



Child Support Report



Office of Child Support Enforcement

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Dawn of New Legislation Signals Resolve to Build on Strengths

By Margot Bean

As you may know, on Feb. 8, President George W. Bush signed into law the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. Along with the nation, child support professionals had watched the evolution of this bill over the past months, while it was deliberated, changed, refined, and, of course, voted on, in various sessions of the House and the Senate.



Commissioner Bean

The new legislation contains the most sweeping child support enforcement provisions in 10 years. It comes at a time when we are seeing a high demand for change in the way government operates and strong concern about the level of resources committed to government programs, and creates opportunities for child support agencies to improve efficiency and outcomes, as we pursue our goals in the National CSE Strategic Plan. The new legislation

The Commissioner's Voice

rewards us with some long-awaited prospects to direct more child support collections to our customers—the children and families we serve.

Specifically, two provisions provide state options to pass more child support collections through to both current and former TANF families, with the Federal Government sharing in the cost of those increased payments. Another provision halves the arrearage amount triggering passport denial from \$5,000 to \$2,500. And still others authorize collection of arrearages owed to adult children through the Federal income tax refund offset program and federal-level matching of insurance claims data. And, to help us obtain medical support for more children, another provision requires that both parents be considered as sources for medical support.

As a former state IV-D director, I recognize that the legislation will generate new complications for states, with the end of Federal matching of State expenditures using incentive payments, effective FY 2008. In view of this

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OCSE: www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse

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Child Support Provisions Deficit Reduction Act of 2005

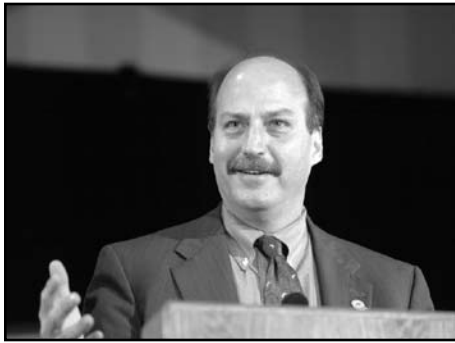
The following is a summary of the child support provisions contained in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. (See page 7 for a summary of major changes in other ACF programs.)

- Provides State option to pass through support to TANF families (\$100 for 1 child/\$200 for 2 or more children) with Federal financial contribution effective FY 2009 or FY 2010 at State option.
- Provides State option to distribute more support to former TANF families with Federal financial contribution effective FY 2009 or FY 2010 at State option.
- Ends Federal matching of State expenditures using incentive payments effective FY 2008.
- Requires medical support for children from either parent (with optional enforcement against CP) effective FY 2006.
- Provides for matching of insurance settlement data with the Federal Parent Locator Service effective FY 2006.
- Mandatory review and adjustment of child support orders for families receiving TANF effective FY 2008.
- Decreases the trigger for passport denial from \$5,000 to \$2,500 in unpaid support effective FY 2007.
- Imposes a mandatory annual \$25 collection fee for non-TANF families effective FY 2007 in cases exceeding \$500 in collections.
- Reduces FFP for paternity lab costs from 90% to 66% effective FY 2007.
- Requires tax offset to collect past-due support on behalf of children whether or not they are minors effective FY 2008.

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change, all of us need to strive to reassess and streamline our business practices for improved efficiency. I am committed to joining with all of you now as we work even harder to strengthen our federal, state, private, and community partnerships.

With the enthusiasm and commitment you've demonstrated more times than I can count, I am optimistic that together we can further our goal of making child support a reliable source of income for children and families. I look forward to working closely with you, and I thank you for the work you do every day. [CSR](#)



NCSEA Forum Speakers Look Ahead

Panelists discussed the future of child support business during several sessions of the annual Policy Forum and Training Conference, sponsored by the National Child Support Enforcement Association, Jan. 30 in Washington, DC. In a session on global family justice, Dr. Wade Horn, Assistant Secretary for Children and Families, emphasized the government's obligation to help children through healthy-marriage education programs, especially in low-income communities where services may not be available or affordable.



