

Child Support Report

OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

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Child Support—A Record of Strong Performance and Partnerships

By Vicki Turetsky
OCSE Commissioner

Over the years, the national child support program has evolved from a welfare cost recovery mechanism to a family support program. As a State administrator and children's advocate for many years, I have watched the program grow and mature. I remember the days before income withholding and guidelines were implemented; providing services to families who had left cash assistance was controversial and interstate enforcement did not work too well.

Now, child support collects over \$26 billion annually and has emerged as one of the "big three" income supplement programs for low-income children living in custodial parent families, along with the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Commissioner Turetsky Appointed

On June 15, HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius appointed Vicki Turetsky to become OCSE Commissioner. Ms. Turetsky most recently served as Director of Family Policy at the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). She brings 25 years of experience as a public administrator and advocate for low-income families. She is a nationally recognized expert in child support policy and has been instrumental in efforts to put the program on a stable financial footing, to increase support payments to families, to establish realistic child support programs that encourage fathers to work and play an active parenting role, and to bring a family focus to the child support program.

I can't think of a better opportunity to be at the helm of such a highly regarded government program, led so capably by my predecessors. As Commissioner, I hope to draw on the strong performance and collaborations we have built to continue moving the program forward. Under the new Administration, we have an opportunity to consolidate the mission of the program, putting children and their parents at the center of our work. I am privileged to be in this job at a crossroads in the program's history.

I am acutely aware of the funding difficulties States and counties face during this economic downturn. I also know that unemployment around the country is taking a toll on family income and child support performance. Initiatives like PAID, with its emphasis on setting and modifying orders, early intervention, and debt management, will

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Child Support Enforcement

remain a critical program tool for managing some of the effects of job loss. I am committed to working closely with State, Tribal, and local programs as we try to respond to family needs in an era of resource cutbacks.

I have felt welcomed since the day I came aboard. OCSE staff has greeted me graciously, as have the many State and Tribal child support directors I met with during the NCCSD (National Council of Child Support Directors)

and NTCSA (National Tribal Child Support Association) annual meetings during my first month on the job. What a great way to start!

I'm looking forward to working with you—the Federal, State, Tribal, and local child support professionals—on these and many other issues. I appreciate your tireless work to successfully carry out a program devoted to getting children the support they need.

National Council of State Child Support Directors Meets in Wyoming



From left, Alicia Griffin, New Jersey; Mike Schwindt, North Dakota; Barb Sanders of Health Management Solutions; and Dan McDonald, Arkansas, lead a panel discussion about medical support.

At the annual conference of the National Council of State Child Support Directors (NCCSD), last month in Wyoming, directors of State and Tribal child support programs and OCSE staff confer about potential revisions to the National Child Support Enforcement Strategic Plan for 2010 through 2014. From left are Lily Matheson, OCSE Senior Advisor; Dan McDonald, Arkansas; Deborah Yates, Comanche Tribal Director and President of the National Tribal Child Support Association; Jeff Cohen, Vermont; and Laurie McGrath, Massachusetts.



Gathering at the end of the conference are (from left) Tami Lorbecke, Keweenaw Bay Tribe; Eddie Brakes, Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska; OCSE Commissioner Vicki Turetsky; Brenda Lyttle, Wyoming Director and NCCSD President; Scott Cade, New York; Marilyn Stephen, Michigan; Yvette Riddick, OCSE Policy Division Acting Director; and Joe Jackins, Maryland.

Digging for Gold: Michigan Goes Underground

By Linda Hudson
OCSE

The underground economy costs taxpayers millions of dollars every year. Workers who get paid in cash “under the table” and who fail to report (or underreport) their income—along with the employers who hire them—defraud the government out of millions of dollars in lost tax revenue each year.

The child support community is affected by this underground economy, too. When parents take active steps to engage in the underground economy, child support workers have to overcome complex, and often time-consuming, challenges to locate parents and employers, establish orders, enforce existing orders, and collect support due on behalf of children.

Now Michigan is doing something about it. Under the leadership of Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura D. Corrigan, the State has convened a task force to study its underground economy to determine the extent of the impact on both child support and tax revenues. The Underground Economy Task Force first met in June 2008 and includes representatives from the State and Federal governments and economists from the academic community.

The task force identified three strategies: prevention, collaboration, and enforcement.

