



Child Support Report

OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

Vol. 29 No. 12

December 2007

Facing Our Future

By Barry Miller, President

National Council of Child Support Directors



Barry Miller

I am honored to be the president of the National Council of Child Support Directors (NCCSD) in FY 2008. Over the past few years, this council, along

with State and local child support agencies, has experienced an exceptional and effective partnership with the Office of Child Support Enforcement. It is my vision for the next year to continue our partnerships striving to meet as many goals as possible set out in the national strategic plan.

Based on conversations with my peers, I believe the most pressing matters facing us in the coming year are:

- Implementation of the \$25 annual assessment fee;
- Adapting the program to meet the demands of medical support; and
- Dealing with the end of Federal matching of State expenditures using incentive payments.

I have great confidence we will be able to deal with these issues. OCSE and NCCSD are organizations made up of dedicated men and women who love their work and are concerned

every day with the well-being of single-parent families in our nation. With the collective talent of child support professionals across the country, these goals can become realities.

There are, of course, many other issues facing the future of child support. We are approaching a plateau of performance that will require better ways of doing business. The child support program, like many companies, has the tendency to be “data rich and information poor.” I believe we must find ways to utilize the data we have available in order to maximize performance and deliver meaningful information to our local offices and partners.

Customer service is an ongoing, ever-evolving component of our program. Any organization’s quality and performance are judged by the satisfaction of its customers. With the advent of call centers and outreach programs to noncustodial parents, the child support future looks bright.

Our automated systems are becoming outdated. In the last decade technology has become an integral part of child support and yet already some States need to replace their automated systems. In the next decade we will see technological advances that today we cannot imagine. Our challenge is to continue working with our partners to see that these advances are utilized in a way that not only improves our systems but increases the delivery of our services. Planning must begin.

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Massachusetts Keeps Employers In-the-Loop, Compliance Numbers Up

By Peter Coulombe

MA Division of Child Support Enforcement

Employers are the source of more than 70 percent of child support collections—reason enough for the Massachusetts Child Support Enforcement Division to devote a team of customer-service workers to keep employers in-the-know.

The Division, housed in the State Department of Revenue (DOR), has found that educating employers about their obligations, answering questions, and providing technical assistance helps employers more easily withhold and remit child support on time and in full.

But what happens when an employer refuses to withhold support? Or worse, when the employer withholds support but doesn't remit it to the child support agency? That's where our employer compliance program kicks in.

Under State law, Massachusetts can administratively assess a penalty if an employer has not complied with an income-withholding order. If the employer refuses to pay the penalty, the DOR can collect the unremitted child support and the penalty using the same administrative remedies available to collect child support from obligors.

How it Works

Cases with an employer compliance problem are referred to the employer services team to contact the employer in an attempt to resolve the matter. We follow up by sending a reminder of its legal obligations and the steps DOR can take to ensure compliance. Many employers just need a little more information about the extent of their obligations to be convinced that compliance is the best practice. We've found



The Massachusetts Employer Services Team handles all employer-customer needs, from answering questions to complex problem resolution, as well as the initial work on employer noncompliance cases. Pictured are, from left, Kathlyn Cox-Breen (Supervisor), Anthony Caporale, Joan Bello, Kerri Slattery, Gina Cernigliaro (Team Leader), Kim May, Jamie Tamburrini, and Jeffrey Marquez.

that 4 out of 5 referrals are resolved by this initial contact.

If the employer fails to remedy the problem—or doesn't respond—the case is referred to an attorney who tries to contact the employer to offer a “last chance” to comply. Even at this late stage, about 1 in 3 employers comply voluntarily after getting a call from an attorney. (We'll admit that we probably get a little extra compliance because our IV-D agency is housed within the State's tax-administration agency!)

Further noncompliance results in an administrative finding of noncompliance. Although that can be used as a *prima facie* case of contempt in court, we prefer to enforce compliance using administrative remedies.

