

# NATIONAL CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT



STRATEGIC PLAN  
FY2005-2009



NATIONAL  
**CHILD SUPPORT**  
ENFORCEMENT

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STRATEGIC PLAN



## INTRODUCTION

This National Child Support Enforcement Strategic Plan is the product of an enormously effective collaboration. The Plan reflects more than ten years of child support professionals brainstorming and consensus-building among branches and levels of government. The result is not merely a good process but a good product: a deliberate, thoughtful, specific, data-driven map that shows how we will proceed to meet our commitments to children and families.

The FY 2005-2009 Plan weaves a modern mosaic from a set of updated objectives and related strategies. These objectives and strategies demonstrate how the Child Support Enforcement Program has evolved and matured. Child support is no longer primarily a welfare reimbursement, revenue-producing device for the Federal and State governments; it is a family-first program, intended to ensure families' self-sufficiency by making child support a more reliable source of income.

### **A few highlights that distinguish this Plan from the ones that came before it:**

#### **1. Families come first. Child support should be a reliable source of income for families.**

More than ever, the money we collect on behalf of children actually goes to children. In fiscal year 2003, 90 percent of the record \$21.2 billion collected was disbursed to families. For families currently receiving assistance, 46.1 percent of collections were disbursed to families, up from under 8 percent in 1996. We hope these proportions will increase as States respond to legislative proposals to fund additional support payments "passed through" to families receiving public assistance and distributed to families who formerly received such assistance.

We sharpened the focus of our Strategic Plan to ensure that child support is not merely something we collect, but something on which children and families can rely. Our goal is children's financial security, which comes from certainty that they can count on



their parents' support. In this Plan, we move toward that goal by, among other things:

- focusing on increasing the amount and rate of money collected and distributed to families;
  - setting as a national priority the reduction of support collected but not distributed; and measuring and counting as a success not just getting any collection, but collecting and distributing timely support payments.
- #### **2. Meaningful medical support for children.**
- Using the child support system to secure children's private health-care coverage has been enormously difficult. The Medical Support Working Group made significant progress in studying the complications inherent in the process. This Plan takes us beyond the basic step of establishing medical support orders in IV-D cases to making medical support real for families.

In this Strategic Plan, securing medical coverage for children is a stand-alone goal and not merely a subset of other goals. We articulate this goal both in terms of establishing support orders with a medical support

component and in actually securing health coverage for children. Importantly, we acknowledge that medical coverage has value regardless of its source. After all, a child may be better off getting coverage from a custodial parent or step-parent. Child support staff are in a good position to make sure that parents meet their responsibilities with regard to their children's medical care.

Because many States are struggling with their Medicaid budgets, the Child Support Enforcement community recognizes that it has a unique role to play. Investments in medical support can lead to good outcomes for kids and for all of us. Our medical support efforts should aim not only at gaining coverage, but also at placing the financial responsibility for that coverage with the family, not the taxpayer, to the greatest extent possible.

### 3. Preventing the build-up of unpaid support (arrearages) through early intervention rather than traditional debt threshold-based enforcement.

Until recently, child support has followed a business model predicated on enforcement, as the name "child support enforcement" implies. That is, we built a system that intervened only after debt, at times substantial, accumulated and often too late for collection to be successful, let alone of real value to the child. Severe enforcement remedies applied when necessary have their place. But this Strategic Plan signals our intent to build a culture of compliance, in which parents support their children voluntarily and reliably.

As usual, creative State and Tribal child support leaders have led the way, demonstrating the effectiveness of a new approach. Early intervention to prevent the unnecessary build-up of arrears benefits families, States, and Tribes in numerous ways, from improving collection rates (and thus performance on incentives) to keeping noncustodial parents from running underground to avoid overwhelming and largely uncollectible arrears. So, the Plan provides for proactive efforts to, among other things:

- Modify orders to ensure that obligations stay consistent with ability to pay;
- Contact noncustodial parents soon after a scheduled payment is missed;
- Update child support guidelines to recognize modern family dynamics and realities (e.g., shared custody, incomes of custodial parents, etc.);
- Use automation to detect non-compliance as early as possible; and
- Aim primarily at consistent, reliable payment of current support, even if it means compromising uncollectible arrears to bring the noncustodial parent back into the fold.