OCSE Commissioner Margot Bean, left, and Pat Redmond from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (Philadelphia) joined others to analyze potential medical-support solutions using, as an example, a family who had lost not only its main source of income, but employer-provided health insurance as well. Commissioner Bean pointed to OCSE automated projects with other government agencies to help connect medical support to children, while Redmond cautioned that public health-care coverage will be "an important part of the puzzle" as more employers drop their coverage, and as the numbers of uninsured families continue to grow.



On a panel to share lessons from hurricanes Katrina and Rita were Robbie Endris, left, and Alicia Key, IV-D directors of Louisiana and Texas, respectively. Ms. Endris advocated electronic disbursement and document imaging in child support offices, as well as planning ahead; for starters: Know where staff members might evacuate to if disaster strikes. Ms. Key credited Louisiana's experience with helping Texas through Rita's aftermath, and showed a video of a Texas staff member describing, with photos, the agency's experience during the crisis.

Global Update



International Forum Heightens Child Support Solidarity

By Stephen Grant

International child support has become a matter of increasing importance to state IV-D child support agencies as they seek to ensure that there is no place to which noncustodial parents may go to avoid meeting their responsibilities to their children.

To support this mission, the European Commission and The Hague Conference on Private

International Law invited child support experts from around the world to address international child support issues in a joint conference titled "Guaranteeing the Effective Recovery of Maintenance in Europe and in the World," Jan. 12-14, in Brussels, Belgium.

The conference sought to exchange information and ideas on national practices for the

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Time Out for the Kids Prisoners Make the Connection in New Hampshire

By Elaine Blackman

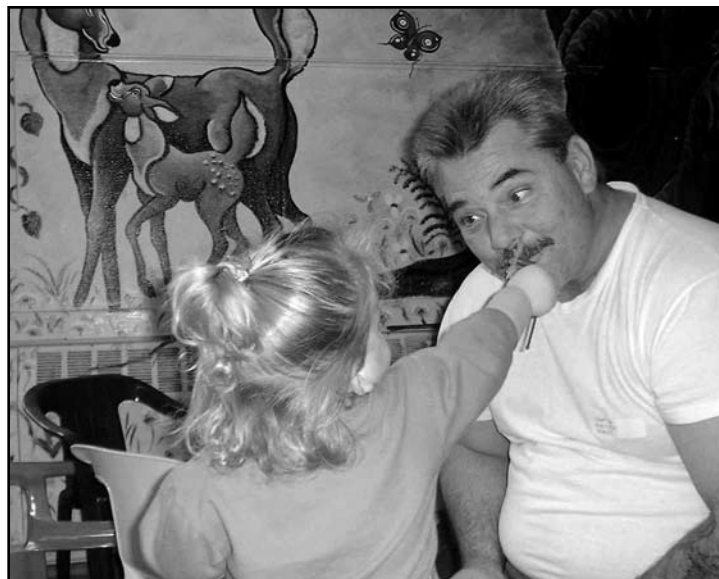
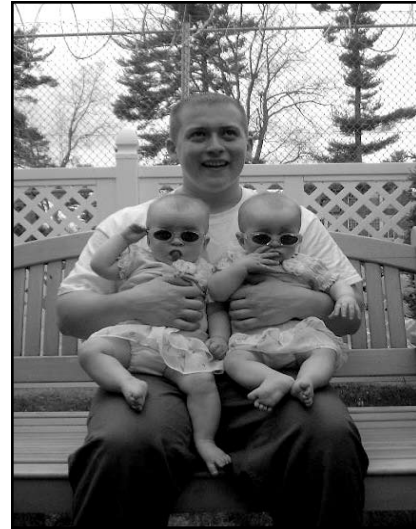
For the past 16 months, a young father incarcerated in New Hampshire's Lakes Region Facility has enjoyed regular visits with two special guests—his twin daughters. He has also learned about parenting—everything from money management and child development, to diaper changing and nutrition, to how to modify a child support order. And he has recorded books on tapes to send home with the toddlers.

This dad is one of many in the Lanconia, NH, prison who take advantage of the opportunity to bond with their children during weekly or bi-weekly supervised visits, and attend seminars, support groups, and counseling—once they complete an 18-hour parent-education class offered by the Family Connections Center (FCC).

