**Talking points: Ending Full Family Sanctions**

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* **Full-family sanctions take away critical cash assistance from children.**

When families with children have sufficient income to meet their basic needs, their children are healthier and do better in school. Income support programs can improve children’s academic, health, and economic outcomes, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine’s report on reducing child poverty finds. Even relatively small infusions of income, like those from TANF, can make a difference. Researchers at Columbia University estimate that providing an extra $1,000 per year (just over $83 per month) to low-income families could yield over $11,000 in societal benefits annually, primarily driven by increased earnings and better health among children.

Since TANF began in 1997, full-family sanctions have taken away critical cash assistance from over 2 million families with children, and many more have had their assistance reduced due to partial sanctions. Families who are cut off due to a sanction are left without a critical part of the safety net. While other supports like SNAP and Medicaid are important, they cannot meet families varied and changing needs like monthly cash can.

* **Work requirements are rooted in the myth that low-income people don’t and don’t want to work. Moreover, sanctions are *counterproductive* to helping TANF families escape poverty through employment.**

TANF’s focus on work requirements reinforces the racist stereotype that parents receiving assistance, who are disproportionately people of color, do not work and do not wish to work, but the data tell a different story: the majority of TANF “leavers” work before entering TANF and again after leaving.

Although states have flexibility under TANF to help recipients gain education, skills, and work experience to prepare them for better-paying jobs, most have not taken advantage of this flexibility. Instead, states rely mainly on low-cost job search programs that direct TANF recipients back to the same low-paying, unstable jobs that led many of them to TANF in the first place; meanwhile, the limited resources that states devote to work activities go primarily to monitoring compliance with work requirements.

Parents who left TANF due to sanctions or time limits, who often face significant physical or mental health challenges that reduce their employment prospects, had lower employment rates than other leavers. In Kansas, 37 percent of families who left TANF because of a sanction had no earnings *four years* after leaving the program, and only 17 percent had incomes above the poverty line.

* **Research shows that sanctions are often applied inappropriately and in a racially biased manner.**

Agencies that administer public benefit programs are ill-equipped to identify people who should not be subject to work requirements. Multiple studies have uncovered problems in the process by which states sanction families for failure to meet work requirements. A study by Tennessee’s TANF agency, for example, found that about 30 percent of sanctions in the state were imposed in error.

Studies also show that many parents who lose benefits due to work requirements have significant employment barriers, including many that would qualify them for exemptions under most states’ TANF work rules. Those losing benefits are more likely than other TANF parents to have physical, mental health, or substance use issues; to be fleeing domestic violence; to have low levels of education and limited work experience; or to face significant logistical challenges, such as lack of access to or funds to pay for child care and transportation.

States’ application of work requirements has also exacerbated racial inequities. Nearly every study comparing the race and ethnicity of sanctioned and non-sanctioned TANF recipients finds that African Americans are significantly more likely to be sanctioned than their white counterparts.