This approach requires a more customized customer service philosophy and a more effective allocation of tasks among automated systems and child support professionals. The next five years offer us an opportunity to be more purposeful about letting technology do what it does best and freeing up people to do



people things (e.g., phone calls to parents, legwork to prevent/reduce default orders, easier means of order modification when income rises or falls). These tasks are what we used to spend our time on before the work became so focused on computer messages and alerts. In this respect, the past must be prologue.

#### 4. **Accountability.**

The prior two Strategic Plans for the Nation's Child Support Enforcement Program were extremely effective in focusing resources on what counts. This effectiveness was, in large part, due to carefully developed, specific performance measurements. In this Plan, we commit to measure our performance through the use of over a dozen new or revised performance indicators.

For example, we put families first by including an indicator that measures the percentage of total distributed collections disbursed to families. And we demonstrate our seriousness about making child support a reliable source of income by measuring and reporting how much of the child support owed to all of the families is actually paid to them. Having taken significant steps to correct inconsistent reporting and unreliable data problems with respect to undistributed collections, we include an indicator that captures how well States are reducing collections that are not promptly distributed. By establishing such indicators in our Strategic Plan, we ensure that the proper distribution of money to families is a top priority.

We in the Child Support Enforcement community take our mission very seriously. We have a long tradition of setting high standards and of holding ourselves accountable for achieving meaningful results. This Strategic Plan continues that tradition, as well as the traditional partnerships across levels and branches of government that have led to our success so far. But, it also recognizes the need to do more, because many families depend on us.



## OUR CUSTOMERS, PARTNERS, AND STAKEHOLDERS

We recognize the different values and perspectives of those involved in children's lives and acknowledge that the physical and emotional needs of children are paramount.

### **CUSTOMERS**

The primary customers and beneficiaries of the Child Support Enforcement Program are children in need of support. The parents and/or custodians of these children are also our customers.

### **PARTNERS**

The Child Support Enforcement Program is operated by a number of entities that must work together in partnership to achieve results for our customers. The partners include:

- State, Tribal, and local Child Support Enforcement agencies;
- Courts, law enforcement agencies, and other entities operating under cooperative agreements with child support enforcement agencies; and
- The Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, including the Administration for Children and Families Regional Offices.

Many other groups have an important role in helping us serve our customers. Without the active cooperation of these additional partners, we would be unable to operate our Program effectively. Child Support Enforcement agencies seek assistance from additional partners including:

- Employers, financial institutions, hospitals, the insurance community, program contractors;
- Other components of Federal, State, and local government such as Temporary Assistance for

Needy Families (TANF/Title IV-A), Medicaid (Title XIX), State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP/Title XXI), child welfare (including Title IV-E and Indian Child Welfare Act) agencies, and non-IV-D State and Tribal agencies that provide Child Support Enforcement services, Bureaus of Vital Records, Departments of Corrections; and

- Related Federal government agencies that work on particular aspects of the program such as the Departments of Labor, State, Treasury, and the Social Security Administration.

Parents also seek assistance from additional partners with whom we work to provide effective customer service, including:

- Family law practitioners, private collection agencies (PCA), public prosecutors, and Tribal court advocates.

### **STAKEHOLDERS**

Many other groups have a legitimate interest in how our customers are served. These stakeholders make a contribution toward, and benefit from, a well-run Child Support Enforcement Program. They include:

- National interest groups and charitable, community and faith-based organizations that help serve the interests of Child Support Enforcement Program customers or partners; the Congress; State, and Tribal legislatures; taxpayers; and the public in general.



## NATIONAL CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

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- MISSION, VISION, AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES
  - GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND INDICATORS
    - STRATEGIES

## MISSION

The purpose and the mission of the Child Support Enforcement Program are derived from title IV-D of the Social Security Act:

To enhance the well-being of children by assuring that assistance in obtaining support, including financial and medical, is available to children through locating parents, establishing paternity, establishing support obligations, and monitoring and enforcing those obligations.

## VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Children can count on their parents for the financial, medical, and emotional support they need to be healthy and successful.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Children first.
- Parents must meet their financial and emotional responsibilities to their children and we will help those who are struggling to do so.
- A legal and emotional relationship between parents and their children is essential.
- Our prompt, proactive steps ensure that appropriate levels of child support are paid timely and consistently to prevent the accrual of unpaid child support.
- Reliable child support and medical coverage are particularly crucial for families striving for self-sufficiency.
- Both parents are treated fairly, kept informed, and their concerns are recognized.
- Services are most effective when cultural differences are respected.
- Child Support Enforcement Programs have an obligation to provide public education and outreach.
- We will promote stable, safe, and healthy relationships between parents and children by participating in the larger community's efforts to strengthen families, and encourage healthy marriage and responsible parenthood.
- We will collaborate widely, with respect and flexibility, to overcome jurisdictional and other barriers among countries, States, Tribes, programs, cultures, and traditions.
- We will ensure the privacy and security of the personal information so critical to our mission.
- The Child Support Enforcement Program will advance through coordinated efforts involving technology, research, demonstration projects, and innovation.
- Policy and technology decisions are interdependent and coordinated to achieve high performance.





GOALS	OBJECTIVES	INDICATORS
<p><b>Goal 1:</b> ALL CHILDREN HAVE ESTABLISHED PARENTAGE</p>	<p><b>Objective A:</b> To Increase the Percentage of Children with a Legal Relationship with their Parents</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Percentage of IV-D Children Born Out-of-Wedlock with Paternity Established or Acknowledged (Statutory Caseload Percentage) 1</li> <li>2. The Percentage of All Children in the State Born Out-of-Wedlock with Paternity Established or Acknowledged (Statutory Statewide Percentage) 2</li> <li>3. The Percentage of Children Born Out of Wedlock with Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgments</li> <li>4. The Percentage of Children in the IV-D Caseload with Paternity Resolved</li> <li>5. The Percentage of Children Living in Married Couple Households (TANF marriage measure: data source – Annual supplemental census data) *</li> </ol>
<p><b>Goal 2:</b> ALL CHILDREN IN IV-D CASES HAVE SUPPORT ORDERS</p>	<p><b>Objective A:</b> To Increase the Percentage of IV-D Cases with Support Orders</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Percentage of IV-D Cases with Support Orders (Statutory Support Order Performance Level)</li> </ol>
	<p><b>Objective B:</b> To Increase the Percentage of Interjurisdictional IV-D Cases with Orders for Support</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Percentage of Interstate Responding IV-D Cases with Support Orders</li> <li>2. [Placeholder for future Tribal and International Measures]</li> </ol>
<p><b>Goal 3:</b> ALL CHILDREN IN IV-D CASES HAVE MEDICAL COVERAGE</p>	<p><b>Objective A:</b> To Increase the Percentage of IV-D Cases with Orders for Medical Support</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Percentage of IV-D Cases with Support Orders (excluding arrears-only cases) in which Medical Support is Ordered + #</li> </ol>
	<p><b>Objective B:</b> To Increase the Percentage of IV-D Cases in which Medical Coverage is Provided</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Percentage of IV-D Cases with Support Orders (excluding arrears-only cases) in which Medical Support is Ordered and Provided + #</li> <li>2. The Percentage of IV-D Cases (excluding arrears-only cases) with Medical Coverage Provided from Any Source*</li> <li>3. Medicaid Cost Savings Attributed to Medicaid Eligible Children in the IV-D Caseload Covered by Private Insurance or Receiving Cash Medical Support *</li> </ol>



