



Long Island Housing Services, Inc.

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Protecting Civil Rights for Long Islanders since 1969



Memorandum of Support A Fair Process for Reducing Erroneous Welfare Sanctions Should Apply Statewide **A.2455-a (Hunter)/S.3840-a (May)**

In 2014, a new state law dramatically improved the process by which public assistance recipients can respond to an allegation that they have failed to comply with a welfare work requirement. But at the last minute, the bill was modified to apply only to New York City. The law provides common sense protection against the imposition of unwarranted and unduly harsh sanctions on the poorest New Yorkers. ***Long Island Housing Services, Inc.* strongly supports A.2455-a/S.3840-a, which would broaden the law to apply statewide.**

For the entire state outside of New York City, when the Department of Social Services (DSS) believes that a person has failed to comply with a work rule, this triggers a sanction process. In that process, the individual essentially has the burden to demonstrate that they either did comply, or had good cause for not complying. That proof can be extremely difficult for the unrepresented individual to obtain. This is especially true because the people who are most at risk of being sanctioned often have serious physical or mental health limitations, limited literacy, lower levels of education and more limited English proficiency.

The regular public assistance grant is severely inadequate. Any reduction due to an often unwarranted sanction will cause severe hardship. Sanctioned households are more likely to experience hunger, eviction, loss of utilities and the need for emergency services.

A.2455-a/S.3840-a would protect against inappropriate sanctions by requiring that:

- Before imposing a sanction, districts must determine whether the alleged failure to comply was related to a disability, a child care problem or transportation difficulties.
- Instead of mandatory durational sanctions, the individual can avoid a sanction or have it lifted by demonstrating a willingness to comply with the work requirements.
- There can be no sanction for a single infraction, such as one missed appointment.

There is no justification for failing to apply these fair and reasonable measures statewide. They provide critical protection to clients who may be unable to comply with a work requirement for reasons beyond their control, or who have a single lapse in a system that is often rigid and punitive. This bill will afford **all** public assistance recipients in New York the opportunity to participate in appropriate activities and limit the risk of unwarranted punishment.

For more information contact:

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