



News Clips

California Department
of Child Support Services
Office of Public Affairs
January, 2002

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES

P.O. Box 419064, Rancho Cordova, CA 95741-9064



NEWS RELEASE

FOR RELEASE 11:00 A.M.**January 4, 2002**Contact: Mike Botula, Public Information Officer
(916) 464-5188 (916) 464-5315**California's Child Support Reform Results in Greater Benefits for Families***Child Support Collections Up, Customer Service Enhanced*

SACRAMENTO—Child support Collections in California, for the first time, have exceeded the \$2 billion mark, paternity establishments and support orders are up and customer service for custodial and non-custodial parents has improved, according to a report outlining the successes of the California Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) released at a Capitol news conference today.

Governor Gray Davis signed Child Support Reform legislation in September 1999 creating the Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) in January 2000 to provide leadership, ensure uniformity of services for families throughout the State and to oversee the development of a statewide automation system.

"This Administration has a new vision for the future of California's Child Support Program of building stronger communities through strengthening families," said state Health and Human Services Agency Secretary Grantland Johnson. "Connecting children with their parents for financial, medical and emotional support is the foundation of that vision," the Secretary said.

The reform legislation mandated that county-level child support programs, previously administered by district attorneys, be operated by local child support agencies (LCSAs). A major task for DCSS in its first two years has been the transition of the local programs out of the district attorneys offices into the new local agencies under the one state administered umbrella of the DCSS.

"The transition process is ahead of schedule and is saving the state \$4 million a year," said DCSS Director Curtis L. Child. Child said all 58 counties would complete the transition to local child support agencies by July 1, 2002.

(more)

Child Support Services News Release
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Citing the need for a new approach for the delivery of services and collection of child support, the Director said the Child Support Services Program is one of the largest human service programs in the State and serves families longer than most other social services programs. "Two thirds of the families we currently serve are not on public assistance, meaning that most of the child support funds that are collected by the state go directly to families and children," Child said.

DCSS has also begun several major customer service initiatives including the Ombudsperson Program and Complaint Resolution and State Administrative Hearings. A statewide customer satisfaction survey is also being conducted to determine how and in what ways that customer service can be improved in the future.

EDITORS: More information on Child Support Reform may be obtained from the DCSS Internet site: <http://www.childsup.ca.gov>

California

Reformed Child Support System Called a Success

Legal: Glowing report comes on the two-year anniversary of the state agency that collects court-ordered payments, whose amounts doubled on average per case.

By GREG KRIKORIAN
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Two years after California overhauled its beleaguered child support system, state officials and advocates said Friday that the new program has exceeded expectations in collecting money for single-parent families.

With a record \$2 billion a year now collected from parents ordered to pay child support, the new state Department of Child Support Services has more than doubled the average amount brought in per case, from \$419 in fiscal 1996 to \$1,015 in

2000, officials said. The 2001 figures are not yet available.

Just as important, they said, the new department has increased the number of cases in which paternity has been established in court, expanded the number of children covered by health insurance and enhanced the customer services that just a few years ago were a constant source of controversy.

"For the first time in the history of California, child support enforcement embraces the idea of customer service," said Melanie Snider, a director of the Assn. for Children for Enforcement of Support, a national advocacy group.

Snider was among the child support advocates and state officials in Sacramento on Friday to mark the two-year anniversary of the new child support department, launched after years of complaints to the Legislature about the performance of California counties on the issue.

One result has been that about two-thirds of the state's current cases involve families that are not on welfare—a reversal of what state officials were reporting several years ago.

"What that means is that about two-thirds of the \$2 billion [in collections] is going directly to families, instead of repaying county welfare systems," said Curtis L. Child, director of the state child support department.

"So the magnitude of that number is important in looking at a program that is directed at family self-sufficiency."

In addition, he said, his department has saved the state more than \$4 million by eliminating some local administrative costs.

The department has plowed savings into better customer service, including the addition of local ombudsmen throughout California to respond to complaints about local programs, he said.

The reorganization has helped to

foster a new level of cooperation between child support advocates, fathers' rights groups and others in handling the thorny issue of child support collections, he said.

Said Assemblywoman Dion Aroner (D-Berkeley): "This is one of the few times when we get to look at a reform package and see the accomplishments come to fruition in such a short period of time."

The report was issued at the same time state officials released the results of a performance analysis of Los Angeles County's long-troubled child support collection program.

The analysis, by Denver-based Policy Studies Inc., concludes that the county's program has increased the amount collected from \$212 million in 1997 to \$425 million last year.

The report says the county has achieved an "impressive rate" of compliance with federal deadlines for child support cases, an indication that it is meeting deadlines for

such actions as establishing paternity and obtaining court orders for collections.

But the study also found that the county's collection rate for current support was only 32%, "very low" compared with the state and nation.

The latest state figures show that collections on current support in California averaged 44%, while nationwide the figure was 56%.

