

Parents Organizing for Welfare and Economic Rights

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Dear Self Advocate,

These are the WA state laws regarding Individual Responsibility Plans or IRPs as your caseworker will call them. As you will see, your caseworker is supposed to sit down with you and use your input to create your IRP. Unfortunately, what we hear is that most people are presented with an IRP either at an appointment or in a letter and told to sign it or face sanction. However, by signing your IRP you are agreeing to this particular plan for your future, so if it not what you want to do, *don't sign it*. Change it to what you want to do, then sign it. Or ask your caseworker for a meeting to discuss your IRP. You can receive support services for any activities on your IRP, so make sure to include all activities you are doing to meet your workfirst requirements, even if they are not directly work related. Your IRP changes need to reflect what legally meets workfirst requirements. If you are unclear about what that is, or if you are having a hard time getting your IRP accepted, contact POWER!

WAC 388-310-0500 WorkFirst — Individual responsibility plan.

(1) What is the purpose of my individual responsibility plan?

The purpose of your individual responsibility plan is to give you a written statement that describes:

- (a) What your responsibilities are; and
- (b) Which WorkFirst activities you are required to participate in; and
- (c) What services you will receive so you are able to participate.

(2) What is included in my individual responsibility plan?

Your individual responsibility plan includes the following:

(a) What WorkFirst activities you must do and the participation requirements for those activities including the amount of time you will spend doing the activities, a start and end date for each activity and the requirement to participate fully.

(b) Any other specific requirements that are tied to the WorkFirst work activity. For example, you might be required to learn English as part of your work experience activity.

(c) What services we will provide to help you participate in the activity. For example, you may require support services (such as help with paying for transportation) or help with paying childcare.

(d) Your statement that you recognize the need to become and remain employed as quickly as possible.

POWER is an organization of low-income parents and allies advocating for a strong social safety net while working toward a world where children and care giving are truly valued, and the devastation of poverty has been eradicated.

(3) How is my individual responsibility plan developed?

You and your case manager will work together and use information gathered from your comprehensive evaluation (see WAC 388-310-0700) to develop your individual responsibility plan and decide what activities will be included in it. Then, your case manager will assign you to specific WorkFirst activities that will help you find employment.

(4) What happens after my individual responsibility plan is completed?

Once your individual responsibility plan is completed:

(a) You will sign and get a copy of your individual responsibility plan.

(b) You and your case manager will review your plan as necessary over the coming months to make sure your plan continues to meet your employment needs. You will sign and get a copy of your individual responsibility plan every time it is reviewed and changed.

(5) What should I do if I cannot go to a required WorkFirst appointment or activity because of a temporary situation outside of my control?

If you cannot participate because of a temporary situation outside of your control, you must call the telephone number shown on your individual responsibility plan on the same day you were to report to explain your situation. You will be given an excused absence. Some examples of excused absences include:

(a) You, your children or other family members are ill;

(b) Your transportation or child care arrangements break down and you cannot make new arrangements in time to comply;

(c) A significant person in your life died; or

(d) A family violence situation arose or worsened.

(6) What happens if I don't call in on the same day I am unable to attend to get an excused absence?

If you do not call in on the same day you are unable to attend to get an excused absence, it will be considered an unexcused absence.

If you exceed the number of unexcused absences allowed on your individual responsibility plan, without good cause, your case manager will begin the sanction process. (See WAC 388-310-1600 for more details.)

POWER members want you to know your rights. We copied these WACs (Washington Administrative Code) from the internet. You can find a complete list at the Washington State Legislative site at the rules and regulations link. All WACs guiding DSHS (the Department of Social and Health Services) start with 388. You can also find other handy information there, like who are your elected officials and how you can contact them. Let them know if your caseworker is not following the rules or if there are changes you would like to see at DSHS.