

# **THE OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT**

## **AN INTERSTATE SUMMIT:**

### **CROSSING THE LINE FOR THE CHILDREN OF AMERICA**

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#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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As Commissioner David Gray Ross announced at the IV-D Directors' meeting this year, interstate enforcement was the Office of Child Support Enforcement's number one priority for FY 1999. Although there have been outstanding achievements in many areas of child support enforcement, interstate has remained a challenge. During the year the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) worked in partnership with States on a number of interstate initiatives including an Interstate Summit which was held on September 13, 1999. The purpose of the Summit was to assure the continuation of our work on interstate enforcement efforts by developing recommendations and initiatives to improve interstate operations in the Year 2000 and beyond. OCSE extended an invitation to every State IV-D Director, or their interstate representative, to attend the Summit.

About 100 Federal, State, local, and Tribal representatives participated in the Summit. We were also very fortunate to have representatives of the former Commission on Interstate share their ideas and stimulate the day's discussion at the plenary Town Hall. For most of the day, participants were assigned to small facilitated group discussions during which they covered three topics related to interstate case processing -- 1) Case Clean-Up and Maintenance, 2) Case Processing and Communication, and 3) Customer Service.

In bringing together these interstate experts, the Summit was successful in generating ideas and practical actions that we can, at all levels of government, begin to implement in the Year 2000. We refer to this initiative as I-2K --Interstate 2000. This Executive Summary is designed to share some of the Summit's major highlights with the hope that through this and other exchanges we can, working in partnership, make substantial strides in improving interstate child support enforcement efforts, especially resulting in increased interstate collections on behalf of America's children.

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## SUMMIT HIGHLIGHTS

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In providing you an overview of the Summit, these highlights cover only the major challenges and suggestions addressed at the Summit and are not intended to reflect the specific details of the discussions. This summary focuses on the three topic areas referred to above. Each topic area highlights the challenges, suggested solutions/considerations, recommendations for I-2K and "good ideas" relative to that topic area. The purpose of each topic discussion was to identify challenges and associated solutions. The major goal was to identify initiatives or steps that States, Tribes, and the Federal Government could take to improve I-2K interstate case processing.

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### I. CASE CLEAN-UP AND MAINTENANCE

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The discussion focused on the methods used to review unworked interstate cases for new information, which may make a case workable, and/or for evidence that a case is unworkable and should be closed. Discussion also covered the methods to maintain an interstate caseload of active or worked cases.

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#### *A. STATEWIDE REVIEWS*

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##### **Challenges:**

Participants agreed that case clean-up and maintenance projects should be conducted on a statewide basis. Participants discussed the approach of sending out notices on inactive cases to seek updated information to work the case or to seek closure. The challenges related to this approach involve the volume of cases that may need a manual review, workload and budgetary constraints, and the possibility of negative reaction by advocacy groups.

##### **Suggested Solutions/Considerations:**

Participants offered a number of approaches regarding statewide reviews. For example, automation could be used in an effective way with state-specified criteria to identify cases needing review or closure. It could also be used to send out client notices. However, participants thought that notices should be carefully crafted to communicate purpose and to make sure the client fully understands the need for updated information

or the option to close the case. Notices should also reflect terminology that does not provoke anger; e.g., reference to an unknown father.

Participants also suggested that States have a toll-free telephone number for customer inquiries and information. Much discussion centered on the extensive manual process involved in updating and reviewing new information. Where possible, a specialized clean-up task force could be used to do this type of review.

**Recommended I-2K Initiatives:**

- Share State practices and automation criteria for case clean-up/closure projects.
- Encourage States to use automated case reviews to cleanup cases.

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*B. CASE CLEAN-UP*

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**Challenges:**

Participants acknowledged that many challenges exist with establishing the controlling order, reconciliation of arrears and communication across State lines. Controlling order determinations are particularly cumbersome in some States. Many State participants expressed concern about State responsibility when all parties have left the State. Another issue noted was that data becomes outdated soon after a data clean-up project has been completed. States too often have little confidence in each other's data given that a lot of old, unreliable data exists in interstate cases.