The county's performance in other key areas has also been poor. For example, the report found, Los Angeles County has an "extraordinarily high" rate of court orders obtained by default—79%—because those sued for child support fail, for whatever reasons, to appear in court.

That default rate, the report says, not only raises serious questions about the fairness of the county's approach, but also gives the court orders for child support "less credibility and makes them harder to enforce."

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Published Thursday, Jan. 10, 2002, in the San Jose Mercury News

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EDITORIAL

The opinion of the Mercury News

State is making good progress on child support

New computerized system has increased collections, orders for payment, and the rate of establishing paternity

Two years ago, California junked its failed child-support collection system and created a new one that was supposed to be more efficient, more accountable and more humane. Responsibility for collecting child support and tracking down parents who didn't pay was transferred from the 58 county district attorneys to a new, centralized Department of Child Support Services.

Critics of the old system -- including the Mercury News opinion pages -- applauded the change but cautioned that the transition from old to new could mean short-term chaos.

The results of the department's first two years of operation are in, and they are encouraging. Chaos does not reign. The transition has been orderly so far. Collections have increased from \$1.6

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billion in 1998-99 to more than \$2 billion [Print this Page](#)
last year. The rates of establishing paternity
and getting support orders have improved.


Nearly half the counties have transferred operations from the
DAs to new state-run, local child-support offices, resulting in
better customer service and administrative savings of \$4 million.
The other counties, including Santa Clara and Alameda, are
scheduled to transfer by July.

While we're still far from the goal of having a single statewide
child-support computer system, there has been some progress.
All counties now are computerized, even if they are hooked up to
six different computer systems. And nearly all the state's 2
million cases have been loaded onto the federal case registry, so
the information can be shared with other states.

Perhaps the most noticeable improvement for the families who
depend on the child-support system is the new emphasis on
customer service. In the old days, the bureaucratic maze was
daunting. It could take hours or even days to get through on the
phone to live people who could help with cases. The new
department created an ombudsperson program and established
procedures for answering queries and resolving complaints
quickly.

There is a good deal of work yet to be done. California still lags
behind the national average in collections, and will continue to
be fined millions of dollars by the feds until it has a statewide
computer system. But the new department appears to be a vast
improvement over the unruly network of DAs. And, if it doesn't
live up to its billing, at least this time the Legislature will know
where the buck stops.

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Local & State

Stories from The Mercury News

Published Saturday, Jan. 5, 2002, in the San Jose Mercury News

SACRAMENTO

Support payments surpass \$2 billion

For the first time in California, child support collections have exceeded \$2 billion, the California Department of Child Support Services announced Friday.

That's \$175 million more than the last fiscal year, but legislators and parents say it also means families that have waited years for a child support check are now receiving them. Also, the families are receiving better customer service, longer office hours and more locations to visit.

In recent years, California's child support program came under increasing scrutiny from agencies, advocates and the Legislature. The program was operated independently by 58 county district attorney offices.

In 1999, Gov. Gray Davis signed a bill to reform the child support system. The state now oversees the program and delivers child support programs in each county. So far, two-thirds of the counties have been turned over to the new system. Counties such as Sacramento, Fresno and Napa will change over by July.

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California Department of Child Support Services
NEWS CLIPS

PUBLICATION: SACRAMENTO BEE
DATE: January 19, 2002 Saturday
REPORTER: EDITORIAL
SLUG: CHILD SUPPORT SUCCESS

The Sacramento Bee • Saturday, January 19, 2002

Opinion

Child support success But Sacramento, alas, is still not on board

Sometimes government reform actually works. Child support is one recent happy example.

For years, single mothers across California complained that they couldn't get county district attorneys to force absent fathers to pay child support owed. Fathers who did pay up complained that they couldn't get district attorneys to stop garnisheeing their wages or to re-instate driver's licenses suspended for failure to pay child support. Every year, the federal government threatened to fine California because its child support collections system was in shambles.

Two years ago, the Legislature approved and Gov. Gray Davis signed a bill that wrested the child support collection system away from county district attorneys. The new law was enacted despite fierce opposition from powerful county district attorneys, including Sacramento's Jan Scully.

Under the new system, a beefed-up California Department of Child Support Collection oversees revamped, D.A.-free, county-run child support offices. The results are impressive.

In just one year of full operation, with only 27 counties having made the transition so far, annual collections have exceeded \$2 billion for the first time. Paternity establishments and support orders are up. Average collection of child support per case has jumped from \$419 to \$1,015. The department also reports that they've been able to trim administrative costs by \$4

million.

Most important, according to state officials who run the system and mothers who depend on it for needed income, service has improved dramatically in counties where the transition has been completed, including Placer and El Dorado. Praise for the new system flows not just from the parents who have custody of the children (usually the mother), but also from the absent parent (usually the father) as well.