The FCC is a “safe, friendly, and comfortable” place adjacent to the prison, says director Kristina Toth, that offers a chance for these far-off dads to build a relationship with their children. In addition to overseeing the visits and parenting education, the center offers living rooms and meeting rooms adorned with toys, accessories, and colorful wall murals, as well as outdoor gardens and play-

grounds—all to provide an environment where dads and children can feel at home.

Toth is one of FCC's cofounders who helped to expand its services under a Federal OCSE 1115 demonstration grant (2001-2004). During the grant period, the center supervised 260 visits between fathers and children; 128 fathers attended support groups; and 209 fathers (ages 18 to 51) attended classes. Since the grant period ended, Toth has become the center's lone full-timer, with one part-time staff member, and a few welcome interns and volunteers.



Dwindling resources, however, haven't stopped Toth from carrying on the center's mission, especially since follow-up research has proven the program's worth: “As these dads learn about parenting, visits with the kids

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continually increase,” says Toth. “And dads became more understanding, and creative in playing with their children.”

Toth encourages dads to modify child support orders while in prison, with help from a child support agency representative. Meeting the child support staff person also offers dads the opportunity to “get to know the friendly face” they might see again when they visit the child support office. “They’ll more likely go to the child support office than fear it.” During the grant period, 12 of the 57 fathers with child support orders modified those orders, while others chose to go home to live with their children or share joint custody.

The center also partners with 4-H youth development educators to enroll children of the incarcerated parents into community 4-H clubs or other programs. A family therapy component is in the works as well. And Toth produces a monthly newsletter for parents with articles about such topics as helping teens grow, making a choice to encourage and motivate chil-



Kristina Toth, director of Family Connections Center at the Lakes Region Facility in Lanconia, NH, offers fathering tips to incarcerated dads. Toth and staff supervise visits with their children (photos on opposite page) and follow up with “positive feedback, and make the dads feel good about themselves as a parent.”

dren, learning from mistakes, and advocating for their child’s education.

It might be too early to know whether FCC graduates, so to speak, will be more likely to pay child support. But, says Toth, “my gut feeling is that they are learning more about the desire to support their children, both emotionally and financially.” **CSR**

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recovery of family maintenance in Europe and around the world and, at a time of profound reform of mechanisms for the recovery of maintenance across frontiers, to review and consider the development of new multilateral child support conventions by the Hague Conference and the European Commission (EC).

OCSE Commissioner Margot Bean and OCSE Division of Policy Director Lily Matheson participated on session panels regarding the importance of nations’ mutual recognition and

enforcement of foreign support orders and cooperation between national authorities.

Commissioner Bean said, “We were delighted to have been able to be part of this important and educational conference put on jointly by the EC and Hague Permanent Bureau.”

Director Matheson added, “The opportunity to interact less formally than during a negotiation session greatly increased our mutual understanding on various issues.” **CSR**

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Center of Attention

Baltimore's Ex-Offenders Go for One-Stop Customer Service

By Elaine Blackman

For recently released incarcerated parents returning home to the Baltimore area, a visit to Mondawmin Mall could mean more than a shopping trip for new clothes.

Housed inside this northwest Baltimore mall is the city's first reentry center, last summer's addition to the Northwest One-Stop Career Center (under the auspices of the Mayor's Office of Employment Development). The primary goal of the reentry center, also known as the ReC, is to help Baltimore City residents who have criminal records—ex-inmates, parolees, and probationers—secure employment and avoid recidivism.

Here, ex-prisoners can get help from agents representing a range of services—including child support—as they steer their lives anew. Why in a mall? "It's a place in the community where people can feel comfortable," says Felix Mata, director of both the ReC and its parent organization, the Baltimore City Ex-offender Initiative. (The mall also is conveniently located near offices of the State Division of Parole and Probation.)

Mata's rationale rings true for many, including one ex-offender who called Mata because he feared arrest if he visited the child support agency. "Though the parent had been served a warrant for arrest for nonpayment of child support," Mata explains, "an arrest would not have taken place in the child support office." Still,

Mata referred the caller to the center, where "there's a level of trust."

Richard Dumas agrees. Dumas, a 15-year veteran of the Baltimore Office of Child Support Services, says it was this uneasiness that motivated Child Support's participation. "The

number-one barrier to getting child support help to ex-offenders is fear of the child support agency," says Dumas, "They're so much more at ease in the neighborhood."

