

TO ALL STATE IV-D DIRECTORS

Dear Colleague:

In 1997, the Office of State Systems [OSS] promulgated a suggested format for electronic data exchange between State Child Support Enforcement agencies of revised and modified case numbers to allow for synchronization between agencies of newly changed case numbers that no longer match the originally assigned case numbers. This was issued as DCL OSS 97-02. The Dear Colleague is being reissued as an OCSE Dear Colleague and posted on the OCSE Web site to assist in the reconciliation of interstate child support cases.

With the passage of the Family Support Act of 1988, States have been aggressively pursuing the design, development, implementation and operation of comprehensive, statewide automated child support enforcement systems. In many States, existing systems with limited automation have been replaced with more functionally comprehensive systems. In addition, many other States have sought to implement the requirements of the Family Support Act of 1988 to their existing systems. These new and enhanced child support systems have required States, in a significant number of instances, to modify the format, style, and properties of case numbers assigned to child support cases residing on the systems. Case numbers are a primary identifier used by States' automated child support systems.

States that have changed the format, style and/or characterization of case numbers on their systems have no standard methodology with which to identify these revised/modified case numbers to other States for purposes of ensuring the synchronization of data exchange in interstate cases. This Dear Colleague letter presents a suggested standard format for the identification and mapping of old to new case numbers for those States sharing case number information with other States that are participating in related interstate case activities as either the initiating or responding State.

In the last six months interest in such a suggested format has grown rapidly among the States. A number of States have been instrumental in creating revised data exchange formats specifically for this purpose. After much consultation between this Office and various States involved in addressing this issue, two slightly different State formats have been merged into a single standard. This standard is suggested for use by all States.

While this Dear Colleague letter does not mandate this specific format, it is strongly recommended to ensure the synchronization of electronic data exchange formats between States. There are no additional formats recommended by this Office, and this electronic data exchange format for the exchange and matching of old to new/revised child support enforcement case numbers between States' is effective immediately.

States are encouraged to implement this electronic data exchange format prior to the transmission to other States of newly created or revised child support case numbers. OSS, and more specifically, the Division of Child Support Information Systems will provide technical assistance, as needed and available, to facilitate the testing and exchange of test data between States. The electronic data exchange format for case number compatibility and synchronization between States' automated child support enforcement systems is as follows:

| Field | Field Description | Number of Characters | Character Type |
|---|---|-----------------------------|---|
| 1 | <i>Sending State's Case Number</i> | <i>(15)</i> | <i>Alphanumeric ⁽¹⁾</i> |
| 2 | <i>Other State's Case Number</i> | <i>(15)</i> | <i>Alphanumeric ⁽¹⁾</i> |
| 3 | <i>Sending State's FIPS Code</i> | <i>(7)</i> | <i>Alphanumeric ⁽¹⁾</i> |
| 4 | <i>Non-custodial Parent's Social Security Number</i> | <i>(9)</i> | <i>Alphanumeric ⁽¹⁾</i> |
| 5 | <i>Custodial Parent's Social Security Number</i> | <i>(9)</i> | <i>Alphanumeric ⁽¹⁾</i> |
| 6 | <i>Non-custodial Parent's Last Name</i> | <i>(21)</i> | <i>Alphanumeric ⁽¹⁾</i> |
| 7 | <i>Non-custodial Parent's First Name</i> | <i>(14)</i> | <i>Alphanumeric ⁽¹⁾</i> |
| 8 | <i>Non-custodial Parent's Middle Name</i> | <i>(14)</i> | <i>Alphanumeric ⁽¹⁾</i> |
| 9 | <i>Non-custodial Parent's Suffix</i> | <i>(3)</i> | <i>Alphanumeric ⁽¹⁾</i> |
| 10 | <i>Non-custodial Parent's Date Of Birth</i> | <i>(10)</i> | <i>MM-DD-YYYY ⁽²⁾</i> |
| 11 | <i>Custodial Parent's Last Name</i> | <i>(21)</i> | <i>Alphanumeric ⁽¹⁾</i> |
| 12 | <i>Custodial Parent's First Name</i> | <i>(14)</i> | <i>Alphanumeric ⁽¹⁾</i> |
| 13 | <i>Custodial Parent's Middle Name</i> | <i>(14)</i> | <i>Alphanumeric ⁽¹⁾</i> |
| 14 | <i>Custodial Parent's Suffix</i> | <i>(3)</i> | <i>Alphanumeric ⁽¹⁾</i> |
| 15 | <i>Custodial Parent's Date of Birth</i> | <i>(10)</i> | <i>MM-DD-YYYY ⁽²⁾</i> |
| 16 | <i>Error Record -- No Match Found</i> | <i>(1)</i> | <i>Numeric ⁽³⁾</i> |
| <i>Total Record Length Is 180 Bytes.</i> | | | |

(1) Alphanumeric designates that the field may have any combination of numerals and alphabetic characters.

- (2) MM-DD-YYYY designates a numeric format that prescribes a two-digit code for the month (i.e., MM equals 01 for the month of January, 02 for the month of February, etc.,) followed by a separator, followed by a two-digit code for the day of the month (*i.e., DD equals 01 for the first day of the month, 02 for the second day of the month, etc.*) followed by a separator, followed by a four-digit code for the year (i.e., YYYY equals the year such as 1997, 1998, etc.)
- (3) This field is used to inform the sending State exchanging data that the above listed record has no match on the responding States system. The data field is numeric and will have a "0" representing a match, or a "1" for no match.

The suggested format does not include any suggested formats for electronic transmission, electronic media specifications [i.e., magnetic tape, cartridge, etc.,] or media formatting [i.e., EBCDIC, ASCII, etc.,] nor the labeling of such media. These issues are best addressed by the individual States exchanging data as the media types, formats, labeling, etc., are subject to routine changes and revisions as individual States' systems and their organizations employ newer and ever evolving technology.

In addition, there are some important points to note about this suggested format. For one, FIPS codes, though seven characters in length, may only actually be five characters in length, depending upon a State's particular implementation of the FIPS codes. For example, CSENet allows for a seven character FIPS, but only edits on the first five, as there is little standardization among States in how the final two digits of the seven digit FIPS is maintained and updated. Another point to note is that the format does not require the submission of both the old AND new case numbers from a sending State to the receiving State. The reason is that any new child support system will most likely not carry both the newly created case identification number and the old CSE system's case identification number. Further, there appear to be sufficient data in the suggested format to support effective cross-referencing of case data to case numbers [names, birth dates, social security numbers] to ensure a high level of confidence in the new case number linkages. Finally, some concerns have been expressed regarding the handling of errors, such as when the case numbers submitted by the sending State have no match on the responding State's system. To handle this, we modified the record layout to include a one-digit field that can be used to indicate whether the specific referenced record does or does not have a match.

Inquiries from State child support enforcement agencies, and other interested parties should be directed to the Division of Child Support Information Systems on 202-401-6519, or in writing to the following address:

Director
Division of Child Support Information Systems
Office of State Systems
Administration for Children and Families
370 L'Enfant Promenade, SW
Washington, DC 20447

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This is a unique opportunity to address one of the many issues facing the ongoing implementation and operation of automated child support enforcement systems in the States. We look forward to providing you continued support as we all work to meet the challenges of automating this important program.

Sincerely,

Dave Gray Ross
Commissioner
Office of Child Support Enforcement

Enclosure

cc: State IV-D Directors
State IV-D CSE Systems Project Directors
ACF Regional Hub Directors and Regional Administrators