



# CHILD SUPPORT CUTS WOULD HARM TEXAS CHILDREN

*by* Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

CONGRESS IS ABOUT TO give Texas children a lump of coal in their stockings for Christmas. Federal lawmakers are dangerously close to approving legislation that slashes funding for the Texas child support enforcement program – cuts that would lead to billions less in child support for a million Texas kids.

Many children and families who depend on child support to furnish the basic necessities of life will suffer if these drastic measures make it into law, and Washington lawmakers need to fully understand the harm this legislation, if passed, will cause.

The looming crisis stems from a deficit-reduction bill recently passed by the U.S. House of Representatives that would cut more than \$400 million from the Texas child support program over the next four years. At a minimum, these cuts will require my office to reduce child-support enforcement staff by more than half. This drastic reduction in our workforce would, in turn, lead to a nearly \$3 billion drop in estimated child support collections over that four-year period.

This would be tragic for Texas children and families, especially considering the success we have seen in recent years. Last year, the men and women in our Child Support Division collected a record \$1.8 billion in child support that benefited Texas children, an 83 percent increase since 2000.

As a conservative, I fully support the House's goal of cutting the federal budget, but this is not the way to do it. Not only would it crush Texas children and families who depend on this money, but it would actually increase the overall amount of taxpayer money spent.

Child support helps taxpayers by keeping many people off welfare. Social policy researchers estimate that state child support programs helped lift more than a million Americans out of poverty in 2002 alone.

In Texas, half of the families we serve subsist on low incomes. The child support we collect helps these single moms and dads feed their children, put clothes on their backs and a roof over their heads. Without it, many would slip into poverty, forcing them to turn to public assistance.

According to estimates by my office, the proposed \$400 million in cuts to the Texas child support program would trigger an almost \$2 billion increase in temporary assistance for needy families, food stamps and Medicaid. Clearly, cutting child support isn't the way to truly trim the federal deficit.

Moreover, the House's plan would undermine one of the few federal programs that is running well. Nationally, child support programs collect \$4.38 in child support for every dollar spent. (Texas collects almost \$7 for every dollar spent.) In fact, the President's 2006 budget cited federal child support enforcement as one of the highest-rated of all government programs.

Beyond the dollars and statistics, though, is the fact that parents who pay their child support are more likely to be involved in their children's lives. Parents who pay their child support and are engaged in their kids' upbringing give them a better chance of success in life. The Texas child support program bolsters these parent-child connections

and the proposed federal cuts would undermine them.

The silver lining in this cloud is that the bill hasn't made it out of Congress yet. The Senate passed its own version of the deficit-reduction bill that avoided the cuts made by the House. Negotiators from both chambers will be meeting soon to hammer out the differences between the two versions and when they do, I hope they will realize the wisdom in keeping child support funding at full strength. Compromise is not an option.

Most Texans agree it is important for the federal government to trim its budget, but Texas children should not be the target of cuts. Congress should take a hard look at the devastating effect these cuts would have on a million Texas children, and then reverse course.

Let's not rob our children of their future. We must eliminate any cuts to the child support system.