

### 13.9 WV WORKS SANCTIONS

When a member of the AG does not comply with requirements found on his PRC, a sanction must be imposed unless the Worker determines that good cause exists. Information about development of the PRC is found in Chapter 24. Information about the PRC as an eligibility requirement is found in Chapter 1.

**NOTE:** When the person whose actions cause a sanction to be imposed becomes an SSI recipient prior to imposition of the sanction, no sanction is imposed. In addition, the offense is not counted when determining the level of subsequent sanctions. If the family has already been sanctioned when the offender becomes an SSI recipient, the sanction is lifted as soon as possible considering RAPIDS deadlines. The partial sanction already served counts when determining the level of the subsequent sanctions.

#### A. DEFINITION OF SANCTION

**NOTE:** Once a sanction has been imposed, it cannot be stopped until the appropriate time has elapsed or the appropriate action is taken, whichever is later.

Sanctions are applied to WV WORKS cases in the form of check reductions and, for the 3rd or subsequent offense, termination of benefits. The amount of the check reduction is a fixed amount and is determined as follows:

1st Offense = 1/3 reduction in the check amount, prior to recoupment, that the AG is currently eligible to receive, for 3 months

2nd Offense = 2/3 reduction in the check amount, prior to recoupment, that the AG is currently eligible to receive, for 3 months. If the case is in a 1/3 reduction when the 2nd sanction is applied, the 2/3 reduction is applied to the check amount the client is currently eligible to receive, prior to recoupment; it is not applied to the check amount which has already been reduced by 1/3.

3rd Offense = Ineligibility for cash assistance for 6 and all subsequent offenses months or until compliance, whichever is later.

**NOTE:** See item C below for information about the mandatory home visit after imposition of the 2<sup>nd</sup> sanction.

All benefit reductions due to imposition of a sanction require advance notice. See Chapter 6 for specific information. Unless the client shows good cause for non-compliance, the sanction is imposed. This is true even if the client complies after the notice is sent but before the sanction is effective.

Once a reduction in benefits or ineligibility is imposed, i.e. after expiration of the advance notice period, the reduction or ineligibility remains in effect for the pre-determined number of months, regardless of case status.

B. CONCURRENT SANCTIONS

When an additional offense for the same or a different requirement occurs during a sanction period, the next level of sanction is imposed, after proper notification. The client must also be given the opportunity to establish good cause, regardless of the length of time remaining for the sanction that is already in effect. Sanctions may, therefore run concurrently.

When 2 or more offenses, by the same individual or by different individuals in the same AG, occur prior to the Worker's having mailed the advance notice to the client, it is treated as if only one offense has occurred. Even though all offenses must be addressed in the client notification, only one sanction is imposed. However, if an additional offense, by the same individual or by a different individual(s), occurs after the Worker has mailed the client notification of the preceding offense, an additional sanction may be imposed after proper notification and the opportunity to establish good cause.

C. BEGINNING OF THE SANCTION PERIOD

The sanction period begins the month after expiration of the advance notice period. A sanction is not imposed by having the client repay all or part of the benefit he has already received. A reduced check amount for three months or termination of cash assistance for at least 6 months is the only means by which a sanction is imposed.

Imposition of a sanction may be delayed by a Fair Hearing request. When the Department is upheld, the sanction begins in the month following the Fair Hearing decision.

If the decision is reached after the RAPIDS deadline date, the sanction begins 2 months after the decision.

After the 2<sup>nd</sup> sanction has been imposed, the Worker must make a home visit. The visit may occur anytime after notification that the 2<sup>nd</sup> sanction has been imposed, but before notifying the client of the 3<sup>rd</sup> sanction. It is recommended that the visit occur as soon as possible after the 2<sup>nd</sup> sanction to try to avoid a 3<sup>rd</sup> sanction. When the 3<sup>rd</sup> sanction occurs prior to the home visit, the imposition of the 3<sup>rd</sup> sanction must be delayed until the home visit is completed. The Worker must attempt 2 home visits before imposing the 3<sup>rd</sup> sanction without a home visit. At least one of the visits must be scheduled in writing.

During the home visit, the Worker must discuss with the client the reason(s) for the 2<sup>nd</sup> sanction. The Worker will explore with the client why he has not complied with the PRC or otherwise participated and cooperated. During the visit, the Worker will explore any support services, other Department services or community resources that are available to the client to address any challenges to participation. Appropriate services and referrals will be arranged. The Worker must also discuss the following during the home visit:

- Plans for how the children's needs will be met when the WV WORKS check stops.

**NOTE:** Under no circumstances is the Worker to suggest or indicate that the loss of WV WORKS income will result in removal of the children from the home.

- How rent and utilities will be paid while the AG is ineligible. Determine how extra expenses, such as, but not limited to, cigarettes, laundry supplies, pet food, etc. will be covered.
- Explain that Emergency Assistance is not available for a family serving a sanction.
- Explain that Food Stamp benefits will not increase due to the loss of the WV WORKS check for 6 months.
- Explain that the client must establish good cause to avoid a 3<sup>rd</sup> sanction.

The home visit does not substitute for advance notice of any additional sanctions or for any good cause appointments.

D. PROCEDURES WHEN THE SANCTION PERIOD ENDS

The 1st and 2nd sanction periods expire when the client has received reduced benefits for three months. The 3rd sanction period ends when the client complies. However, if he complies before he has missed 6 checks, eligibility cannot begin until the 7th month following the imposition of the sanction. Once the sanction period has started, it runs for the appropriate number of consecutive months, whether the case remains active or not. In addition, once a sanction has been imposed, it cannot be stopped until the appropriate action is taken or the appropriate time has elapsed, whichever is later.

