

Child Support Collections Exceed \$1.6 Billion



By Greg Abbott
Attorney General of Texas

I am pleased to report that child support collections exceeded \$1.6 billion for the first time in the history of the Texas child support program. The \$1.677 billion collected during the state fiscal year that ended August 31 topped the previous year's total by \$111 million. More than \$3 billion has been collected for the children of Texas since I became attorney general.

For many Texas children, child support means the difference between food on the table or going to bed hungry. Along with the employees of the Attorney General's Child Support Division, I am privileged to touch the lives of so many boys and girls, who rely on child support to give them a fair start in life.

More than half of the one million children served by the Attorney General's Child Support Division were born to unmarried parents. The Child Support Division helps fathers establish paternity so their children are eligible for child support and benefits such as Social Security, veteran's survivor benefits and health insurance. Last year, the Division established legal paternity, either voluntarily or through court action, for almost 60,000 children. The Division also obtained court orders obligating more than 56,000 parents to pay child support.

The Attorney General's Office uses every available tool to enforce a parent's

legal obligation to pay child support. Almost 70 percent of the \$1.677 billion collected in 2004 was made possible by withholding income from a parent's paycheck. Other enforcement measures include interception of federal income tax refunds; suspension of driver, professional and recreational licenses; and seizure of assets held in financial institutions.

For example, the Attorney General's Office seized \$98,000 from a father's Edinburg bank account to pay back child support. The mother, upon receiving the lump sum payment, said she would use the money to pay for her son's college education.

When all else fails, the Attorney General's Office seeks jail time for delinquent parents who continue to ignore a court's order to pay child support. In the last fiscal year, just over 3,000 parents were incarcerated for failing to pay child support.

At the same time, the Attorney General's Office recognizes that many parents who want to pay child support face obstacles to finding and keeping steady employment. For that reason, the Attorney General works with local workforce development boards to provide employment assistance to needy parents. In 2004, child support employees referred more than 8,000 parents to dozens of workforce development boards operating across the state. If you need help to collect child support, my office accepts applications from mothers, fathers, and other individuals who have possession of a child. To request an application for services, call our toll-free telephone

number at (800) 252-8014, or visit the Web site www.oag.state.tx.us.

My office strives to be accessible to all of our customers, who often need up-to-date information about their child support case. Moms and dads can obtain round-the-clock help from the agency's toll-free automated voice response system (800-252-8014). With one phone call, both parents who receive child support and parents who pay child support can obtain a record of recent child support payments, dates and locations of pending court hearings, dates of service on current legal actions, availability of genetic test results, and amount due for current and past-due child support.

Child Support Interactive, accessed from the main Attorney General Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us, gives visitors another avenue for obtaining general information about the child support program and applying for services. Those with child support cases can obtain specific case information from a secure section of the site. Child Support Interactive received more than 12 million visits in the last fiscal year, a 75 percent increase over the previous year's visits.

I appreciate the hard work of the child support employees that made our record-breaking year possible. However, there are still many children going without a parent's financial support. I want the people of Texas to know that my office will not be satisfied until all children receive the support they are due.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

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.



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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.