- **Prevention:** Identify steps to prevent people from joining the underground economy in the first place, keeping them “above ground” and employed with reported income. Suggestions include: reductions in default orders; early intervention before an



arrears become so large it drives the obligor underground; appropriate setting of child support orders for indigent prisoners and jail inmates; and nonadversarial litigation procedures that encourage cooperation between parents.

- **Collaboration:** Facilitate government agencies working together to share information about the underground economy. First recommendations include: establishing data-sharing agreements between select governmental agencies; increasing field investigations; and developing training for child support workers to recognize parents participating in the underground economy.
- **Enforcement:** Publish existing best practices and use them to make recommendations for new techniques to uncover the unreported income of parents. Study various enforcement tools used across the nation, including nonstandard enforcement techniques not used in Michigan.

The task force worked with Michigan’s Misclassified Employee Task Force, which was established to identify employers who improperly classify their employees as independent contractors, thus shifting their tax burden and reporting requirements to the employees.

The task force also had fruitful discussions with the Referees’ Association of Michigan, which provided valuable insights and effective means for identifying and enforcing child support obligations.

Justice Corrigan says, “One of Michigan’s greatest assets is our Title IV-D community. These professionals see child support payers operating in the underground economy on a daily basis, and they are the key to our practical solutions.”

The Underground Economy Task Force plans to survey all those working in the State’s child support system, including judges, referees, Friend of the Court staff, prosecuting attorney staff, State Office of Child Support staff, and members of the Family Law Section of the Michigan State Bar. Results of the survey will be incorporated into its final report in 2010.

Michigan is well on its way to learning more about its underground economy. Please contact Daniel Bauer at 517-373-2167 or bauerd@courts.mi.gov for more information about the task force.

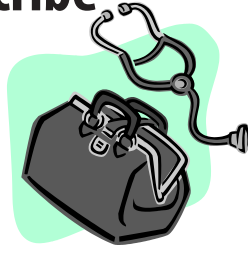
Please send ideas to help identify and work with people in the underground economy to Linda Hudson at linda.hudson@ngc.com.

Correction

In the June 2009 CSR, the photo caption with the article on the Region VI Tribal Session (page 6) incorrectly identified the speaker. It should have read: Keith Franklin, Commissioner, Bernalillo County Off Reservation Native American Health Commission.

OCSE 'House Calls' Prescribe FPLS Remedies

By Dee Price Sanders
OCSE



Remember the good ol' days when doctors made house calls, neighborhood kids raked your leaves, and attendants checked your oil when they pumped gas into your car?

OCSE takes you back to those days by providing "house calls" to State child support agencies. The house calls can review "locate" operations to help States decide where to best place limited resources, or provide training and assess how to best use the wealth of data coming from the FPLS—all at no cost to the State.

Reliable locate information is a key component to a successful child support agency and FPLS is one of the most powerful sources of information. The house calls can help States take full advantage of the FPLS in a cost-effective manner. They are conducted on-site by one or more FPLS State Technical Support (TS) team members who collectively have more than a century of child support experience. The TS team is skilled at offering creative solutions to FPLS system challenges facing State child support programs today.

Four States Receive a House Call

Indiana requested a TS team visit to identify areas where automating use of FPLS data could improve performance. The State looks forward to the prospect of boosting collections as a result of the house call. Jan Raffauf, Indiana Child Support Business Analyst said, "We owe a big thanks to the TS team. They helped us in choosing the best options to benefit our program. They have been sympathetic and realistic about our problems and great supporters of all our efforts."

Arizona requested a house call from the TS team to train program and system staffs on recent changes to the FPLS. Lisa Faison, IT Supervisor, commented: "Arizona is currently working on programming to automatically take all next appropriate actions to increase collections and reap benefits from the locate information from the FPLS. These opportunities always prove useful, and I would recommend it to any State striving to become a 'Top Ten State'—the goal our director often reminds us of."

Veronica Ragland, Arizona's Deputy Child Support Director, wrote a letter to OCSE regarding the TS visit: "We appreciate this opportunity to learn as well as forge a solid relationship with our partners at the Federal level."

Missouri requested TS team assistance with designing its automated use of SVES (State Verification and Exchange System) data. Nancy Crocker, Missouri Policy Unit Manager, reported, "It was a long couple of days, but their participation in our discussion provided us with the help we needed. We came away with a lot of good information and some great ideas on where to go next. I am happy to report that we are finalizing our business requirements for this project and hope to begin making system changes soon."

