



A RECORD-BREAKING \$2.6 BILLION IN SUPPORT COLLECTED FOR TEXAS CHILDREN

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT JOBS the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) performs is making sure Texas children get the support they need and deserve. For many children, child support means the difference between food on the table or going to bed hungry.

Thanks to the efforts of dedicated child support employees, the Attorney General's Office collected a record \$2.6 billion in child support in the last fiscal year. The \$2.6 billion collected during the fiscal year that ended Aug. 31 surpassed the previous year's all-time record by \$300 million and marks the sixth consecutive year that child support collections have exceeded previous records. More than \$12 billion has been collected for the children of Texas since December 2002.

The Child Support Division uses every available tool to enforce a parent's legal obligation to pay child support. Enforcement measures include withholding income from a parent's paycheck; interception of federal income tax refunds; suspension of drivers, professional and recreational licenses; and seizure of assets held in financial institutions.

When all else fails, the Attorney General's Office seeks jail time for parents who continue to ignore a court's order to pay child support. In the last fiscal year, more than 4,000 parents were incarcerated for failing to pay child support.

The Child Support Division ranks first in the nation for the amount of child support

collected. Texas' collections have grown at a rate triple the national average over the previous one-, five-, and 10-year periods. In 2007, the National Child Support Enforcement Association recognized the Texas program as the best in the nation.

Families who receive child support attribute the successful outcome of their enforcement cases to the efforts of child support employees. One mother wrote after receiving a one-time payment of \$26,000 to cover past due child support the father owed, "What a great team for Wichita County. The employees in that office have worked years to help me collect support, always going back to court when my ex-husband stopped paying. It just goes to show that hard work and persistence pay off. Thank you so much for collecting the entire debt."

Another mother of an 11-year old daughter with a heart condition credits the Missouri City child support office with the regular child support she receives. That mother wrote, "Because of your efforts, my child support comes in like clockwork. Since the divorce, it's been the only thing I could count on. Thank everyone for all the great work."

These are just two of the examples where Child Support Division employees are privileged to touch the lives of so many children who rely on child support to give them a fair start in life.

Of course, many parents who want to pay child support face obstacles to finding and keeping steady employment. Over the past 10

years, child support employees have referred thousands of needy parents to local workforce development boards for employment services. Three years ago, the Office of the Attorney General partnered with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) on the Noncustodial Parent (NCP) Choices project designed to empower parents with jobs and the ability to provide much-needed support for their children. In the first three years of operation, more than 2,500 parents — who were neither working nor paying child support when ordered into the project — have paid over \$7 million in support to their children. Last year, the OAG and TWC received the Commissioner's Award for Innovative Partnership from the Office of Child Support Enforcement.

This year, the OAG once again received the Commissioner's Award for Innovative Partnership for the p.a.p.a. (Parenting and Paternity Awareness) program. p.a.p.a. is an innovative educational curriculum for secondary school students and young adults that deals with "rights, responsibilities, and realities of parenting." Since January, the Child Support Division has trained more than 3,000 Texas educators to teach the curriculum. The award recognizes the partnership between the Attorney General's Child Support Division and the Texas Education Agency, State Board of Education, Department of State Health Services Texas School Health Network, and Regional Educational Service Centers.

The Attorney General's Office strives to

be accessible to all of its customers, who often need up-to-date information about their child support case. The Child Support Division provides 24-hour access to parents who are seeking information about their child support case, both by telephone and the Internet. The agency's toll-free automated voice response system (800-252-8014) handled more than 24 million calls during the last fiscal year. With one call, parents who pay child support or parents who receive child support can obtain a record of recent payments; dates and locations of pending court hearings; dates of service on current legal actions; availability of genetic test results; and amounts due for current and past-due support.

Child Support Interactive, accessed from the main Attorney General Web site at www.texasattorneygeneral.gov, 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 14 million visits in the last fiscal year.

If you need help collecting child support, the Office of the Attorney General accepts applications from mothers, fathers and other individuals who are caring for a child. To request an application for services, call the toll-free telephone number at (800) 252-8014 or visit the Web site www.texasattorneygeneral.gov.