

Child Support Services



Not long ago, I met a boy who had been abandoned by his father. His father's absence left him with an emptiness I could see in his eyes. Against the odds, he had become

a star student, but he and his mother were struggling because of the child support his father wasn't paying. They came to my office for help, and we tracked down the father, who returned to Texas and began paying what he owes.

Every day at the Office of Attorney General, we try to help children like this boy. In 2003, my office's Child Support Division collected a record \$1.5 billion in child support, and we are on track to beat that record this year. But we do much more. The Child Support Division provides a full range of services needed to establish, enforce and collect child support, including:

Locating a Noncustodial Parent

If the absent parent's whereabouts are unknown, the Child Support Division accesses various computer databases to locate that parent. Data sources include federal Social Security and income tax records, state drivers licenses and employment records, credit bureau information, occupational and professional license information, and phone and utility records.

Establishing Paternity

Under Texas law, a child born to a man and woman who are not married has no

legal father. If the children's parents were never married, my office works through administrative processes and the courts to legally establish who the child's father is and obtain court orders that set child support and medical support. If necessary, DNA testing is performed on all parties to determine the child's father. Establishing paternity not only makes children eligible for child support and benefits such as Social Security, veteran's survivor benefits and health insurance, but it also guarantees a father's rights as a parent, such as visitation with his children.

Establishing Support Orders

For some children, paternity has been established but there is no child support order to make a parent legally responsible to pay child support. The Child Support Division establishes child and medical support orders for those children.

Modifying Support Orders

If the child support order is outdated and the child or a parent's circumstances have materially and substantially changed, the Attorney General's office can file a legal action to adjust the amount of support owed. This service is available both to non-custodial parents seeking decreases in support and custodial parents seeking increased support.

Enforcing Support Orders

Thankfully, many parents pay their child support in full and on time. For those parents who need assistance or extra encouragement, the Child Support Division has several enforcement measures at its

disposal that can remind them of their duty to pay. These remedies include:

- withholding income from a parent's paycheck;
- obtaining a legal judgment for past-due support;
- intercepting federal income tax refund checks, unemployment insurance benefits, or lottery winnings;
- filing liens against financial and real property;
- suspending driver, recreational and professional licenses;
- filing contempt-of-court charges; and
- incarceration.

I realize delays in the child support process can occur for a number of reasons, including waiting to obtain a hearing date in court. To help streamline the process, my staff routinely meet with parents to establish paternity and establish, modify and enforce child support orders without going to court. This Child Support Review Process (CSRP) allows parents to resolve matters amicably, and in a less formal environment than in a courtroom. For those situations that don't qualify for the CSRP, my office stands ready to go to court to provide the necessary services.

You can obtain an application for child support services by visiting Child Support Interactive on the Attorney General Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us, or by calling our 24-hour voice response system at (800) 252-8014. You can also look in your local phone book to find the Child Support office nearest you.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

CHILD SUPPORT

An application for child support services can be obtained by:

- Visiting Child Support Interactive, located on the main Attorney General Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us
- Calling the 24-hour voice response system at (800) 252-8014

Provide the following information about the other parent with your application:

- Current address
- Current (or last known) employer's name and address;
- Social Security number and date of birth;
- Names and addresses of relatives and friends;
- Names of banks or creditors such as utility companies;
- Names of organizations, unions or clubs to which the other parent belongs; and
- Places where the other parent spends free time.

If possible, also be prepared to submit copies of official documents like your:

- Divorce decree,
- Children's birth certificates, and
- Signed acknowledgment of paternity.



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

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Information on this and other topics is available on the Attorney General's Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us.