TO ENGAGEMENT SERVICES**

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview of Pathway to Engagement

The 2007 – 09 Operating Budget authorized by the Washington State Legislature in the 2007 session (Substitute House Bill 1128, Section 207 (2)) includes a budget proviso directing the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to establish a WorkFirst Pathway to Engagement Program that provides pre-sanction termination and post-sanction termination services to WorkFirst families through contracts with qualified community-based organizations.

The goals of the services are to:

- Help ensure child safety and family stability for sanctioned families who leave WorkFirst due to non-compliance with program requirements.
- Help families who want to re-engage in WorkFirst.

Pathway to Engagement services to be provided through contractors include intensive outreach, resource information and referral, development of a viable WorkFirst Exit Plan, and assistance re-connecting with the WorkFirst program for those families who want to begin participating in required WorkFirst activities.

The budget proviso requires the Department's Economic Services Administration to collaborate with community partners and represented staff to identify Pathway to Engagement services that compliment the work of the department and do not supplant existing staff or services for WorkFirst families.

The 2007 - 09 Operating Budget appropriated \$250,000 in State Fiscal Year 2008 and \$250,000 in State Fiscal Year 2009 for Pathway to Employment services.

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Planning Process and Implementation

In June 2007, the Economic Services Administration began working collaboratively with community representatives and representatives from the Washington Federation of State Employees to identify specific services that meet the intent and requirements of the budget proviso. Those services have been identified and are described in this report.

In November 2007, the Economic Services Administration began working with local communities to establish Pathway to Engagement contracts with interested and qualified community-based organizations (CBOs). There are currently 22 contracts in place with at least 3 contractors in every region. Local Community Services Offices will refer WorkFirst families in sanction to these organizations when a contractor is providing Pathway to Engagement services in their area.

WorkFirst Non-Compliance Sanction

With the goal to motivate parents in WorkFirst to do all they can to prepare for and seek work, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) implemented the Non-Compliance Sanction policy on September 1, 2006.

Under the Non-Compliance Sanction policy, parents in the WorkFirst program who can work lose their cash grants if they refuse to participate without good cause for six consecutive months in WorkFirst activities that can help them find work and become economically self-sufficient.

During the first six months of non-compliance, a family's monthly cash grant is reduced by 40%. To come into compliance, the family must participate for four consecutive weeks.

Decisions on whether a family's cash grant should be terminated for continued non-compliance are made by an independent, three-person State Level Review Panel, based on a comprehensive review of the family's case and actions taken by the Department. Cases entering their fourth month of sanction are referred to the panel for a review and decision.

Families who lose their cash grant due to non-compliance continue to be eligible for Medicaid, Basic Food, and child support services. They can also continue to receive Working Connections Child Care if they are working or in school.

Once a family's cash grant ends, the family can reapply for WorkFirst. If the family's case has been closed for less than six months, the sanctioned parent

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must participate for four consecutive weeks before the cash grant can be restored.

The Non-Compliance Sanction policy does not apply to parents who are ill or disabled, or caring for a disabled relative in their home.

In addition to final case reviews and sanction decisions by the State Level Review Panel, the Department has developed and implemented other Pre-Sanction Procedures to avoid inappropriate Non-Compliance Sanctions on vulnerable families, and ensure WorkFirst sanctions are applied in a fair and non-discriminatory way.

These procedures include the following:

- A Comprehensive Evaluation is done (involving assessments by the WorkFirst partner agencies) when a parent initially fails to participate, to find out whether the family has any barriers that prevent the parent from complying with work requirements. The evaluation also addresses whether the family has the services and supports it needs to participate.
- WorkFirst staff make ongoing attempts to re-engage the parent, such as monthly phone calls, monthly letters, and home visits by a Social Worker.
- For parents entering their fourth month of sanction, a Non-Compliance Case Staffing is completed with a Social Worker or Social Services Supervisor and others involved with the family's case. These case staffings include a Child Safety Review to determine how the children will be cared for and supported if cash benefits end, and to identify the need for community referrals. Staff from the DSHS Children's Administration are involved in these case staffings when a family has an open Child Protective Services (CPS) or Child Welfare Services (CWS) case.

In November 2007, there were 1,332 WorkFirst families in sanction status. Of these families, 384 were in sanction for four months or more.