After a visit to Alabama, Child Support Director Faye Nelson said, "We learned so much from their presentations and the open exchange of information that we expect will result in improvements in our program. An immediate outcome from their visit is a [Federal Case Registry] reconciliation file. The TS team has assured us of their availability to provide ongoing support as needed."

How to Request a House Call

The house call is one way OCSE can help States to increase collections—a goal of the national Project to Avoid Increasing Delinquencies (PAID)—and to improve program performance using FPLS data. Please contact your TS liaison to schedule a visit. See contact information on the [OCSE Web site](#).



Economic Recovery Payments Bring \$87.5 Million

As of June 12, OCSE has received and sent to States more than 354,000 intercepts totaling \$87.5 million from the one-time Economic Recovery Payments (ERP). This total includes ERP offsets from Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, and Railroad Retirement Board beneficiaries owing past-due child support. OCSE expects to send intercepts from Veteran's Compensation and Pension beneficiaries in July. Overall, the Federal Offset program has collected more than \$1.9 billion to date. Check this newsletter for ERP updates!



Pennsylvania Launches Partnership to Educate Incarcerated Fathers on Child Support Issues

By Jennifer Mastrofski

Penn State Justice and Safety Institute

Ann Marie Oldani

Centre County, PA, Domestic Relations Section

John Clark

OCSE Region III

Recognizing that a significant percentage of male inmates are fathers (*shown in sidebar at right*) and that these men may not fully understand their rights and responsibilities as parents, a partnership of agencies in central Pennsylvania recently launched an educational panel for incarcerated fathers.

The panel was conceptualized by Penn State University faculty member Jennifer Mastrofski in the Penn State Justice and Safety Institute, and then developed through partnerships between Penn State, State and county prison staff, the Centre County, PA, Domestic Relations Section, and members of the Centre County Bar Association.

The first panel was held at a nearby State penitentiary in January 2008; since then, others have been conducted there and at a local county correctional facility. The panels have generated much interest among incarcerated fathers who return for new information and recommend them to fellow inmates.

The panels are designed to inform incarcerated fathers about several core topics, including child support laws, legal rights and responsibilities associated with child custody and visitation, petitions to terminate parental rights, adoption, protection from abuse, and parenting while incarcerated. Within child support, the panel addresses:

- Broad overview of child support
- PA child support laws
- Rights and responsibilities while incarcerated
- Modification process
- Establishment of paternity
- Location of absent parents
- Explanation of forms and process

Inmates and Their Children

About 800,000 of the 1.5 million individuals held in the nation's prisons in mid-2007 were parents of minor children. These parents—52 percent of State inmates and 63 percent of Federal inmates—reported having about 1.7 million minor children, accounting for 2.3 percent of children under age 18.

For more details, see the US Department of Justice Web link: [Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/pptmc.htm) (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/pptmc.htm>)



Major topics for discussion at each panel are rotated, with announcements about upcoming programs provided by prison staff. The format involves a primary and secondary speaker for each program. Participant feedback from exit surveys generates additional information on subjects inmates would like to learn more about. Prison staff encourages presenters to use teaching methods that motivate and empower incarcerated fathers to support each other after panels are held.

Seed funding from Penn State has enabled the creation of a father's handbook to reinforce panel presentations. The handbook includes resource material for incarcerated fathers and sample petition letters and forms for reference, as needed. One participating facility has suggested that prison counselors and staff might benefit from in-service training on information covered in panels and the handbook, as they are sometimes called upon to assist in understanding legal documents sent to inmates.

Responses from both prison staff and participants, through conversations and exit surveys, have been very positive. There is strong qualitative evidence for replicating the model for correctional facilities across Pennsylvania and beyond.

For more information, please contact Jennifer Mastrofski, Associate Professor of Administration of Justice, Penn State Justice and Safety Institute at mvc@psu.edu.

'Compensated Work Therapy' Collaboration with Child Support Expands to Remove Barriers for New York's Veterans

By Judith R. Albury
OCSE Region II

The June 2009 Child Support Report featured an article about the benefits of collaboration between child support agencies and the Veteran's Affairs' Compensated Work Therapy Program. It highlighted a collaboration project in Massachusetts. The following article shows progress with a similar partnership in New York.