Unfortunately, Sacramento is one of those counties whose collection system has not yet made the transition. According to those who are forced to rely on it, Scully's Bureau of Family Support remains among the worst in the state. Some specifics: According to Melanie Snider, executive director of the Association for Children for Enforcement of Support (ACES), out-of-state parents trying to find out if their payments have been received have a hard time even finding the Sacramento number to call, so they call the ACES office instead. Even when someone calls, Snider says, they have a hard time getting through. ACES volunteers, who test the system periodically, say they've never waited less than 43 minutes for the phone to be answered. Don't believe it? Try calling (916) 875-7400.

The 31 remaining counties, including Sacramento, are set to make the transition to the state system by July 1. For parents and their children in need of support, the sooner the better.

From: Botula, Mike@DCSS
Sent: Saturday, January 05, 2002 3:26 PM
To: Botula, Mike@DCSS
Subject: Bakersfield.com Article: Child support collections on rise in state



Comments from Mike Botula:

Child support collections on rise in state

Address: <http://www.bakersfield.com/top/story/748180p-800853c.html>

By VIC POLLARD, Californian Sacramento Bureau
e-mail: vpollard@bakersfield.com

Friday January 04, 2002, 10:21:00 PM

SACRAMENTO -- Child support collections have risen significantly since the state began supervising them two years ago, taking the function away from local district attorneys' offices, officials said Friday.

Statewide, child support payments hit the \$2 billion mark last year for the first time in the state's history, officials of the state's new Department of Child Support Services said. That is an increase of about \$175 million over the previous year. By another measure, the annual collections per case rose from an average of \$419 in 1996 to \$1,015 in 2000.

It is too early to gauge the impact of the program in Kern County, where the transfer to the new system was made Jan. 1, officials said.

So far, just 27 of the state's 58 counties have converted to the new system, but the department's director, Curtis Child, said the transition is ahead of schedule and is already saving taxpayers an estimated \$4 million a year. The remaining 31 counties are expected to convert by July 1.

The new system in counties that have implemented it is also much easier to utilize, said Melanie Snider, executive director of a child support advocacy group.

"You can walk into someone's office and they are happy to see you," she said. "That is a big change."

Sweeping child support reform legislation enacted in 1999 required each county to turn child support collections over to a new local agency, which would be supervised by the new state department.

Some counties, Kern included, simply converted the existing child support operations of their district attorneys' offices into to a separate agency, largely using the same personnel.

Others, Child said, "looked for new leadership" to conduct child support collections.

At the same time, California is moving to comply with a federal reform law requiring most counties to join a computerized system to make it easier to track and collect from deadbeat parents.

Child said officials hope to have that system in place in 2005.

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24-Hour State News

Child support collections exceed \$2 billion for the first time

Published 12:40 p.m. PST Friday, Jan. 4, 2002

SACRAMENTO (AP) - For the first time in California, child support collections have exceeded \$2 billion, the California Department of Child Support Services announced Friday.

That's \$175 million more than the last fiscal year, but supporters, legislators and parents say it also means families that have waited years for a child support check are now receiving them. Also, the families are receiving better customer service, longer office hours and more locations to visit.

"We feel that there is quite a difference in the way that parents are served," said Curtis Child, director of the Department of Child Support Services.

In recent years, California's child support program came under increasing scrutiny from agencies, advocates and the Legislature. The program was operated independently by 58 county district attorney offices.

In 1999, Gov. Gray Davis signed a bill to reform the child support system. The state now oversees the program and delivers child support programs in each county. So far, two-thirds of the counties have been turned over to the new system, with counties like Sacramento, Fresno and Napa left to change over by July.

"We can tell when we answer the phones if the person is calling from a county that is still under the old system, things like not being able to get through on the phones," said Harriet White a Placer County supervisor. "This has been so innovative that other states are clamoring to change their own systems."

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Child Support Collections Exceed \$2 Billion for the First Time

(KFWB) 1.04.02, 3:05p -- State officials say child support collections in California have exceeded the \$2 billion mark for the first time. The Department of Child Support Services says the increase proves that recent reforms are working.

The amount is \$175 million more than the last fiscal year. Officials say much of the money is going to families that have waited years for child support checks. Along with increased collections, DCSS says families are receiving better customer service with longer office hours and more locations to visit.

Child Support Reform legislation signed in September 1999 created the DCSS and mandated that county-level child support programs be operated by local child support agencies instead of district attorneys. The agency spent most of the last two years making that transition and Director Curtis L. Child says they are ahead of schedule. Child says all 58 counties will make the transition to local agencies by July 1, 2002. He says the switch is saving the state \$4 million a year.

KFWB All News Radio 98 – Los Angeles Friday January 4, 2002



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Child Support Changeover Has Had Major Impact

Attorney General's Office Formerly Oversaw Program

POSTED: 8:37 p.m. PST January 4, 2002

MONTEREY, Calif. -- The state is cracking down on deadbeat parents, and while the state is pleased with recent success, some parents say more needs to be done.