**Suggested Solutions/Considerations:**

A number of States could establish regional case clean-up projects where high volume metropolitan areas border two or more States. Participants also discussed sharing data across State lines by placing read-only computers in border localities. Participants felt review and adjustment could be useful in cleaning up cases. New hire data and the financial institution data matches may also assist in case clean-up with more updated address information. In addition, some participants suggested that some viable data on NCPs could be obtained through matches between the non-IV-D and IV-D case registries. Participants agreed that data clean-up must be an ongoing process to increase the integrity of the available data.

**Recommended I-2K Initiatives:**

- Promote CSENet communication and enhancements.

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## *C. CLOSING CASES*

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### **Challenges:**

Participants discussed erroneous cases on the system, which were often created during the conversion process. Much discussion centered on case closure regulations as they relate to erroneous cases. In addition, closed cases may need to be reactivated at a future point based on new information.

### **Suggested Solutions/Considerations:**

Participants indicated that States must follow case closure regulations only as they relate to a bona-fide IV-D case. Duplicate and erroneous cases do not meet the definition of a Title IV-D case. Verification and elimination of duplicate and erroneous cases should routinely be performed to ensure a realistic caseload. Participants also discussed warehousing closed cases because they may be activated at a later time, e.g., incarcerated NCPs.

### **Recommended I-2K Initiatives:**

Develop a work group once final interstate regulations have been published to establish better ways to interact on closing and maintaining quality interstate cases.

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## **"GOOD IDEAS" FOR CASE CLEAN-UP AND MAINTENANCE**

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- **Florida Automatic Case Closure Process** -- The system identified cases for automated closure and generated appropriate notice and alert to custodial parent and caseworker, respectively, complying with Federal certification requirements. Results: The auto-closure program is run on a monthly basis. The first run of this process identified 27,448 cases for closure. It is estimated that the process succeeded in a cost avoidance of \$274,480 in the first month. Contact: Willie Mitchell at (850) 562-5184.
- **Michigan Case Closure Project** -- The goal of the Michigan case closure project is to close as many cases as possible that no longer need their services or are not appropriate to continue services, i.e., child is over 18 and there is no order in place. Results: Michigan expects to close over 200,000 cases due to computer errors and mailed 29,556 letters to individuals who have sought services but cases have not been worked. Depending on the responses to these letters, Michigan will either close the case or keep the case open and continue services, if needed. Contact: Kelly Morse at (517) 335-0890.

- **Montgomery County, Maryland Case Maintenance/Closure Initiative** -- The goal of this initiative is to improve office performance by probing the State's child support computer system for cases inappropriately coded or eligible for closure using the revised case closure regulations. The initial effort focused on determining (1) if custodial parents wanted to pursue child support, (2) if children with paternity established were properly coded, 3) if SSNs not in the computer system for noncustodial parents were available from other sources, and 4) if certain locate cases met the criteria for closure. Results: 328 children were properly credited with having paternity established; 1300 cases were closed because the custodial parent no longer wanted to pursue child support; 1300 cases in the locate function were closed due to insufficient information to locate the noncustodial parent. Contact: Brian D. Shea at (301) 610-4603.
- **Virginia's Automatic Income Withholding Case Clean-up Project** -- A review of the entire Automated Program to Enforce Child Support (APECS) caseload using the caseload listing report was started. This report identified worker caseloads and the current status of those cases. This report was used to update/correct pertinent information that was related to the income withholdings. Results: 8,933 automatic income withholdings have been sent to employers. The income withholding clean-up project results in batch income withholdings being sent to employers with accurate information from the APECS system. Contact: Lisa R. Johnson at (804) 692-1534.