GOALS	OBJECTIVES	INDICATORS
<p><b>Goal 4:</b> ALL CHILDREN IN IV-D CASES RECEIVE FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM PARENTS AS ORDERED</p>	<p><b>Objective A:</b> To Increase the IV-D Collection Rate</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Total Dollar Amount Distributed in IV-D Cases</li> <li>2. The Percentage of Total Distributed Collections Disbursed to Families *</li> <li>3. Accumulated Year-End Undistributed Collections as a Percentage of Total Annual Collections (Undistributed collections unresolved from line 9d OCSE 34-A) *</li> <li>4. IV-D Collection Rate for Current Support (Statutory Current Payment Performance Level)</li> <li>5. The Percentage of IV-D Cases with Support Orders (Current Assistance, Former Assistance, and Never Assistance) Where the Percentage of Current Child Support Paid is: 0%, 1-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, 76-99% and 100% +</li> <li>6. The Percentage of Arrears Cases with a Collection on the Arrears (Statutory Arrearage Payment Performance Level)</li> </ol>
	<p><b>Objective B:</b> To Increase the Percentage of Interjurisdictional IV-D cases with Collections</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Percentage of Interstate Responding IV-D Cases with Collections</li> <li>2. [Placeholder for future Tribal and International Measures]</li> </ol>
	<p><b>Objective C :*</b> To Increase the Number of Families Leaving TANF Who Receive Child Support Collections</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Percentage of TANF Cases Closed in Which Child Support Was Received (Line 14 of current 157 and TANF agencies report to HHS on the number of TANF cases closed) *</li> </ol>
<p><b>Goal 5:</b> THE IV-D PROGRAM WILL BE EFFICIENT AND RESPONSIVE IN ITS OPERATIONS</p>	<p><b>Objective A:</b> To Operate an Efficient Program</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Total Dollars Collected per \$1 of Expenditure (Statutory Cost-Effectiveness Performance Level)</li> <li>2. See Goal 3, Objective B, Indicator 3 *</li> </ol>



GOALS	OBJECTIVES	INDICATORS
<p><b>GOAL 5:</b> THE IV-D PROGRAM WILL BE EFFICIENT AND RESPONSIVE IN ITS OPERATIONS (Continued)</p>	<p><b>Objective B:</b> To Operate a Responsive Program</p>	<p>1. Periodic surveys including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children First Customer Satisfaction Survey of Custodial and Noncustodial Parents' Satisfaction with Child Support Services</li> <li>• Survey of State Child Support Enforcement Programs' Satisfaction with Federal Performance</li> <li>• Percentage of Orders Established within 6 Months of Locating the Noncustodial Parent *</li> <li>• Percentage of Cases with Support Orders (and paternity, when necessary) or Service of Process Completed (when necessary) within 90 Calendar Days of Locating the Noncustodial Parent *</li> <li>• Percentage of Interstate Cases in which the Responding State Acknowledges Receipt of the Case and Requests Additional Information within 10 Days of Receipt *</li> </ul> <p>(Data will be taken from State Self Assessment reports)</p>
	<p><b>Objective C:</b> To Increase Personal Responsibility in Public Assistance and Benefit Programs.</p>	<p>1. See Goal 4, Objective C, Indicator 1 *</p> <p>2. Total Program Savings to Federal and State Benefit programs attributable to use of the FPLS Data as reported to OCSE by other agencies *</p>

**Footnotes:**

1. The Ratio that the Total Number of Children in the IV-D Caseload in the FY or, at the option of the State, as of the end of the FY, who have been Born Out-of-Wedlock, the Paternity of Whom has been Established or Acknowledged, Bears to the Total Number of Children in the IV-D Caseload as of the end of the preceding FY who were Born Out-of-Wedlock

2. The Ratio that the Total Number of Minor Children in the State who have been Born Out-of-Wedlock and for whom Paternity has been Established or Acknowledged during the FY, Bears to the Total Number of Children Born Out-of-Wedlock during the preceding FY

**Key:**

- \* New Objectives or Indicators
- + Revised Indicators
- # Possible Future Incentive

**National Child Support Strategic Plans**

1995 -1999 Plan: February 28, 1995

1995-1999 Measures: July 18, 1996

2000-2004 Plan & Measures: June 12, 2000

2005-2009 Plan & Measures: July 14, 2004

## **STRATEGIES**

### **1. Emphasize prevention and early intervention**

- Intervene early to modify orders, correcting mismatches between ordered payments, and ability to pay.
- Take prompt steps, as soon as a payment is missed, to work with parents to resume payments.
- Provide easy access to genetic testing for parents of children born out of wedlock.
- Provide information and education to parents about the impact of marriage and single parenting on the financial security of children.
- Update child support guidelines regularly and simplify order modification.
- Develop automation tools that spotlight opportunities for early intervention to avoid payment problems.

