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# OIG NEWS

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## **OPERATION LOST AND FOUND NETS CHRONIC CHILD SUPPORT DEFAULTERS**

A former high-ranking state official, a divorce mediator, and a university professor were among dozens of delinquent parents recently rounded up by federal authorities as part of an HHS-led crackdown on chronic child support defaulters, Acting Principal Deputy Inspector General Dara Corrigan announced today.

In total, 44 defaulters have been arrested or surrendered since the coast-to-coast sweep, dubbed “Operation Lost and Found,” was launched last week.

Authorities are pursuing another 38 delinquent parents for whom arrest warrants or summonses were issued as part of the enforcement action but have not yet been taken into custody.

“These are not nurturing parents who are temporarily down on their luck. These are people who have the resources to pay support and have callously put their own selfish interests ahead of their children’s well-being,” Corrigan said. “Our goal is to bring them to justice and help ensure that their children have a fair chance in life.”

The arrests were made without incident at various locations in 23 states by agents from the HHS Office of Inspector General (OIG), U.S. Marshals Service, and state and local police. All of the defendants are either under federal indictment or the subjects of criminal complaints for willful failure to pay court-ordered child support. If convicted of the charges, they face maximum sentences of up to two years imprisonment plus full restitution of their overdue obligations.

The 82 defaulters collectively owe approximately \$4 million in child support, and many of them have fled across state lines and switched jobs multiple times to avoid making payments. Their individual arrears range from \$6,710 to more than \$216,000, and most of them are at least a year late in their payments. Many have not made a single payment in several years, and some have never made a payment.

Among those taken into custody was Francis Giberson, a 56-year-old former attorney and former deputy commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Services, who oversaw the state's child support enforcement division in the mid-1980s. Ordered in 1991 to pay \$1,200-a-month for the support of two sons, Giberson made only sporadic payments, the last in 1996, and now owes more than \$106,000. Authorities caught up with him in Las Vegas following his arrest on routine motor vehicle charges.

Stephen Lewis, a five-times married California divorce mediator, also was apprehended. He has made infrequent, partial payments since 1994 for the support of five children and now owes over \$190,000. The children are in the custody of his fourth wife who has received public assistance because of the family's dire financial circumstances.

Others arrested include John Epperson, an accountant and a professor at Auburn University, who owes nearly \$69,000 for three children; Katherine Fulton, the mother of a seven-year-old daughter and a five-year-old son, who owes nearly \$22,000; and Stephen Knowlton, a California real estate appraiser who owes nearly \$116,000 and has not made a payment since 1995 for the support of an 18-year-old child with disabilities. Lewis Corder, a Georgia businessman, was apprehended during the roundup along with Richard LaBato, a Denver baker, and George Benton, a Philadelphia boxing trainer and bar owner. Corder owes more than \$50,000 for one child, LaBato owes \$132,856 for five children, and Benton owes nearly \$216,919 for one child.

"Children deserve to be supported by their parents, whether the family is together or apart," said Wade F. Horn, Ph.D., HHS assistant secretary for children and families. "We are continuing to be relentless in our enforcement of the child support rules in these cases, because to do otherwise would be to deny vulnerable children the financial support they need and deserve."

Corrigan said that the defendants were selected for enforcement action because they were among the most egregious offenders out of the interstate cases referred by state child support agencies to federal authorities for investigation and prosecution. She noted that emphasis was placed on pursuing delinquent parents who had a demonstrated financial ability to make the court-ordered support payments but intentionally and repeatedly refused to do so.

In addition to the week-long federal sweep, law enforcement authorities in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, and West Virginia conducted separate coordinated crackdowns. They collectively arrested more than 100 child support defaulters on state charges.

This was the second HHS-initiated national roundup of child support defaulters in the past two years. Last summer teams of federal and state agents arrested 70 defaulters during a five-day sweep.

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