



ACCESS AND VISITATION HOTLINE HELPS TEXAS PARENTS ADDRESS CUSTODY CONCERNS

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

CHILDREN THRIVE ON THE SECURITY that comes from knowing both parents love and care for them. That is why the Office of the Attorney General is committed to helping parents stay involved in their children’s lives.

The Attorney General’s Office often receives inquiries from frustrated parents wanting to know how to handle custody or visitation disputes. This is particularly problematic for parents who do not have legal custody of their children. Most of the time, parents without custody say the other parent won’t let them see their child. Sometimes the parent with custody says their child does not want to go for visits.

To help Texas families who find themselves in these painful situations, the Office of the Attorney General awarded a grant to Legal Aid of North West Texas, which operates a statewide Access and Visitation Hotline.

The hotline is staffed by attorneys who provide legal information and assistance about child custody, along with information about visitation, paternity and child support matters. The hotline’s toll free number, (866)-292-4636, is available Monday through Friday from 1 to 7 p.m.

Hotline attorneys provide basic legal information and education about a parent’s legal authority to see their child; establishing paternity; and the

child support process. Attorneys cannot represent callers or offer legal advice—only legal information.

Parents also can visit www.txaccess.org to obtain downloadable legal forms and examples for completing them. Also available are samples of parent letters to request compliance with orders, visitation logs, and other tools for resolving custody and visitation concerns.

Studies show that non-custodial parents who stay involved with their children are more likely to make regular child support payments. According to a national report, unmarried parents who receive Access and Visitation services pay an average of 33 percent more of the child support they owe than do those who don’t receive Access and Visitation services. Studies also show that children whose parents who pay their child support have fewer behavioral problems, make better grades, and stay in school longer than children who do not receive regular child support. And child support collections benefit taxpayers too. The money that parents pay to support their kids is money that taxpayers aren’t spending to provide services for those children.

Under state and federal law, the Office of the Attorney General is charged with collecting child support for families who request our assistance. The law

requires us to collect child support for families who receive or have received public assistance. Our services include locating absent parents; establishing paternity for children born to unmarried parents; establishing, enforcing and modifying child and medical support orders; and collecting and distributing child support payments.

The Office of the Attorney General does not handle custody or visitation disputes. The child support program receives significant federal funding for child support activities. Under federal law, our federal funding cannot be used for custody and visitation related matters.

However, the Attorney General’s Office is allowed to award federal grants to Legal Aid of North West Texas and other groups that seek to increase contact between non custodial parents and their children. By sharing grants with local organizations, the Attorney General’s Office can help Texas children whose parents are engaged in custody or visitation disputes.

The Office of the Attorney General appreciates parents who work together to care for their children. It is critical to a child’s well-being that they know and have a relationship with both parents.

For parents who are experiencing custody or visitation problems, the Access and Visitation Hotline is a great resource.

POINTS TO REMEMBER



ACCESS AND VISITATION HOTLINE

- Starting Sept. 4, 2007, the Access and Visitation hotline’s toll free number, **(866)-292-4636**, will be answered in English and Spanish, Monday – Friday from 1 to 7 p.m.
- Visit www.txaccess.org to obtain downloadable legal forms and directions for completing them.
- The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) establishes court orders for the payment of child support that include provisions for child access and visitation. However, federal funding the OAG receives to run the child support program can’t be used to intervene in custody or visitation disputes.

Information on this and other topics is available on the Attorney General’s website at

www.oag.state.tx.us



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