B. SERVICE SCOPE

The following Pathway to Engagement services will be available to help families who are in long-term sanction or who have lost their WorkFirst cash grant due to the Non-Compliance Sanction:

- **Pre-Termination Services.** These services are for parents in Months 4 through 6 of sanction. The community-based organization (CBO) will work

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with the parent and the family to develop an Exit Plan that will help them transition to life after WorkFirst. The CBO will also encourage re-connection with WorkFirst services. For those parents who want to begin participating in WorkFirst, the CBO will help connect the parent with the family's WorkFirst case manager to begin the process of re-engagement.

For Pre-Termination Services, the contractor will conduct an in-person interview, preferably in the family's home, to assist in developing an Exit Plan.

This plan must include a written strategy to meet basic needs and promote family stability and child safety after the WorkFirst cash grant has ended. Additionally, the plan must include referrals and linkages to appropriate and available community resources as identified by the department or contractor.

If, during or after the preparation of the Exit Plan, the sanctioned parent is willing to re-engage in WorkFirst activities, the contractor may develop a Re-Connection Plan that describes how the contractor will assist the parent in meeting with their WorkFirst Program Specialist or WorkFirst Social Worker to begin the process of re-engaging in WorkFirst activities.

- **Post-Termination Services.** These services are for families who have lost cash assistance as a result of the Non-Compliance Sanction. The goal is to promote family stability and child safety through home visits and referrals to community resources by the CBO.

For Post-Termination Services, the contractor will conduct an in-person interview within 60 days of WorkFirst termination, preferably in the family's home, to assist in developing an Exit Plan and/or implement the previously prepared plan. While meeting with the parent, the contractor will assess family stability and child safety as well as encourage the client's re-application and participation in WorkFirst activities. The contractor will also provide each family with necessary referrals and linkages to available community resources.

For parents willing to re-engage, the contractor will assist the parent(s) with re-application for WorkFirst.

After benefits have been approved, the contractor will develop a Re-Connection Plan to determine how the contractor will assist the client in meeting with their case manager in order to begin re-engaging in WorkFirst activities.

C. SERVICE PAYMENTS TO CONTRACTORS

Compensation is payable to a Pathway to Engagement contractor for satisfactory performance of the work detailed in the performance-based contract.

Payments for Pre-Termination Services

For parents in Months 4 through 6 of sanction, the contractor will receive \$300 for developing an Exit Plan with the parent that addresses family stability and child safety, completing a review of the family circumstances, and providing community resource referrals and linkages appropriate to the family's needs.

For sanctioned parents who are willing to re-engage, the contractor will receive \$500 for developing a Re-connection Plan to assist the parent in meeting with their case manager in order to begin re-engaging in WorkFirst activities.

With one exception, contractors will be paid for either an Exit Plan or a Re-Connection plan but not both. The one exception is when a Re-Connection Plan was developed, but the parent did not resolve the sanction. In that situation, the contractor may subsequently develop and be paid for an Exit Plan.

Payments for Post-Termination Services

For parents that have terminated from WorkFirst as a result of the Non-Compliance Sanction, the contractor will receive \$300 for developing an Exit Plan and/or evaluating the effectiveness of the previous plan, completing a review of the family circumstances and providing community resource referrals and linkages appropriate to the family's needs

If the terminated parent elects to reapply for WorkFirst, the contractor will receive \$300 for facilitating reapplication of benefits and developing a re-connection plan to determine how the contractor will assist the parent in meeting with their case manager in order to begin re-engaging in WorkFirst activities.

D. OUTCOME MEASURES

The budget proviso that establishes the Pathway to Engagement program requires the department to develop outcome measures for the program related to outreach and re-engagement, reduction of barriers to employment, and participant feedback and satisfaction.

The outcome measures for each Pathway to Engagement service type are described below. The department will begin reporting on these measures in January 2008.

Pre-Termination Services

- Number of referred parents.
- Number and percentage of referred parents who successfully complete an Exit Plan.
- Number and percentage of referred parents who successfully complete a Re-Connection Plan.
- Number and percentage of referred parents who successfully complete an Exit Plan and a Re-Connection Plan.
- Number and percentage of referred parents who re-engage and complete the WorkFirst Comprehensive Evaluation (CE).
- Number and percentage of parents completing the CE who successfully cure their sanction.
- Number and percentage of referred parents who complete an Exit Plan and /or a Re-Connection Plan who cure their sanction.
- Number and percentage of parents still engaged after 90 days of re-engagement.