During the center's first two months of operation, a child support agent assisted about 75 people per month while onsite one day a week. Now, the

agent helps about 195 people each month during nearly full-time hours. Probably first and foremost on the minds of new visitors, says Dumas, is "How much do I owe?" And right on the spot, he says, the agent can print out a payment-verification notice. Other frequent requests involve reactivating a driver's license and order modification.

Word-of-mouth continues to bring traffic into the center. About 70 percent of the child support requests are referred by agents from the other partnering organizations. Center staff recently helped a man find employment, "but because his license had been suspended for nonpayment of child support, he was referred to the child support agent for help with getting back his license," says Mata, so he would able



Theresa Lee, representing the Baltimore Office of Child Support Services, helps a parent with child support questions inside Baltimore's northwest reentry center for ex-offenders.

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Deficit Reduction Act of 2005

Provisions for Other ACF Programs

The following is a summary of provisions contained in the new legislation for several programs of the Administration for Children and Families. (For a summary of Child Support provisions, see page 2.)

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

+\$1 billion in FY 2007 (\$250 million for the block grant and \$750 million for the contingency fund).

TANF

Reauthorizes TANF and Title IV-A provisions through FY 2010 (except as noted).

- Extends Supplemental Grants through FY 2008.
- Eliminates the Bonus to Reward Decrease in Illegitimacy Ratio and funding for the High Performance Bonus.

+\$150 million annually for healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood activities.

- Up to \$50 million may be awarded for activities to promote responsible fatherhood.
- Up to \$2 million may be awarded for CW/TANF demonstrations for at-risk tribal families.

Improves calculation of work participation rates by recalibrating the caseload reduction credit, using FY 2005 as the base year and adding Separate State Programs in the work participation rate.

Provides for improved verification of work and work-eligible individuals:

- HHS to issue regulations by June 30, 2006.
- States to maintain verification procedures subject to review by the Secretary and penalties.

Amends MOE to allow expenditures for TANF goals 3 (prevent and reduce out-of-wedlock births) and 4 (encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families) to be counted.

Child Care

+\$200 million per year (\$2.917 billion); reauthorized through FY 2010.

Abstinence Education

Authorized through Dec. 31, 2006.

Foster Care/Adoption Assistance

Clarifies administrative claiming in the foster care program related to candidates (in general, no admin. for children in unlicensed relative homes beyond 12 months).

Clarifies eligibility for maintenance payments to remedy the Rosales decision (home of removal used to determine eligibility).

Revises adoption assistance eligibility by requiring that the child meet the AFDC eligibility criteria at the time of removal only.

Revises allowable costs within the Medicaid Targeted Case Management program.

Promoting Safe and Stable Families

+\$40 million in FY 2006 and FY 2007 (\$345 million)

Revises the State Court Improvement Program to:
1. improve case tracking and analysis of child welfare cases, and 2. train judges, attorneys and other legal personnel in child welfare cases and cross-train with child welfare agency staff and contractors.

+\$20 million per year through FY 2010 - \$10 million for case management and \$10 million for judicial training.

Other Child Welfare Changes

Adds a State plan requirement for collaboration with the courts in the development of State plans and Child and Family Services program improvement plan.

Provides States flexibility to allow public access to child welfare court proceedings.

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to drive to the new job.

“These partnerships are what make the reentry center so special,” says Mata. “We’re advocating for the ex-offenders as partners.” In addition to child support help, employees offer assistance in securing identification, access to temporary and long-term housing, connections to substance-abuse treatment, and referrals to mental- and physical-health services. Other partnering agencies include community, faith-based, and nonprofit organizations that offer employment services onsite, such as job readiness preparation, skills training, and literacy/ GED courses.

A second reentry center recently moved into the one-stop career center on Baltimore’s East Side, and discussion is under way to set up reentry sites in the city’s northeast and southwest career centers as well. Also, says Dumas, several state child support programs have shown an interest in Mondawmin Mall’s success.

Dumas believes that, as a large city child support office, Baltimore “should help to put forth some innovative edges” for the national program. “The reentry center is doing just that.”^{CSR}

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Child Support Report

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