First, DOR sends a notice of assessment to the employer of the finding of noncompliance, the amount of child support that should have been withheld and remitted, and the amount of the penalty. Penalties are set at the greater of \$500 or an amount equal to the unremitted support. The employer then has 30 days to pay or to request an administrative hearing to challenge the assessment. If neither happens, DOR uses

See MASSACHUSETTS, next page

OCSE, IRS Collaborate on Tax-Program Training

OCSE, in collaboration with the IRS, is encouraging State and local child support offices to provide information to low- and moderate-income working individuals and families regarding the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) program, which administers a refundable Federal income tax credit for these individuals and families. The partnering agencies will soon begin holding a series of calls with States about the EITC program.

EITC is the Federal Government's largest cash-assistance program targeted to low-income individuals. In addition, at least 20 States (including the District of Columbia) and several local governments administer EITC.

To meet the eligibility criteria for EITC, individuals and families must meet certain IRS requirements and file a Federal tax return, even if they would not have to do so otherwise due

to income below the filing threshold.

For tax year 2006, EITC was available to individuals and families whose earned income and adjusted gross income did not exceed \$32,001 (\$34,001 married filing jointly) with one qualifying child; and \$36,348 (\$38,348 married filing jointly) with two or more qualifying children. The maximum credit for tax year 2006 was \$4,536 with two or more qualifying children and \$2,747 with one qualifying child.

Two examples of the Federal collaboration are in place. With help from IRS and OCSE, the Pennsylvania Bureau of Child Support Enforcement and the Domestic Relations Association of Pennsylvania have placed brochures in all 67 county child support offices. According to George McGriff, Senior Tax Specialist, IRS

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MASSACHUSETTS, *from previous page*

administrative enforcement remedies against the employer to collect the support and penalties. The most successful remedy is a levy on an employer's bank account, but DOR has also revoked motor vehicle registrations and suspended liquor licenses held by employers.

For some employers, the significant penalties provide the necessary financial incentive to ensure that child support is withheld and remitted properly. Since the penalties are owed to DOR, often DOR will enter into agreements in which we waive the penalties if the employer withholds and remits child support in full and on time for a significant probationary period.

Noteworthy Results

Our employer compliance program has been a great success. Our statute alone is often enough to encourage compliance: Less than 10 percent of all referrals end up with an assessment

against the employer. In the past year, DOR has collected over 96 percent of the support previously unpaid because of employer non-compliance.

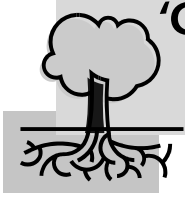
The results for individual families can be dramatic. In one case, DOR was able to collect over 46 weeks of support that had been withheld from the obligor's paycheck but never sent to DOR.

In another case, the employer refused to withhold because the obligor falsely stated he was paying voluntarily. In that case, DOR was able to send a lump sum equal to 7 months of child support payments to a family who hadn't seen a payment in years. Even better, the child support has been coming in weekly and in full ever since.

To learn more about this program, call Peter Coulombe at 617-626-4157, or e-mail him at coulombep@dor.state.ma.us. CSR

In Tennessee, One-On-One Approach Takes Root

'Child Support Helped Me More Than Anyone'



By Elaine Blackman
and Karen Anthony
OCSE

If he had a few hours to spare, Matthew Keller could rattle off dozens of positive experiences helping noncustodial moms and dads to support their children. Even though his time is spread thin, however, Keller manages to spread the word about the Child Support Employment and Parenting Program (CSEPP), where he works with parents referred by the Knox County Child Support Enforcement Division and courts and connects them with employment and other resources.



Matthew Keller

Keller talks about one dad, for example, who walked into CSEPP about a year ago. "He was homeless and owed current child support on cases for some of his seven children, arrears on the others." In addition, he left a trail of minor criminal offenses and a history of mental health issues. "He was facing a lot of barriers."

One step at a time, CSEPP coordinators helped the father obtain temporary residence in a Salvation Army facility, and then helped him get ready for a job with training in interview and job skills that coordinators prepare based on needs of each client. Now about half of the father's paycheck is going to pay child support.

In addition to job-readiness training, CSEPP partners with State Workforce Investment career centers, and refers clients to organizations that specialize in housing for homeless people, faith-based responsible-fatherhood programs, and mental health needs. "With help

from a housing specialist and other community resources," says Keller, "the clients then have a team of people working with them."