Post-Termination Services

- Number of referred parents.
- Number and percentage of parents who successfully complete or update an Exit Plan.
- Number and percentage of parents who successfully complete a Re-Connection Plan.
- Number and percentage of parents who successfully complete an Exit Plan and a Re-Connection Plan.
- Number and percentage of parents who re-engage and complete the CE.
- Number and percentage of parents completing the CE who successfully cure their sanction.

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- Number and percentage of parents who complete a Re-Connection Plan who cure their sanction.
- Number and percentage of parents still engaged after 90 days of re-engagement.

E. PARENT FEEDBACK AND PROGRAM SATISFACTION

The goal of the Pathway to Engagement program is to provide meaningful services that meet or exceed the parent's satisfaction, promote family and child safety, and encourage re-engagement in the WorkFirst program.

To gather client feedback and assess client satisfaction, the department plans in Spring of 2008 to develop and conduct a survey of parents who received Pathway to Engagement services program. The outcome measures for this survey will include the following:

- Number and percentage of referred parents that respond to the survey.
- Number and percentage of referred parents indicating satisfaction with services received.
- Number and percentage of referred parents who re-engage in the WorkFirst program.

PART II

SPECIALIZED SANCTION CASELOADS

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The budget proviso that establishes Pathway to Engagement services also requires the department to report on the implementation of specialized caseloads in local Community Services Offices for WorkFirst families in sanction status, including information on the referral process and criteria, average caseload size, and expected outcomes for specialized caseloads.

In December 2006, Community Services Offices (CSOs) began to implement specialized caseloads for sanctioned households. This report describes the implementation and use of specialized sanction caseloads, and covers the period of December 2006 to October 2007.

B. REFERRAL PROCESS AND CRITERIA

A variety of methods were used to implement specialized caseloads, depending on the resources available in each office. All methods include varying degrees of social worker involvement to increase parent contact, as well as identify and address barriers that prevent the parent from participating in WorkFirst activities.

The different implementation methods utilized include:

- The WorkFirst Social Worker carries the specialized sanction caseload.
- WorkFirst Case Managers and Social Workers carry the specialized caseload together.
- The WorkFirst Case Manager carries the specialized caseload and the Social Worker becomes involved when issues are identified.
- The WorkFirst Case Manager carries the specialized caseload and the Social Worker conducts the home visits and case staffings.

Once the specialized sanction caseload workers were assigned, the referral process was established although it varies across the state and within each region. All parents facing sanction or those who have just entered sanction are referred to the specialized caseload worker.

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Referring parents to the specialized sanction caseload worker can be done:

- Prior to sanction at the onset of non-compliance.
- When the good cause case staffing is scheduled.
- Upon being placed in sanction.
- During the first month of sanction.

Once a parent has been referred to the specialized sanction caseload worker, the worker attempts to re-engage the parent through office appointments, phone calls, home visits, case staffings, and innovative service plans.

C. AVERAGE CASELOAD SIZE

Sanction caseload sizes vary based on the number of WorkFirst cases, sanctioned cases and WorkFirst staff within each office. The chart below shows a comparison of non-specialized caseloads and specialized sanction caseloads.

Region	# of CSOs	Average Caseloads						
		September 2007 Child Only TANF Caseload	September 2007 TANF Caseload*	TANF FTE's**	Average TANF Case: 1 Staff Ratio	September 2007 Sanctioned Cases***	Specialized Sanction Staff****	Average Sanction Case: 1 Staff Ratio
1	13	2757	4291	99.8	71	178	24	7
2	6	3388	4113	74.9	100	302	23	13
3	7	2104	3083	83.6	62	141	9.5	15
4	10	3614	6280	133.2	74	308	14	22
5	5	2983	5420	84.2	100	274	10.5	26
6	14	4217	5653	110.1	90	319	18	18
Central Support		0	0	4.7	0	--	--	--
State	55	19063	28840	590.5	81	1522	99	15

*Source: EMAPS; Statewide Caseload By Case Type; ACES D/W – Updated on 10/9/2007

**Source: TANF FTE's by Region; FY 2006 & 2007

***Source: RDA Sanction-To-Where Report; September 2007 ACES Data using October 2007 CARD Load

****Source: Region Specialized Sanction Report, 10/26/2007

The average specialized sanction caseload size is 15 cases, but these workers carry other WorkFirst cases. While there is no available data on the total number of other cases the specialized workers carry, the field reports their caseloads are comparable to that of non-specialized workers. Other types of specialization cases they carry include two-parent families, parents

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who are participating in barrier removal activities, clients in the Pregnancy to Employment Pathway, and teen parents.