California Child Support Services has collected a record \$2 billion in the past year from parents who owe child support.

Prior to 1999, the district attorney's office was responsible for collecting child support, but the duty has since been passed on to Child Support Services.

The move has meant millions of dollars more for children.

More than 8.5 million California families are waiting for child support. Most will never see the money they hope for, Action News 8 reported Friday.

Barbara Sauret said she has been waiting for child support for the past 12 years.

In Monterey County, there are 24,000 families like Sauret's in need of child support. Nearly 50 percent will never see any cash.

Sauret has single-handedly raised four children with no financial help. She said the county needs to do more.

"The hard cases are those that go across state lines, that work under the table, that you have a hard time tracking their assets and those require more work," Sauret said.

The change in the system has made an impact in Monterey, Action News 8 reported. With the newly beefed up collection staff and aggressive criminal prosecution, the county collected a record \$31 million for children last year.

"There are individuals out there that may not be deadbeat dads or parents, but

rather dead broke parents, and that's a problem with the economy that we're facing," Child Support Services director Stephen Kennedy said.

When parents don't pay child support, the cost trickles down to the taxpayers. Taxpayers often pick up the tab of paying for welfare services.

It's estimated that every dollar paid in child support by a parent will save \$5 in taxpayer money.

Additional Resources:

- Visit the [Department of Child Support Services Web site](#) to learn more about child support payments or to report problems.

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NEWS CLIP

Office of Public Affairs California Department of Child Support Services

Contact: Mike Botula, Public Information Officer (916) 464-5188

Mike.Botula@dcss.ca.gov

PUBLICATION: Orange Co Register

REPORTER:

DATE: January 5, 2002

SLUG: Child-support collections top \$2 billion in state.

Northern California briefly

SACRAMENTO -- For the first time in California, child-support collections have exceeded \$2 billion, the California Department of Child Support Services announced Friday.

That's \$175 million more than the last fiscal year, and supporters, legislators and parents say it means families that have waited years for a child-support check are now receiving them. Also, the families are receiving better customer service, longer office hours and more locations to visit.

"We feel that there is quite a difference in the way that parents are served," said Curtis Child, the state agency's director.

In recent years, California's child-support program came under increasing scrutiny from agencies, advocates and the Legislature. The program was operated independently by 58 county district attorney offices.

In 1999, Gov. Gray Davis signed a bill to reform the child-support system. The state now oversees the program and delivers child-support programs in each county. So far, two-thirds of the counties have switched to the new system.

NEWS CLIP

Office of Public Affairs California Department of Child Support Services

Contact: Mike Botula, Public Information Officer (916) 464-5188

Mike.Botula@dcss.ca.gov

PUBLICATION: Ventura County Star

REPORTER:

DATE: January 4, 2002

SLUG: **Child support collections exceed \$2 billion for the first time**

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NEWS CLIP

Office of Public Affairs, California Department of Child Support Services
Contact: Mike Botula, Public Information Officer (916) 464-5188
Mike.Botula@dcss.ca.gov

PUBLICATION: OAKLAND TRIBUNE
REPORTER:
DATE: Saturday January 5, 2002
SLUG: CALIFORNIA CHILD SUPPORT PROGRAM PRAISED

SATURDAY, January 5, 2002

**AROUND THE
STATE**

Sacramento

Child support collections:

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BAY AREA

AND CALIFORNIA

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Tuesday,
January 8, 2002

Most child support remains unpaid

New state program has not increased rate of collection

By Greg Lucas

SACRAMENTO BUREAU CHIEF

SACRAMENTO — Although winning praise from the people who depend on it, California's new statewide child support collection system has not lowered the percentage of cash owed by deadbeat parents, just-released figures show.

During its first full year in operation, the new state department charged with collecting support for California children helped de-

liver \$1.1 billion in monthly checks — 40 percent of what was owed, according to federal figures.

That's 1 percent below the collection level in 1999 before the new agency was created.

Nor does that include the more than \$14 billion in back payments owed but uncollected. The new program whittled down that amount by \$900 million during 2001.

"We're improving services to our customers," said Curtis Child,

director of the state Department of Child Support Services. "The next step is to get more information on what these debtors look like, to be able to strategically direct our efforts in areas where collections are most likely to happen."

California has nearly 2 million child support cases, nearly two-thirds more than the caseload of any other state. Three million kids depend on the checks.

For years, California's collection rate was one of the lowest in

the nation, partly because nearly two-thirds of the state's cases involved families on welfare.

But Child said that has changed over the past two years. Now, two-thirds of single-parent families receiving support are not getting public assistance.

Still, nearly 75 percent of the 835,000 noncustodial parents who owe back support earn \$15,000 a year or less.

The \$2 billion total collected by the department last year — \$1.1 billion in monthly checks plus

\$900 million in overdue support — was an increase of \$175 million over 2000. The department expects to increase that total by \$236 million this year.