Keller explains, however, it's more than connecting parents to resources which has led to CSEPP's success: "[CSEPP coordinators] have strong case management and one-on-one skills and we have strong relationships with community partners. Also, it's a constant process; after putting clients in touch with community resources, we continue our one-on-one work until they become self-sufficient and are able to have more positive involvement in the lives of their children."

"It really works if you have energetic people ... we stick with the clients."

For sticking with them, Keller reaps personal rewards, too. Every time one noncustodial mom sees him, she shouts, "Hey Matt, I'm still working and still paying my child support!"

From an 1115 "Seed"

CSEPP began under an OCSE 1115 demonstration grant in 2003 to help noncustodial parents in Knox County overcome barriers to employment through a partnership with the Tennessee Child Support Enforcement Division, the University of Tennessee's Social Work Office of Research and Public Service (SWORPES), where Keller works, and local faith-based agencies. Since the grant ended in 2005, the State Department of Human Services' TANF program has provided funds to keep it going.

See TENNESSEE, next page

“Clearly the OCSE grant planted a seed and the State looked at the evaluation and saw a program that needed to continue to grow,” says Charles Bryson, Director of Tennessee Child Support Field Operations.

The evaluation Bryson refers to showed that during the initial grant period, half of its participants agreed that CSEPP helped them pay child support more regularly; 4 out of 5 agreed that CSEPP helped them to work with the child support court system; and nearly half agreed they learned parenting skills through CSEPP.

Bryson says the State is planning to expand a program in its “child support experimental laboratory” to test approaches such as CSEPP that might be replicated in other localities.

Growing Possibilities

Keller, whose career includes titles of “mental health/homeless case manager” and “career specialist,” began at SWORPES in 2004, where he is committed to CSEPP’s one-on-one approach. “We have to constantly remind clients of who we are and what we’re here to do, and that we’re willing to help carry the load, so

we serve the client to the best of our ability.”

Bryson, for one, is convinced: “Grant programs like CSEPP have helped the child support community realize that things are possible for noncustodial parents with a history of never paying child support, and there are possibilities to removing obstacles to employment.”

In a recent e-mail to Bryson, Keller wrote about a new client; a homeless dad behind in his child support, and caring for his 22-year-old, developmentally disabled son (whom he does not owe child support for). Keller helped the client begin a job search, but without an address to receive mail, Keller needed to help him set up a P.O. Box. Keller wrote:

“While we were standing in line at the Post Office, the client said, ‘You know, I was talking to my brother about CSEPP earlier, and I told him that since I moved back here I have been trying to get some help and no one would help me. And of all people, Child Support has helped me more today than anyone.’”

For more information about CSEPP, contact Matthew Keller at 865-291-0685 or mkeller2@utk.edu. CSR

Partnering With Courts



Find Out More

Many OCSE-funded grants (Section 1115 and Special Improvement Projects) over the past 7 years have demonstrated that collaboration between child support enforcement programs and the judicial system can lead to more efficient programs and better services for parents.

Highlights from 28 of these projects are now available in a publication, “Working Better Together for Families and Children/A Summary of OCSE Child Support

Enforcement and Judicial Collaboration Grants.”

The publication offers several projects which focus on case processing improvements, while others address low-income or incarcerated noncustodial-parent issues.

To download the publication, log on to <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pol/DCL/2007/dcl-07-29.htm>. To order print copies, send an e-mail to OCSENationalReferenceCenter@acf.hhs.gov, or call 202-401-9383.



MN Delivers a Little Public Relations

OCSE Commissioner Margot Bean and Wayland Campbell, Director of the Minnesota Division of Child Support Enforcement, pose with Flat Stanley at the October conference of the Minnesota Family Support Recovery Council wait. Who? Where? Flat Stanley (look closely in the middle) is a children's book character, who, instead of being discouraged by his situation, discovers some perks that come with being flat. In his own little way, Stanley educated a class of third-graders in Morgan Hill, CA, about the child support program, after attending the Minnesota conference with Karen Schirle, the aunt of one of the students. Stanley returned to class with material about the child support program, including Web sites where the students could learn more.