The chart above displays the number of WorkFirst FTEs to the number of WorkFirst cases to show a case to staff ratio. In practice, cases are not assigned in this manner. They are assigned to specific workers based on the parent engagement needs or office case distribution protocols.

For instance, parents with limited English proficiencies (LEP) parents may be assigned to specific LEP Social Workers. Offices with high LEP caseloads may have workers who serve only LEP parents. Offices with low LEP caseloads may have workers who carry a mixture of LEP cases and non-LEP cases. In this instance, the caseload may be weighted to allow for the additional workload that exists for providing culturally appropriate services and addressing language and communication needs.

Also, parents in the Pregnancy to Employment Pathway or with other barrier issue needs may work with a team of both a WorkFirst Program Specialist and a Social Worker. In this circumstance, one parent will be contained in both workers' caseloads.

D. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The goal of the specialized sanction caseloads is to target re-engagement for sanctioned families and to encourage them to take full advantage of the opportunities available through WorkFirst.

Specialized sanction caseload workers allow for subject expertise and increased contact with the parent, including home visits and case staffings. The expected outcomes for the specialized sanction caseload are to reduce the number of parents in sanction, which will increase the number of clients willing to re-engage and participate in WorkFirst activities.

The specialized sanction caseload worker provides numerous opportunities to re-engage in WorkFirst activities in order to cure their sanction, while making sure the client is in appropriate activities and barriers to participation have been addressed.

The chart below provides a look at the number and percentage of sanctioned parents who re-engage in WorkFirst activities each month.

A sanction is lifted when a parent has participated and complied with WorkFirst requirements for four consecutive months. They are also lifted when a parent becomes exempt because they have an infant under 12

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months, a parent has a significant disability, or a parent is caring for a disabled family member.

The data shows fluctuation in engagement rates from month to month. The department is currently analyzing the data to identify what may be causing the fluctuations and actions needed to improve re-engagement.

Sanction Status

Source: RDA Sanction-to-Where Report

Note: This chart shows the participation status of parents the first of the month following the reporting month. TANF closures represent counts of all cases closed in the following month regardless of the reason.

	Mar-07		Apr-07		May-07		Jun-07		Jul-07		Aug-07		Sep-07	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Remained in Sanction	717	45.52%	645	52.87%	760	59.10%	708	50.54%	942	61.61%	944	58.27%	849	55.78%
TANF Closure (Entire Family)	500	31.75%	294	24.10%	358	27.84%	273	19.49%	353	23.09%	459	28.33%	462	30.35%
Individual Removed from Assistance Unit	10	0.63%	21	1.72%	8	0.62%	14	1.00%	24	1.57%	28	1.73%	8	0.53%
Sanction Lifted - Engaged or Exempt	297	18.86%	235	19.26%	147	11.43%	386	27.55%	191	12.49%	177	10.93%	182	11.96%
Sanction Lifted - Not Engaged or Not Exempt	51	3.24%	25	2.05%	13	1.01%	20	1.43%	19	1.24%	12	0.74%	21	1.38%
Total	1575		1220		1286		1401		1529		1620		1522	

APPENDIX A: BUDGET PROVISIO

**Sec.207. FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES--
ECONOMIC SERVICES PROGRAM**

(2) Up to \$250,000 of the general fund--state appropriation for fiscal year 2008 and \$250,000 of the general fund--state appropriation for fiscal year 2009 of the amounts in subsection (1) of this section are for the WorkFirst pathway to engagement program. The department shall collaborate with community partners and represented staff to identify additional services needed for WorkFirst clients in sanction status. The department shall contract with qualified community-based organizations to deliver such services, provided that such services are complimentary to the work of the department and are not intended to supplant existing staff or services. The department shall also contract with community-based organizations for the provision of services for WorkFirst clients who have been terminated after six months of sanction. Contracts established pursuant to this subsection shall have a performance-based component and shall include both pre-sanction termination and post-sanction termination services. Clients shall be able to choose whether or not to accept the services. The department shall develop outcome measures for the program related to outreach and reengagement, reduction of barriers to employment, and client feedback and satisfaction. Nothing in this subsection is intended to modify a collective bargaining agreement under chapter 41.80 RCW or to change the state's responsibility under chapter 41.80 RCW. The department shall report to the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the legislature by December 1, 2007, on program implementation and outcomes. The department also shall report on implementation of specialized caseloads for clients in sanction status, including average caseload size, referral process and criteria, and expected outcomes for specialized caseloads.