Collections should also increase when the department creates a database to track deadbeat parents throughout the state, as required by federal law.

The state does not expect to have one before 2005. Each year it doesn't have one it is fined \$100 million by the federal government.

The state's new department opened in January 2000 after Sen-

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Child support uncollected

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From Page A15

ate President Pro Tem John Burton, D-San Francisco, pushed through legislation taking away control of child support collection from the district attorneys of California's 58 counties.

Under the new system, child support cases are managed by county offices, which report to both county supervisors and the state agency.

Single parents receiving child support say the new program is more helpful to them than the old because of its focus on customer service.

"Phones at child support departments are actually being answered," said Melanie Snider, executive director of the Association for Enforcement of Support.

California's program is so in-

novative, Snider said, "other states are clamoring for the information."

The law called for a 2½-year transition ending in July 2002 for counties to switch over to the statewide program.

So far 27 counties have made the switch. The remaining 31 will do so by July.

Only two Bay Area counties — Contra Costa and San Francisco — have done so. San Francisco was the first county to join the statewide program.

"San Francisco being San Francisco, we were doing a lot of the same things the state is doing before," said Milt Hyams, director of the city's 150-employee Department of Child Support Services.

E-mail Greg Lucas at
glucas@sfchronicle.com.

California Department of Child Support Services
NEWS CLIPS

PUBLICATION: SACRAMENTO BEE
DATE: January 19, 2002 Saturday
REPORTER: EDITORIAL
SLUG: CHILD SUPPORT SUCCESS

The Sacramento Bee • Saturday, January 19, 2002

Opinion

Child support success But Sacramento, alas, is still not on board

Sometimes government reform actually works. Child support is one recent happy example.

For years, single mothers across California complained that they couldn't get county district attorneys to force absent fathers to pay child support owed. Fathers who did pay up complained that they couldn't get district attorneys to stop garnisheeing their wages or to re-instate driver's licenses suspended for failure to pay child support. Every year, the federal government threatened to fine California because its child support collections system was in shambles.

Two years ago, the Legislature approved and Gov. Gray Davis signed a bill that wrested the child support collection system away from county district attorneys. The new law was enacted despite fierce opposition from powerful county district attorneys, including Sacramento's Jan Scully.

Under the new system, a beefed-up California Department of Child Support Collection oversees revamped, D.A.-free, county-run child support offices. The results are impressive.

In just one year of full operation, with only 27 counties having made the transition so far, annual collections have exceeded \$2 billion for the first time. Paternity establishments and support orders are up. Average collection of child support per case has jumped from \$419 to \$1,015. The department also reports that they've been able to trim administrative costs by \$4

million.

Most important, according to state officials who run the system and mothers who depend on it for needed income, service has improved dramatically in counties where the transition has been completed, including Placer and El Dorado. Praise for the new system flows not just from the parents who have custody of the children (usually the mother), but also from the absent parent (usually the father) as well.

Unfortunately, Sacramento is one of those counties whose collection system has not yet made the transition. According to those who are forced to rely on it, Scully's Bureau of Family Support remains among the worst in the state. Some specifics: According to Melanie Snider, executive director of the Association for Children for Enforcement of Support (ACES), out-of-state parents trying to find out if their payments have been received have a hard time even finding the Sacramento number to call, so they call the ACES office instead. Even when someone calls, Snider says, they have a hard time getting through. ACES volunteers, who test the system periodically, say they've never waited less than 43 minutes for the phone to be answered. Don't believe it? Try calling (916) 875-7400.

The 31 remaining counties, including Sacramento, are set to make the transition to the state system by July 1. For parents and their children in need of support, the sooner the better.

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Daily News of Los Angeles (CA)

January 20, 2002

Section: News

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Page: N4 HEADLINE} \$50 MILLION IN SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN SETS RECORD

linesSOURCE: - Sabrina Decker

Ventura County collected a record \$50 million in **child support** payments last year, a 9 percent increase over 2000, primarily from garnished paychecks, officials say.

County officials attribute their success, in part, to new computer databases that allow them to track deadbeat parents.

"I think the real issue is money, how much money are you willing to put into the program, because you need the tools to find people and get (court) orders," said C. Stanley Trom, director of **child support** services said.

More than half of the money collected in 2001 - roughly 58 percent - came by garnishing the wages of deadbeat parents.

State and county officials also said their total collections increased with the new ability to garnish IRS tax refunds.

Currently, the state has an overall collections rate of 40 percent on current **support** orders, compared with 50 percent in Ventura County. And nearly 72 percent of parents involved in **child-support** cases statewide have been located and ordered to pay, compared with 83 percent in Ventura County, officials said.

Like Ventura County, the state saw a 9 percent increase in collections last year, topping \$2 billion for the first time, said Mike Botula, spokesman for the California Department of **Child Support Services**.

