



Dear MLA,

You are about to be made redundant from your job as an MLA in the Assembly. This must be a very worrying time. Being unemployed is very difficult as any of the 50,000 individuals who are currently unemployed will tell you.

Maybe, if it's what you and your constituents want, you'll get your old job back after the election on 2 March.

In the meantime, we would like to provide you with some helpful information and advice.

As an MLA you'll already be aware that social security is a human right under international human rights law which the NI Assembly is bound by.

As an unemployed person you will receive £73 (approx) a week to live on. But be warned, your income can be stopped at any time for up to 18 months. This is called a sanction.

We have spoken to thousands of people at every dole office in Belfast over the last four years. Many have been sanctioned for reasons as petty as turning up 10 minutes late for an appointment or attending a family funeral. Last year an average of 942 sanctions were issued each month.

Should you be sanctioned, you will be deemed guilty until you can prove yourself innocent.

Losing your Job Seekers Allowance in most cases will mean that you lose your Housing Benefit and maybe your home. You may have to resort to using a food bank to feed yourself. You may have to present yourself as homeless alongside the other 40,000 people on the housing waiting list. No impact assessment will be carried out, even if you have dependent children.

The decision to sanction you will be taken by a Decision Maker you will never meet. There are only 51 in total for 32,700 current Job Seekers claimants. They operate to clearance targets. You will not be afforded due process.

If you are still unemployed after a year you will be forced onto the government work programme, Steps 2 Success which is run by a private company being paid millions of pounds of public money.

To date over 35,000 people have been forced to take part in this work programme under the threat of sanctions.

A total of 5333 sanctions have been imposed on people on this programme since October 2014, with over 70% being for *'failure to attend an interview'* with a private contractor.

It is unlikely you will get a job through this scheme and even if you do it will not be sustainable employment. According to official figures only 1 in 4 people get a job through 'Steps to Success' and only 14% of them were still in work after 6 months.

But don't despair! Help is at hand in the form of the Right to Work: Right to Welfare (R2W) group and our 'Peoples Proposal' to protect the sick, disabled and unemployed facing arbitrary benefit sanctions. The Peoples Proposal will ensure due process at all stages of decision- making and an impact assessment before a financial sanction is imposed.

These are administrative changes that can be made locally. Simple really.

Find out more here https://issuu.com/ppr-org/docs/peoples_proposal_-_final and here <http://www.pprproject.org/right-to-work-right-to-welfare>

Tweet your support using the hashtag #PeoplesProposal

And next time you get a job with power to make change... make sure you use it to support the People's Proposal.

Yours sincerely,

Josephine Constituent Bloggs

On behalf of the Right to Work; Right to Welfare group