### **2. Provide proactive case management to ensure reliable payments of support**

- Communicate with parents about child support payments early and consistently. Phone calls initiated by child support staff to explain procedures are vital to ensuring that parents are treated justly.
- Establish and keep orders at appropriate levels by using automated systems that detect changes in circumstances and initiate order modifications.
- Close cases promptly, when appropriate, ensuring that all parties are given the opportunity to object.
- Leverage debt, relieving uncollectible debt owed to the State, or with obligee's permission, in return for regular, reliable payment of current support.

- Strive for reliable payments and voluntary compliance as preferable to debt-triggered enforcement action.

### **3. Simplify distribution of collections, and pay families promptly and first**

- Prepare State decision-makers to make decisions about increasing pass-through of child support to families receiving public assistance and distribute collections to families who formerly received assistance.
- Promote electronic payment options for parents, and employers, and among States.
- Monitor and systematically reduce undistributed collections.
- Increase use of location resources to find addresses and ensure timely distributions to families.





#### 4. Ensure that health care coverage for children is a primary consideration

- Develop information about low-cost health insurance available at the local level.
- Encourage judicial and State legislative leaders to highlight the importance of medical support.
- Develop a medical insurance matching and reporting program at the Federal level.
- Measure State medical support performance with coverage as the primary goal.

#### 5. Eliminate barriers associated with multi-state cases

- Co-locate staff to enhance interjurisdictional case processing.
- Close cases in one State, when single-state case management is sufficient.

- Standardize and support data sharing across jurisdictions.
- Develop effective and streamlined protocols for interjurisdictional case processing; measure and report adequacy of responses.
- Work with employers to ensure full reporting and compliance with new hire and wage withholding requirements.

#### 6. Use specific collaboration protocols with other agencies that serve our clients, emphasizing timely, accurate data exchange

- Standardize data interfaces with agencies including TANF, Medicaid, and Vital Records to expedite establishment of parentage.
- Develop effective communication models between Child Support Enforcement agencies and TANF, Child Welfare, and Medicaid agencies, as well as birthing centers and courts.
- Cooperate with custodial parents' representatives when they choose to use PCAs.
- Have materials about other programs (SCHIP, Access, and Visitation) on hand to share with parents.

#### 7. Use time-sensitive, specific customer service protocols for TANF clients

- Provide intensive child support services to families nearing the end of TANF receipt, due to time limits or income, continuing for the year after TANF ends.
- Ensure prompt payment of collections to families when TANF ends.
- Involve both parents in developing post-TANF transition plans, including: role of child support

in remaining independent of public assistance, review, and modification of orders, and compromise of arrears, where appropriate.

- Use data reports to identify TANF clients who could close their TANF cases with reliable receipt of child support.

#### 8. Customize approach to customer service

- Deliver culturally-appropriate services to clients who are tribal members or members of minority groups.
- Customize enforcement approach, distinguishing between those who refuse to pay (e.g., denial/revocation of licenses) and those who cannot pay (e.g., workforce development referral).
- Address perceived obstacles to payment, including access to children, matters of procedural justice, and affordability of orders.
- Collaborate with the private bar and PCAs to respond to parents' choices about how to enforce their orders.
- Develop targeted, specific initiatives to deal with special populations, including incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parents.

#### 9. Develop more effective locate, service of process, and establishment tools

- Increase use of expedited and administrative processes, with recourse to courts to ensure that parents perceive procedural justice.
- Increase use of sanctions for non-cooperating clients.
- Streamline intake processes for quicker identification and location of non-custodial parents.

- Increase number and types of automated options for locating parents.

#### 10. Expand and improve enforcement/ collection tools

- Develop tools for income that is part of the underground economy.
- Educate credit lenders about child support debt.
- Tailor enforcement techniques to obligors' circumstances and record of reliability.
- Improve the effectiveness of bank account/asset seizure, passport denial, direct income withholding, and the filing of liens.





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