"That's a significant amount, particularly looking at our caseload now, said Curtis **Child**, director of the California Department of **Child Support Services**. "We certainly collect more than any other state."

State control of the **Child Support** Divisions throughout California has been slowly implemented over the last two years. This July, Ventura County will also fall under the state umbrella and be severed from the office of the District Attorney.

Legislators made the move in order to have more continuity between different county agencies both in terms of the paperwork and the quality of service, officials said.

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NEWS CLIPS

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PUBLICATION: NEWSDAY
REPORTER: Associated Press
DATE: January 21, 2002
SLUG: NEW YORK STATE COLLECTIONS

Governor: New York reaches highest child support collection ever

January 21, 2002, 2:41 PM EST

ALBANY, N.Y. -- For the seventh year in a row, child support collections in New York state have hit a record number, Gov. George Pataki announced Monday.

During 2001, \$1.29 billion was collected from parents in arrears on such payments. That's an 8.15 percent increase over 2000 and the third year in a row that collections exceeded \$1 billion.

Officials said \$477 million of that money * or 37 percent * came from New York City.

"New York's child support program is a billion dollar success story," Pataki said. "In 2002 ... we will continue our aggressive action against deadbeats, reminding every parent along the way that child support is a fundamental responsibility."

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NEWS CLIPS

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PUBLICATION: VENTURA COUNTY STAR
REPORTER: Star News Staff
DATE: January 24, 2002
SLUG: CHILD SUPPORT SHIFTS TO STATE

Ventura County Star

Child support collections shift to state

MANDATED: New system will help with 'customer relations.' Ventura County slated to change in July.

By staff reports

Control of child support collection is shifting from the county to the state in July, but officials reassured local employers the change will be smooth and a step toward a better system.

The transition was imposed by a state law approved in 1999. State lawmakers ordered the transfer to bring uniformity to a system critics called disjointed and inconsistent. Differences from county to county allowed some child support cases to fall through the cracks, critics said.

One of the biggest changes will be improving "customer relations" between child collection agencies, families and employers, said Curtis Child, director of the state Department of Child Support Services.

"Before, the big complaint was how people were treated," Child said to the group of about 150 employers from all over the county. "There will be 140 new positions in counties statewide to solely address the problems parents and employers have."

Ventura County is one of 31 counties that will transfer control of its child support program from the District Attorney's Office to the state in July. Twenty-seven other counties have already made the switch.

State officials believe a standardized program can boost collections from the current 30 percent to almost 65 percent of what's owed by 2007. Employers are key in that equation, Child said. Nearly 60 percent of the \$50 million collected in child support payments last year in Ventura County came from wage garnishments. Nearly 60

percent of the \$2 billion collected statewide last year came from wage garnishments, Child said.

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Office of Public Affairs California Department of Child Support Services

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PUBLICATION: FRESNO BEE
REPORTER: Editorial
DATE: January 24, 2002
SLUG: CHILD SUPPORT SUCCESS

Children win one

Sometimes government reform actually works. Child support is one recent happy example.

For years, single mothers across California complained that they couldn't get county district attorneys to force absent fathers to pay child support owed. Fathers who did pay up complained that they couldn't get district attorneys to stop garnisheeing their wages or to reinstate drivers licenses suspended for failure to pay child support. Every year, the federal government threatened to fine California because its child support collections system was in shambles.

Two years ago, the Legislature approved and Gov. Gray Davis signed a bill that wrested the child support collection system away from county district attorneys. The new law was enacted despite fierce opposition from powerful county district attorneys.

Under the new system, a beefed-up California Department of Child Support Collection oversees revamped, D.A.-free, county-run child support offices. The results are impressive.

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Most important, according to state officials who run the system and mothers who depend on it for needed income, service has improved dramatically in some counties where the transition has been completed.

Praise for the new system flows not just from the parents who have custody of the children (usually the mother), but also from the absent parent (usually the father) as well.

Fresno is one of those counties whose collection system has not yet made the transition. The transition plan has been approved by the Fresno County Board of Supervisors and the county now is awaiting state approval for its plan. Last year the District Attorney's Office collected \$87.5 million in child support.

The 31 remaining counties are set to make the transition to the state system by July 1. For parents and their children in need of support, the sooner the better.

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Office of Public Affairs California Department of Child Support Services

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PUBLICATION: SACRAMENTO BEE

REPORTER: Letters to the Editor

DATE: January 25, 2002

SLUG: CHILD SUPPORT

Letters to the editor

Trial and error

Sacramento Bee

Published 5:30 a.m. PST Friday, Jan. 25, 2002

Child support and parenting

Re "Child support success," editorial, Jan. 19: Wow, that is amazing. In just one full year of operation, and in less than half the counties, the new state department, which is not even fully staffed, has produced an increase in the average collection of child support from "\$419 to \$1,015" per case. That's unbelievable.

