

Virginia's Use of the NDNH and FCR Data

By Patricia F. DuBose, District Manager, DCSE Abingdon, VA

At the far western end of Virginia, the Abingdon District Office of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE), consisting of eleven counties, resembles a peninsula. But instead of being surrounded by water, the District is bordered by four other states (West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina). The DCSE also has high levels of poverty and unemployment, characteristic of rural Appalachia. As a result of these demographics, over 30% of Abingdon DCSE's caseload is made up of interstate cases.

In December 1998, Virginia's automated child support enforcement system (APECS) began displaying data from the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH). (*See Page 11 of this guide for a description of Virginia's NDNH screens.*) The data included new hire, quarterly wage, and unemployment insurance information from other states. For DCSE Abingdon, the result was an immediate identification of approximately 3,000 employers belonging to cases assigned to DCSE's Enforcement Unit. Over the next three months the DCSE continuously prepared income withholdings on the noncustodial parents for these cases. With the help of the NDNH, the DCSE's income withholdings have risen from an average of \$357 to \$541 per month—a 52% increase—in the past two fiscal years. The DCSE's collections have increased by 30% during the same period. Prior to using the information from the NDNH, the DCSE averaged a 7% increase per year, with the highest increase being 10% in one year.

The use of the Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS)—which houses both the Federal Case Registry (FCR) and the NDNH—as a locate tool, has been lauded since its inception. For child support districts with high out-of-state caseloads, that benefit increases proportionally. From fiscal years 1998-2000, Abingdon DCSE's average number of locate hits per month has increased 135% (from 330 to 773) as a direct result of information received from the FPLS.

The value of FPLS data to Abingdon DCSE's Establishment Unit has been as significant as the locate and enforcement benefits as just described. Virginia is considered an administrative state in child support enforcement. As such, the State's Division of Child Support Enforcement has the ability, when appropriate, to administratively establish paternity and support orders, and to enforce orders without having to involve the court system.

In 1997, Abingdon DCSE had the highest number of cases needing establishment (excluding paternity) of all the state's districts. With over 7,600 cases requiring establishment of orders, 3,000 of those cases had out-of-state noncustodial parents. The FPLS provided DCSE's Establishment Unit with the locate and earnings data required for the preparation of Administrative Support Orders on noncustodial parents who refused to provide the necessary financial statements. Utilizing the Administrative Support Order and Interstate process servers, DCSE was able to successfully obligate out-of-state noncustodial parents using the Long Arm methods under the Uniform Interstate Family Support Act (UIFSA). For those cases that were not appropriate for Long Arm, DCSE filed UIFSA petitions.

From June 1998 through July 2000, a total of 1,790 UIFSA petitions were filed. In 2000, the District led the State in establishing support orders with over 3,000 orders established. This resulted in an increase in the percentage of support orders established by 52% for the past two fiscal years. The DCSE's establishment caseload has decreased over 4,000 cases from a high of over 7,600 to 3,450 cases.

The District continues to extensively use the FPLS data. More recently, the NDNH information has been used to identify Public Assistance cases for review and adjustment of orders. In Virginia, the minimum support order, regardless of employment status, is generally \$65.00 per month. Abingdon DCSE initially identified those support orders and checked them against the quarterly wage data received from the FPLS for review and adjustment. The District has subsequently reviewed all 1,800 Public Assistance enforcement cases, looking for cases in which the noncustodial parent's earnings were much higher than the support order would suggest. Over 200 cases have been referred for review and adjustment.

The data received from the FPLS is also useful in those hard-to-enforce cases. The absence of employer information and quarterly wage data for certain individuals on the FPLS helps identify those cases that should be checked against IRS 1099 data for other sources of income such as self-employment, retirement pensions, stocks, and Social Security benefits.

The implementation of the FPLS can be credited for a large percentage of Abingdon DCSE's success over the past two years. Credit must also be given to the State's system staff for developing an effective method of disseminating the FPLS information to the districts and to the Abingdon DCSE staff for effective, creative use of the information. Without the FPLS, the DCSE would still be fighting an uphill battle against its burgeoning interstate caseload. As states become more accurate and responsive in their FPLS data submissions, Abingdon DCSE's ability to assist its customers continues to be broadened. Each day, new applications for FPLS data are being discovered. A challenge for the future will be finding new ways to automate the cross referencing of FPLS data with other information in data bases that will reduce the manual online reviews currently being conducted by case workers.

Nick Young, Virginia's IV-D Director, notes that "Virginia recognized early on what a valuable tool the FPLS would be. I asked all offices to place a priority on using the new data. Abingdon has done an excellent job of doing just that!"

For more information on how Abingdon DCSE uses FPLS data, contact Pat DuBose at 540-676-5495 or pad986@dcse.dss.state.va.us.