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## II. CASE PROCESSING AND COMMUNICATION

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This discussion focused on ways States could work more effectively with each other to improve interstate case processing. Below are the major highlights of this discussion.

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### *A. INTERSTATE CASE INFORMATION*

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#### **Challenges:**

Participants agreed that it is often difficult for workers to get case status information from another State or Tribe in a timely fashion. This can leave one State (or more) not knowing what the other State is doing on a case, and unable to respond to customers' inquiries. Another challenge is the communication between the IV-D agency and the custodial parent's private attorney and with private collection agencies. Staff are often unclear as to who they can talk to and have little or no guidance.

In addition, participants noted that it could be difficult for workers to learn about the requirements imposed by other States and the procedures they employ. For example,

due process requirements differ from State to State, as do the methods for calculating arrears. Participants also mentioned that the huge amount of electronic data now coming to States leads to unnecessary information duplication, makes updating information more difficult, and affects their ability to ensure confidentiality.

Another challenge is that interstate cases are not sufficiently tracked by States to ensure that appropriate action is taken on cases, particularly outgoing interstate cases.

### **Suggested Solutions/Considerations:**

Participants, based on their experience, offered a number of solutions. For example, one State maintains current case status (public information) on its web site and the information is therefore available to individuals as well as to workers from other States. Another State is moving toward putting all child support public information on the worldwide web. Though there was some concern expressed about AEI, participants recognized its value and endorsed efforts to improve and extend it.

### **Recommended I-2K Initiatives:**

- Create a national (or a series of regional) contact list(s) and agree upon common procedures for workers to reach their counterparts in other States.
- Encourage use of existing OCSE training materials, particularly standardized curricula, to help provide uniform information and understanding among workers in different States, and among IV-D staff, attorneys and judges.
- Encourage the use of the IRG, e-mail, fax and telephone by States. Expand IRG information and encourage States to update this information by sending a quarterly reminder to States (perhaps by e-mail).

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## *B. RECONCILIATION OF ACCOUNTS*

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### **Challenges:**

Several participants spoke of the need for periodic reconciliation of interstate accounts. They pointed out that States keep records differently, calculate interest differently, and for a number of practical reasons different States may show a different account status for the same case.

### **Suggested Solutions/Considerations:**

Among the solutions proposed were declaring an Arrears Reconciliation Day, common basic training for workers, and making fuller use of CSENet.

## **Recommended I-2K Initiatives:**

- Explore the possibilities of developing a uniform national process for reconciliation and a standard national rate of interest and method of calculation.

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### *C. VARIATIONS AMONG STATES-- TECHNOLOGY, MANAGEMENT AND SERVICES*

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## **Challenges:**

Participants described a number of ways in which the variations among States -- as to procedures, systems, and even degrees to which they are automated -- can create real operational problems. Many participants, for example, mentioned that automated capabilities are not being used well in interstate cases, and others noted the difficulties occasioned by incompatible systems. Different levels of centralization within States further complicate interstate casework, as do different levels of Internet access (in some States workers do not have direct Internet access).

Many participants noted that imperfect or slow servicing of interstate cases remains a problem, and that trying to find out where the case is being handled and its status can be difficult and frustrating. Participants recognized this as an internal management issue for State/Tribal administrators, as well as an interstate issue. States seemed to be clearer about the problems they have with other States, than the problems they may cause for other States, leading to the general notion that more communication and more openness are called for. There was also some discussion about "dumping" of difficult cases; i.e., States may be referring difficult cases to other States rather than taking enforcement actions themselves.

Participants agreed that it is often difficult for the IV-D agency to process cases when family law issues are not resolved. They felt that this applies in administrative States as well as judicial States.

## **Suggested Solutions/Considerations:**

A number of States described multi-State and even multi-regional interstate meetings as being helpful in this area. They spoke of learning enough about each other's systems and capabilities that they could adjust their requests or their responses to accommodate situations unique to a particular State. They also described some success at adopting voluntary conventions to guide neighboring States in their efforts to minimize incompatibility.