I mean that really is unbelievable, especially since the biggest change effected by the legislative reform is the name on the office door. There might be some folks out there who will swallow that one, but not those of us who work in the system. People from out of state call the Association for Children for Enforcement of Support (ACES) instead of the local child support office because it's so difficult to find their number? Really. I went to my computer searched "child support California" and within a minute had the address, phone and fax number of the Sacramento office.

It's amazing that ACES is so well known nationwide that people would know to call them rather than a local support office. Please. You have a right to publish an opinion, but I am not sure that piece rises to the definition.

- John Cochran, Placerville

Within the first few lines of this editorial, noncustodial fathers are, once again, targeted for being absent and not meeting their financial obligations to their children. Has it occurred to anyone that "absent" mothers are required to pay child support also? Perhaps the word "parents" would be a more accurate and less pejorative description.

Being the noncustodial parent does not necessarily mean being absent from your children's lives. It simply means that you should be getting what the courts unfortunately refer to as "visitation." Why should parents have to have a "visit" with their own children? A far better and more accurate term would be "parenting time."

A pervasive bias attends the family court system, not just in California but in most states. The entire system should be changed to make custody and support negotiations and orders begin with a presumption of evenly shared time and expenses. The number of "absent" parents would decline rapidly and the children would have the benefit of having both parents in their lives equally.

For the record, the state department overseeing the collection system is the Department of Child Support Services, not "collection."

- Mike Shuchter, Sacramento

NEWS CLIP

Office of Public Affairs California Department of Child Support Services

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PUBLICATION: VACAVILLE REPORTER
REPORTER: Marcie Grover
DATE: January 7, 2002
SLUG: SOLANO FSO CARRIES OLYMPIC TORCH

To carry a torch

Vaca woman part of Olympic tradition

By Marcie Grover/Reporter Staff

Vacaville resident Ramona Mitchell is spending a lot more time at the gym these days as she prepares for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Mitchell is among the proud Americans who will take turns running the Olympic torch through Sacramento on Jan. 20 as part of its cross-country trip to Salt Lake City for the 2002 Winter Games.

But for Mitchell the effort involved in carrying the lighted torch for her one-fifth of a mile stretch pales in comparison to the great strides she's already made in life.

A Family Support Officer for the Solano County District Attorney's Office, Mitchell worked her way off of Welfare with much diligence and a commitment to getting an education and making a better life for herself and her three children.

"A lot of the things I've done are more for other people than myself," Mitchell said. "I wanted to make sure my children had a better life than I did. I used my time on Welfare to find success. Nothing less was acceptable."

Meeting her today, one would never suspect that Mitchell spent her formative years in a tough, violence-ridden neighborhood in San Francisco. She said drugs were everywhere and becoming a teenage parent in need of public assistance was the norm. She never gave up hope, however.

Though she didn't finish high school, Mitchell eventually earned her General Education Degree, graduated from Skyline College and later Sonoma State University.

Selected from among 200,000 applicants, Mitchell said the news that she would be among those bearing the Olympic torch felt like "a reward" for all of her hard work. "I was honored to be selected. ... This recognition makes me feel real good," she said with a big grin. "My kids see me being active in the community, doing things to better myself and others and they know that anyone can be successful."

Mitchell's life story is what compelled a co-worker, Deputy District Attorney Kathleen Amos, to nominate her to carry the torch.

"Ramona is an example of what our country is all about," Amos said. "She's a walking poster child for Welfare reform. Anyone can make something of themselves, set goals and achieve them. Ramona is a shining example of someone who takes care of herself and her family, no matter what the obstacles."

Mitchell is in good company with the legions of torchbearers across the country, who include luminaries such as world champion cyclist Lance Armstrong, United States women's hockey team captain Cammi Granuto and 100 people who were directly affected by the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

And there will be other Solano connections among the torchbearers.

After the torch passes through the Sacramento region, it will head to Lake Tahoe and Squaw Valley, the site of the 1960 Winter Olympics. Adam Scott Matzinger, 17, grandson of longtime Vacaville residents Shirley and Ken Matzinger, will also carry the flame when it travels through South Lake Tahoe on Jan. 20 or 21, his proud grandparents said.

An Eagle Scout and honor student, Adam was nominated by his father, Marshall.

The torch Mitchell, Matzinger and the others will be carrying is specially designed to keep burning through rain, snow and gusty winds.

Every evening the flame is stored in a lantern which is carefully guarded to assure it is not extinguished. The flame travels an average of 208 miles a day with a 50 member support-vehicle entourage. Though runners will not bear it through Solano County, it will pass through via vehicle, Olympic Committee officials said.

In addition to transport by torchbearer, the flame will travel by car, ship, dogsled (in Alaska), horse-drawn sleigh, snowmobile, ice skater and prairie schooner.

By the time it reaches Salt Lake City, the torch will have traveled through 46 states and been carried by 11,500 runners.

