A recent report by watchdog group Community Voices Heard found that the Human Resources Administration's (HRA) efforts to place work-ready clients in sustainable jobs through its Back to Work program is hampered by a high sanction rate and poor job placement and retention rates. Paralegal Fernando Le'Bron has seen the consequences up-close in his work at Queens Legal Services Corporation, a program of Legal Services NYC, *City Limits Weekly* reports.

Fernando Le'Bron has provided legal assistance to welfare recipients since the 1980s. Ever since welfare reform took hold in New York City a decade ago, he’s seen a steady increase in the percentage of his clients on public assistance who are unable to work because of a physical or mental disability or a substance abuse problem. This is in part a reflection of the city’s success in moving “work ready” people—those who do not have a physical or mental barrier to employment—off of welfare and into jobs. Viewed from this perspective, the city has had success in promoting greater self-sufficiency.

But the story of welfare reform hardly ends there. Le'Bron, a paralegal with the Queens Legal Services Corporation, says that though his clients nowadays have more complex needs than ever, they are at greater risk of being “sanctioned,” or punished through a reduction in benefits. The Human Resources Administration (HRA), the city agency that administers cash assistance, “has been very proficient in sanctioning people,” Le'Bron said. “They haven’t been so successful in helping them avoid sanctions in the first place.”

Read the rest of the December 22nd article at *City Limits Weekly's* website.