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# The Pennsylvania Welfare Coalition

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## Making TANF Work In Pennsylvania Why Congress Should Not Mandate Full Family Sanctions in TANF Reauthorization (2/2005)

During the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, H.R. 4 -- The TANF welfare reauthorization bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives sought to require all states to impose "full-family sanctions" ending all cash assistance to the entire family, when a parent allegedly fails to comply with a TANF work requirement. This mandate for "full family sanctions" would have, for the first time, required all states to punish perceived transgressions by cutting off aid, not only for the offending adult, but also for everyone in the family, including infants and other children, for a prescribed period.

Currently, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has declined to employ the draconian measure of full-family sanctions at least for infractions during the first two years on TANF. The Department of Public Welfare strongly supported the sanction provisions of the Senate TANF reauthorization bill in the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Mandating full-family sanctions would be unwise and contrary to the aims of welfare reform for a number of reasons:

- There is no evidence that correlates sanction severity with successful transition to work. Compliance with TANF work requirements has been shown to be more successful when tied to time-limited individualized intervention rather than punishment.
- Overwhelming evidence demonstrates that sanctions are often erroneously applied, depriving a family of much-needed aid at a time of crisis.
- Full-family sanctions worsen family hardships and deprivations, especially for children, and increases the risks of illness, violence, and poverty.
- A recent West Chester State University study commissioned by the Commonwealth found that more than half the families sanctioned had extenuating circumstances, but were sanctioned anyway.
- Another project implemented by Congreso de Latinos documented that 82% of the families, at-risk of sanction, were brought into compliance through the intervention and barrier reduction strategies embodied in the Congreso project.

In summary, studies and experience in Pennsylvania have shown that pre-sanction reviews and interventions under current law, better promote the goals of welfare reform – getting people into jobs and fostering self-sufficiency – than do extreme penalties.

### We urge:

- Rejection of a full family sanction mandate on states