For more information on how to follow the Olympic torch on its journey, log on to www.saltlake2002.com.

- Marcie Grover may be reached at schools@thereporter.com

NEWS CLIPS

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PUBLICATION: WINDSOR TIMES (Sonoma County)

REPORTER:

DATE: January 9, 2002

SLUG: SONOMA IN TOP TEN

Sonoma County is among the best in the state when it comes to child support programs according to State Child Support Officials.

The District Attorney's Family Support Division (DAFSD) received an "award of excellence" on Thursday December 20, recognizing the Sonoma County DA's Office as among the top ten offices in the state with child support programs.

A grant of \$159,260 was presented to the DAFSD Administrator Cynthia Moore in Sacramento by the Department of Child Support Director Curtis Child, as a funding bonus for the upcoming fiscal year.

A performance report presented by the state, showed that Sonoma County exceeded performance ratings in all areas. "I am extremely proud of the excellent work of the Family Support Division employees," said District Attorney Michael Mullins

According to Mullins, DAFSD employees handle some of the most complex and emotional casework performed by county departments. "They deserve all the recognition for providing outstanding quality customer service," said Mullins.

The Family Support division has had a history of success. Between 1994 and 2001 FSD employees more than doubled collections from \$15 to \$32 million and child support collections processed each year have increased over 227% over the last ten years indicating great efficiency and progress.

Some of the responsibilities of the Family Support Division include establishing legal parentage, attaining court orders for financial and medical support, and enforcing child support orders. They also distribute child support directly to families.

The DAFSD also offers parent education sessions through the department of Human Services and the California Parenting Institute. "The education sessions help educate both custodial and non-custodial parents on the importance of child support and the impact of non-payment on the childrens' lives," said Steve Franceschi, Outreach Manager for the division. According to Franceschi, increases in child support payments from parents who have attended these classes are upwards of 112%. "The class sessions are very valuable and also provide legal advocacies services and employment opportunities," said Franceschi.

The DAFSD had an information booth at Wal-Mart last August during "National Child Support Enforcement Month," giving out information on FSD services. Their next information booth will be set up on March 9 at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds Family Expo. "We will answer any questions and assist those who may be interested in applying for services," said Franceschi.

The Family Support division also has a school outreach program which frequents local high schools to inform students, and especially single parents of the legal and financial responsibilities of parenting.

NEWS CLIPS

Office of Public Affairs California Department of Child Support Services

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PUBLICATION: BAKERSFIELD CALIFORNIAN
REPORTER: Editorial
DATE: January 23, 2002
SLUG: KERN LAUNCHES NEW CS SYSTEM

Editorial: Kern launches new system

Wednesday January 23, 2002, 01:00:05 AM

If statewide trends are an accurate barometer, the new system of child support collections should be a success in Kern County.

Sweeping child support reform legislation enacted in 1999 required each county to turn child support collections over to a new local agency, which is supervised by the state's new Department of Child Support Services.

So far, only 28 of the state's 59 counties have converted to the new system. It is too early to gauge the impact of the program in Kern County, where the transfer to the new system was completed on Jan. 1. The remaining 30 counties are expected to convert by July 1.

Some counties, including Kern, simply converted the existing child support operations of their District Attorney's Offices into a separate agency, largely using the same personnel. Others looked for new leadership to conduct child support collections. Meanwhile, the two-year track record of counties collecting child support under the new system indicates Kern can expect smooth sailing.

Child support collections have risen significantly in those counties. Child support payments hit the \$2 billion mark last year for the first time in the state's history. That is an increase of about \$175 million over the previous year. By another measure, the annual collections per case rose from an average of \$419 in 1996 to \$1,015 in 2000.

Curtis Child, director of the California Department of Child Support Services, said the new system is already saving taxpayers an estimated \$4 million a year.

Officials in counties that have implemented the new system for more than a year find that it is much easier for people to utilize. Melanie Snider, executive director of a statewide child support advocacy group, said: "You can walk into someone's office and they are happy to see you. That is a big change."

Another endorsement comes from Lenny Goldberg of the National Center for Youth Law, who said: "This is an example where a deeply entrenched bureaucracy can be changed and changed for the better."

One result has been that about two-thirds of the state's current cases involve families that are not on welfare, which is a reversal of what the state was reporting several years ago.

Director Child noted: "What that means is that about two-thirds of the \$2 billion in collections is going directly to families," instead of repaying county welfare systems. "So the magnitude of that number is important in looking at a program that is directed at family self-sufficiency."

At the same time, California is moving toward compliance with a federal reform law requiring counties to join a computerized system to make it easier to track and collect from deadbeat parents. The system should be in place statewide by 2005.

Kern County district attorney officials have expressed skepticism about the efficacy and need for the 1999 legislation that brought about the big change in the collection system. No one will know for about a year if the system works as well in Kern as in other counties. But the track record in those counties indicates that it just might be more efficient in Kern County as well.