Upstate and Western New York. It has led to case management enhancements and the incorporation of child support questions into the CWT, Healthcare for Homeless Veterans Program (HCHV), and the HCRV intake process, which addresses the needs of veterans.

The VA also works with other veterans organizations to host "Stand Downs"—one-day, outreach events that include various agencies, including DCSE, and organizations that provide information and services to veterans.

In 2002, the New York State Veterans Administration's Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) Program was confronted with an unexpected barrier to providing service. Some of the veterans in the program were dropping out because their bank accounts were being seized due to failure to pay child support. The issue started a dialogue with the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance's Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE) to determine how the seizures were impacting the veterans both programs serve.

CWT, which is a part of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, primarily focuses on removing barriers to employment for these veterans, who usually have a disability. Realization that its mission and customer concerns overlapped with those of DCSE was the driving force to pursuing a relationship with DCSE.

This new-found collaborative relationship revealed other common interests. First, both CWT and DCSE were faced with similar customer trust issues. Second, the interaction made DCSE aware that its customers included veterans in these special programs and made CWT aware that many veterans had child support issues.

What started as brown-bag lunch sessions in 2002 has blossomed into a partnership between the Veterans' Administration and DCSE, "which has grown into a statewide effort that continues to expand," according to Jonathan Pollack, Program Coordinator for Healthcare for Re-entry Veterans (HCRV) in Upstate New York, which serves veterans who are reentering society after incarceration.

Today's partnership serves as the foundation for regional meetings and training of staff who serve veterans in both

According to Monique Rabideau, DCSE Bureau Chief of Training, Outreach, and Special Projects, beyond the training and outreach for staff and veterans in the various programs, there is a genuine commitment on the part of both agencies to understand how the other operates to ensure the program is beneficial to both.

Rabideau states, "The most important component is that staff in both programs understand the benefits of this partnership as well as any limitations that may exist. Our goal is to build a sustainable partnership that will be supported on both sides during future staffing changes."

Veterans are encouraged to sign a release form (which permits DCSE to release child support information to VA staff) as part of the admission process for CWT and/or VA Homeless programs. However, this is not required for their participation in the programs. By signing the release that allows DCSE to provide their information to the child support contact, they receive assistance from CWT in requesting and obtaining modifications, when appropriate, to ensure that the order is consistent with their ability to pay. This also helps to prevent bank accounts from being "frozen."

Pollack and Rabideau agree that the partnership is strong, yet continues to reveal new challenges. For example, in Albany and Buffalo Counties, where the program is most vibrant, many of the veterans do not reside in the county or State where their child support order was established. Such multi-jurisdictional cases are often more difficult to service, and the complexity of the cases may increase as they get older and/or involve multiple custodial parents.

CWT, HCRV, and DCSE are committed to the

partnership's expansion through continued education and outreach to their staffs to further enhance their collective ability to address the challenges facing veteran customers on a consistent and statewide basis.

Pollack advises other States interested in this type of partnership that "the benefits are tangible; anytime

an initiative can prevent veterans from returning to homelessness or reoffending, everyone wins: the Veterans' CWT Program, DCSE, the veterans, and the veterans' children and families."

For further information, please contact Judith R. Albury at 212-264-2890, ext. 134, or judith.albury@acf.hhs.gov.

National Training Workgroup

Connecticut Succession Plan Targets Retirement, Retention, Renewal

By Keira Dembowski
OCSE Region IX

Perhaps your child support agency is looking to the future and asking: When the baby boomers retire, who will replace these valuable, experienced employees? How can we attract, retain, and prepare the next generation of leaders? Connecticut Support Enforcement Services' (SES) succession planning addresses these challenging questions.

Creating a Learning Environment for All

SES is a statewide agency of 250 staff within the Judicial Branch, which enforces and modifies child

support orders under a cooperative agreement with the State Bureau of Child Support Enforcement.

SES created its succession plan in response to converging factors, including an aging workforce, a lack of qualified candidates, interest in promotional opportunities, and a growing State budget crisis with anticipated impact on the workforce and the ability to hire.

The succession plan builds to the future, rather than reacts to a staffing crisis, as evidenced by its goal statement: "SES will ensure continuity of operations, improve service to the public, and continue our commitment to our mission by fostering a professional, learning-oriented environment for all staff and proactively anticipating and responding to changes in staffing and leadership throughout SES."