Disney Chair Takes Seat in Kern County TV Spot



A public media campaign sponsored by Kern County, CA, Child Support Services, "Kids Count" features guest co-hosts for TV spots, filmed at various community locations, to highlight people and projects that benefit children and enrich families. Appearing in October was Richard Cook, left, Chairman of Walt Disney Studios and one-time Student Council President at Casa Loma Elementary School, where the filming took

place. With him are Guadalupe Jaimes, current Student Council President, and John Nilon, Director of Kern County Child Support Services. This spot highlighted the importance of parental involvement and support. "Kids Count" (www.kids-count.net) first aired on the Kern County Government channel (see article in January 2006 CSR). As of late October, the local NBC TV station donates air time to run "Kids Count" in its regular programming. Disney's Cook was invited to be part of the show by his former sixth-grade classmate Steve Flores, who grew up to be Kern County Child Support Services' media and communications chief.



Examining Early Intervention

As part of the national Project to Avoid Increasing Delinquencies (PAID), a “PAID Practices Guide” is available on the OCSE Web site to help interested child support agencies improve practices that may lead to collection of current support and arrears and reduction of growth in arrears in child support cases.

Child support agencies may wish to consider this list of questions from the guide when examining early intervention techniques in child support cases:

- Are our legal documents readable and user-friendly, using simple language and emphasizing important next steps?
- Do our documents accommodate non-English-speaking parents?
- Have we made improvements in service of process (e.g., providing motor vehicle license pictures to servers) to assure the noncustodial parent receives the documents?
- Do we automatically remind parents of appointments and hearings by mail or phone to encourage their involvement?
- Are we automatically reminding the non-custodial parent of his/her responsibilities at case set-up, after order establishment, after non-payment, upon notification of unemployment?
- Do we proactively work with employment and social service agencies to help unemployed or underemployed parents at the time of order establishment, enforcement, or notification of unemployment?
- Do we have a public education and outreach campaign? Does it focus on non-custodial parents, custodial parents, and employers?
- Are we working with the courts to reduce delays, involve parents, use technology for efficiency, and order noncustodial-parent participation in needed services to promote success in payment of support?

For a similar list about setting appropriate orders, see the August 2007 *CSR*. To view the “PAID Practices Guide,” see Dear Colleague Letter 07-17 on the OCSE Web site at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse. Please send your suggestions for the guide to Linda.Keely@acf.hhs.gov. **CSR**

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Philadelphia Territory, “The partnership we established during the past filing season reached more than 9,000 taxpayers.”

Building on a similar partnership in Maryland this year, the Baltimore County Child Support Enforcement Administration and IRS are assisting residents of Helping UP Mission, which provides services to homeless men. IRS plans

to train some of the men at the mission in filing their taxes, and an area in the mission will be set aside to help the men e-file their taxes. Some of the men have not filed taxes in years due to drug and alcohol problems. Often these men do not remember all of their places of employment. The goal is to help the homeless men get back on track.

For more information about the Earned Income Tax Credit program, go to www.irs-eitc.info.

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As we move forward with our plans for improving performance and enhancing our program, it is my intent to continue the information sharing and open communication that OCSE in conjunction with my predecessors fostered. As John Kennedy once said, "Things do not happen. Things are made to happen." I look forward to the opportunities of the coming year. **CSR**

Military Matters

Military Paydays For FY 2008

Below is a list of active-duty military paydays for calendar year 2008. These dates may be helpful for child support enforcement agencies with cases involving military noncustodial parents with payments out of DFAS (Defense Finance and Accounting Services) in Cleveland. For further information, contact Larry R. Holtz, OCSE's military liaison, at 202-401-5376 or lholtz@acf.hhs.gov.

Pay Period	Payday
January 2008	1 February 2008
February 2008	29 February 2008
March 2008	1 April 2008
April 2008	1 May 2008
May 2008	30 May 2008
June 2008	1 July 2008
July 2008	1 August 2008
August 2008	29 August 2008
September 2008	1 October 2008

Child Support Report

Child Support Report is published monthly by the Office of Child Support Enforcement, Division of Consumer Services. We welcome articles and high-quality photos. We reserve the right to edit for style, content, and length. Contents are for informational purposes only; no official endorsement of any practice, publication, or individual by the Department of Health and Human Services or the Office of Child Support Enforcement is intended. Use of this material is welcomed; please identify *Child Support Report* as the source.

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