**EXAMPLE:** A 2/3 reduction is applied to a case for its 2nd sanctionable offense. The sanction begins with the check received in March. In April the client requests his case be closed and the Worker closes the case. In May the client reapplies for cash assistance and he is eligible. However, because he would have been sanctioned in May had he not requested case closure, the sanction is applied when the application is approved. Assuming no other offenses occur, his cash assistance is raised to the full check amount beginning in June.

However, if the client is not notified of the imposition of the sanction prior to case closure, no sanction may be imposed until the client has received proper notice. Therefore, even when the case is closed prior to the mailing of the adverse action notice, the Worker must still notify the client of the imposition of the sanction. Rather than addressing a reduction in current and ongoing benefits, the notification letter must explain that the sanction will be applied upon reapplication if the client chooses to reapply during the sanction period. The letter must specify the dates of the sanction period. The client may request a Fair Hearing on the sanction issue when the notification is received or upon reapplication within 90 days of closure notification.

**EXAMPLE:** On June 22nd, the client calls the Worker to request case closure, but refuses to state the reason for the request. The Worker takes action to close the case, as requested. On June 24th, a client's employer calls the Worker to report that the client has not

appeared for work for the last 3 days and has not contacted him to explain. The Worker sends the client an adverse action notice explaining that a sanction will be imposed if he reapplies in August, September or October, unless he can demonstrate good cause for his failure to report for work without notifying his employer of the reason within the advance notice period. The client does not respond. On September 20th, the client reapplies. He explains that his mother, who lives in Maryland, became very ill suddenly and was hospitalized. Her doctor said that she would be unable to live alone after leaving the hospital, so he and his family left for Maryland with the intention of staying there indefinitely. Since that time, his mother has been placed in a nursing home and his family returned to WV. The Worker accepts his explanation as good cause but explains that, since the advance notice period expired prior to his claim of good cause, he must approve the case with reduced benefits for September and October. The client may request a Fair Hearing on the approval with reduced benefits.

After the 1st and 2nd sanctions end, the Worker must automatically increase benefits without waiting for the client to request the increase. This increase also requires client notification, as found in Chapter 6. However, once cash assistance is stopped due to imposition of the 3rd sanction, the client must reapply to reinstate benefits. The client may reapply at any time, but applications made prior to the expiration of the 6-month sanction are denied.

E. DETERMINING THE NUMBER OF SANCTIONS WHEN THE AG SEPARATES

WV WORKS sanctions are applied to the AG, not to the individual who causes the sanction. Therefore, the following information is used to determine the number of sanctions when the sanctioned AG separates into 2 or more AG's or when 1 or more member leaves the AG.

- Each adult and emancipated minor included in the same WV WORKS AG is assigned one sanction for each time the case is sanctioned.

**EXAMPLE:** Mr. and Mrs. Tony receive WV WORKS for themselves and their 2 children. Mr. Tony refused an offer of employment without good cause and a sanction is applied to the case. The case has 1 sanction; therefore, Mr. Tony is assigned 1 sanction and Mrs. Tony is assigned 1 sanction.

- When an adult or emancipated minor leaves the home, he takes his assigned sanctions with him. Those adults and emancipated minors remaining in the home retain their assigned sanctions.

**EXAMPLE:** Continuation of the previous example. After application of the sanction, Mr. Tony leaves the home. Mrs. Tony is the only adult remaining in the AG. She carries the sanction that was assigned to her when Mr. Tony refused a job, so the sanction continues.

- When an adult or emancipated minor leaves the home of one WV WORKS AG and joins another one, all members of the new AG are assigned the same number of sanctions. This number is determined by assigning each adult/emancipated minor the highest number of sanctions assigned to any one of the adults/emancipated minors in the new AG.

**EXAMPLE:** Continuation of previous example. When Mr. Tony leaves Mrs. Tony, he moves in with a former fiancée, Nellie. Mr. Tony is the father of 2 of Nellie's children. Nellie and her 3 children are WV WORKS recipients. Nellie previously failed, without good cause, to cooperate with BCSE in obtaining support for her third child. In addition, she failed, without good cause to continue her CWEP placement. Nellie's case has been sanctioned twice. When Mr. Tony joins her AG, he is assigned 2 sanctions, since Nellie has the higher number of sanctions. After 6 months, Mr. Tony decides to return to his wife. When he leaves, Nellie continues to have 2 sanctions. When Mr. Tony returns to his wife, he now has 2 sanctions that were assigned to him from Nellie's case. Therefore, the case which includes Mr. and Mrs. Tony now has been assigned 2 sanctions. The next offense by Mr. or Mrs. Tony results in application of the 3rd sanction, case closure.

Upon learning of his sanction status, Mr. Tony goes back to live with Nellie. Mr. Tony and Nellie each continue to have 2 assigned sanctions. Shortly after his return, Nellie fails to keep an appointment with a prospective employer. She tells the Worker that she wanted to stay home to be with the father of her children. The Worker determines that she did not have good cause and applies the 3rd sanction. Mr. Tony immediately returns to his wife. This makes his wife and children ineligible since he was included in Nellie's case when the 3rd sanction was applied.

- Sanctions applied to a case are never assigned to dependent children.

**EXAMPLE:** One of Mr. and Mrs. Tony's children runs away to live with his grandmother. She applies for WV WORKS for him and herself and is approved. Because he is a dependent child, no sanctions are assigned to the new AG even though his previous AG has 3 sanctions.