Obtaining Input for an Inclusive Approach

SES's greatest challenge in succession planning was to create a meaningful program without additional resources or detracting from daily operations. SES took a deliberate approach: The plan was coordinated by a dynamic manager who conducted a focus group of staff members to elicit recommendations and ensure the evolving plan met both staff and agency needs. Buy-in was also obtained from management and stakeholders with dialogue and presentations throughout the process.

Program Manager Paul Bourdoulous and Court Planner Zarin Kapur review the schedule for an upcoming "Exploring Professional Growth," a succession-planning program Bourdoulous created. Kapur, one of the trainers, receives a request from an employee to participate in the program, via online registration, and then matches the registrant with a seasoned employee (e.g., support enforcement officer requesting to be matched with an office supervisor) and arranges for the "informational interview" and "job shadow" components of the program.



SES identified the following core areas to target the succession plan:

- Recruitment, selection, and retention;
- Staff development;
- Knowledge transfer and training;
- Position reclassification; and
- Organizational workforce management.

The succession plan contains strategies for all five core areas with roles for both administrative and field staff to cultivate and retain qualified staff and leaders.

Rolling Out the Preliminary Programs

SES is taking steps based on input from staff and stakeholders. The first program SES introduced provided a structured, part-time, on-the-job training program that recruited staff to work with the self-assessment team. The second program, “Exploring Professional Growth,” focused on career exploration for employees who may be interested in supervisory positions and career advancement.

These two opportunities minimize staff time offline while challenging and preparing staff for the future.

Participants in the “Exploring Professional Growth” program identified a desired position, and then in less than 2 days conducted a structured “informational interview” and “shadowed” a supervisor in the desired position. The first round of the self-assessment, on-the-job training pilot accepted only three field applicants to receive the intensive training and support for the challenging self-assessment process, which led to an understanding of the regulatory framework and an ability to perform the case review and analysis.

In the spirit of preparing all staff for changing responsibilities and future needs, SES is also offering new interview and resume courses to help staff obtain new positions and promotions.

For further information about fostering a learning environment through succession planning, please contact SES Director Charisse Hutton at Charisse.Hutton@jud.ct.gov.

‘Most Wanted’ Child Support Posters

Analysis Reveals Employment Sectors of Parents, Suggests Potential for Collaboration and Enforcement Activities

By Mike Ginns and Dennis Putze
OCSE



The subject of placing a noncustodial parent (NCP) on a “most wanted” poster for display in the media and on bulletin boards is a controversial one. Proponents believe the posters help child support agencies find some of the most egregious child support scofflaws. Opponents maintain this is a shaming tactic which is too harsh—forcing NCPs to further disengage from the child support agency.

These opinions aside, a recent analysis of 10 States that publish “most wanted” posters compared 2007 and 2009 statistics for the NCPs on posters that showed their arrears and last-known employment type. Though this analysis did not provide hard evidence on either the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the posters, it provides a snapshot of the employment sectors in which these cases tend to congregate.

Arrears Total Down, “Professional” Proportion Up

From 2007 to 2009, the number of obligors and the proportion of obligors in the various employment categories remained relatively stable. However, the total amount of arrears owed by these obligors decreased significantly, by 33 percent. The pie charts on the next page show the data from 2009.

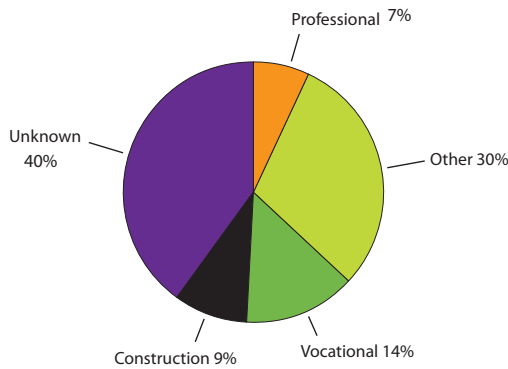
Noteworthy is an increase in the proportion of arrears owed by obligors in the professional category, from 13 percent to 20 percent, while the proportion of obligors in this category only increased from 6 percent to 7 percent. This category also shows the most divergence in the proportion of obligors versus the proportion of arrears. In 2009, professionals accounted for 7 percent of the obligors, but owed 20 percent of the total arrears.

Arrears for “Unknowns” Down, Percentage of NCPs Unchanged

The analysis shows that although the arrears figures

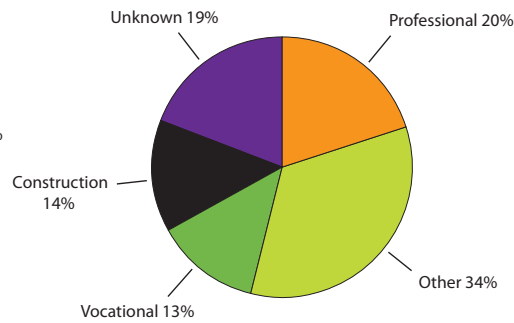
2009 Most Wanted Obligor By Occupation

MA, MS, VA, IN, TX, OH, WA, SC, GA, AZ
Total Obligor = 138



2009 Most Wanted Obligor By Amount Owed

MA, MS, VA, IN, TX, OH, WA, SC, GA, AZ
Total Arrears = \$5,093,318



decreased from 2007 to 2009 by over 30 percent for those listed with an unknown employment status, the total percentage of obligors with unknown employment remained at 40 percent and the total arrears for this group also remained unchanged at 19 percent of the total owed by the “most wanted” obligors.

This could suggest that the posters were successful in helping the child support agencies enlist the public’s help to locate these individuals, receive payments, or attain information, allowing them to close cases according to case closure guidelines.

The data also show need for possible outreach, education, and collaboration with certain employment sectors. Occupations commonly linked to the underground or cash economies (i.e., construction, landscaping, and domestic services) comprised about 22 percent of the obligors featured on the posters in 2009 and almost 28 percent in 2007. While the trend in these occupations is going down, the number of NCPs is still significant enough to require the attention of child support agencies.

By adding obligors employed in the vocational and trades sector—in this analysis painters, plumbers, carpenters, and electricians—and who are commonly linked to the underground economy, these obligors make up 36 percent in 2009 and 41 percent in 2007.

Criteria for Most Wanted Varies

It is important to note that not all States use the same criteria in developing their “most wanted” posters. For example, criteria for an obligor to be placed on a “most wanted” poster may be that he/she is not locatable and there is an ability to pay based upon prior employment or circumstances.

Some States also consider the egregiousness of the case along with a criminal nonsupport order warrant

being issued. Other States may use different criteria combinations such as the location status and arrears amount, or nonpayment over a specified period of time.

Potential Uses for Data on Employment

Despite the varying criteria, reviewing this data may warrant a larger examination of how having data on the NCP employment categories may fit into arrears management, stratification, setting of appropriate orders, or the very effectiveness of “most wanted” programs.

It also may reveal strategies for working with the significant numbers of obligors employed in the underground economy. Knowledge of an NCP’s employment may also benefit the child support agency in preparing a legal action. Employment status and type may be seen by a court as a strong indicator of payment ability, thereby strengthening an agency’s case.

On a more practical level, the value of knowing an NCP’s employment allows a State to consider enforcement actions such as the suspension of personal, professional, and recreational licenses that may persuade an NCP to contact the agency to make payments and comply with the order.

Some of those obligors listed in the “unknown” category no doubt also contribute to the growing numbers of those working in the underground economy. Task forces and legislative provisions, such as those created in California, Michigan, Massachusetts, and at the Federal level, may produce ideas on how to locate and collect from individuals and employers who pay cash wages and fail to report new employees, wages, and taxes to systems and agencies such as the National Directory of New Hires, SSA, or IRS.

For more information, please contact Michael Ginns at 617-565-2456 or michael.ginns@acf.hhs.gov.

*I heard
registration
starts early
August!*

*Well, I heard
the NEW
Commissioner
will be there!*



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***“Dollars and Sense:
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Changing Economy”***

Promising Practices

OCSE ‘Promising Practices’ Moving to *Child Support Report*



For the past several years, OCSE has published a periodic “Compendium of Promising Practices/ Good Ideas in Child Support Enforcement.” The publication offers summaries of innovative State and local program operations that highlight cost-effective results.

The final 2008 edition of the *compendium* is available on the Web site.

In the future, each new report on a promising practice will appear in the *Child Support Report*. Please continue to send “promising practices” to sue.sosler@acf.hhs.gov—OCSE depends on submissions from State and local child support agencies.



Child Support Report

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