Other suggestions included developing a consensus group, composed of individuals from different States, identified by the IV-D community, who would meet and settle on acceptable resolutions to some of the hot issues. This was mentioned as a way to

develop a uniform process for handling particular issues. There was also some interest in national standards for technology in child support enforcement in order to assure that all staff have sufficient technology (e.g., access to the Internet or e-mail) and are adequately trained so that all States can communicate effectively with each other.

Several participants cited work being done on interstate matters by the Big 8 States as a promising starting point. The Big 8 State activities include identifying deficiencies in interstate case processing (in general and by State) and developing a list of common requirements for interstate cases.

### **Recommended I-2K Initiatives:**

- Improve CSENet effectiveness and encourage increased use among CSE agencies.
- Share "Good Ideas"/Best Practices on ways States employ staff or centralized units to: a) review interstate cases before they are sent to another State to ensure all enforcement actions have been taken and data is current, and b) to follow-up on interstate cases after referral.
- Promote use of OCSE-provided training and informational electronic resources [e.g. the National Electronic Child Support Resource System (NECSRS)] and other common training materials to increase coordination and uniformity of practice nationwide among States and between IV-D agencies and tribunals; and to improve the availability and quality of information, including both case-specific data and procedural information.

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## **"GOOD IDEAS" FOR CASE PROCESSING AND COMMUNICATION**

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- **OCSE's "Big Eight" initiative** was designed to improve interstate case processing by gathering data on the quality of interstate referrals as a means of identifying training needs and enhancing communication with interstate caseworkers. A central registry holds flawed cases and requests the initiating State to provide the missing documentation. Results: Gathering data on the quality of interstate referrals aids in the targeting of specific training, and speeds interstate case processing. A quarterly report is provided to the IV-D director and OCSE. Contact: William (Bill) Clair at (312) 353-0166.
- **Region IX and X Bi-Regional Interstate Task Force (ITF).** This Regional Office initiative provides an interactive forum for Federal and State staffs from both regions to identify, discuss, and resolve critical interstate issues. Results: The ITF has reached consensus on several interstate issues, e.g. handling contests in direct enforcement, interest on arrears, and requests for limited services. The ITF has

helped establish and foster a strong communication and coordination network between Region IX and Region X States. Contact: JP Soden at (415) 437-8421.

- **Oregon has found that establishment of paternity through periodic matches with bordering States to be an effective way of identifying Paternity Acknowledgments signed in another State.** Results: When Oregon paternity caseload was matched with Washington's Department of Health records, the State discovered over 200 acknowledgments on file in the State of Washington. Contact: Dave Stillman at (360) 664-5050.
- **Virginia reviews interstate enforcement cases with NDNQ/NDFQ hits on a quarterly basis** to ensure income withholdings are in place, to evaluate each case for potential need to increase support orders through review and adjustment of the support order, and review Medicaid cases for possible healthcare insurance. Results: VA has done two quarterly reviews. Initial concentration was placed on obtaining income withholding on cases indicating quarterly earnings. Contact: Patricia F. DuBose at (540) 676-5470.
- **Oregon-Washington Case Reconciliation--**Using a computer match of case participants, the States of Oregon and Washington have identified cases where each State is pursuing the same noncustodial parent for collection of unpaid support or establishment of paternity or an order. Results: Initially, 22,231 cases have been identified where Oregon and Washington may be duplicating the other's efforts. Contact: Dave Stillman at (360) 664-5050.

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### III. CUSTOMER SERVICE

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Discussion focused on ways that States can help each other provide quicker and better service to customers and communicate better with customers and to help identify procedures and practices that ensure cooperation and timeliness in communication between the initiating State, the responding State, and the parents.

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#### *A. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH CUSTOMERS*

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##### **Challenges:**

Participants indicated that the high volume of calls to IV-D agencies with customer concerns and complaints often overstresses workers and leads to customers feeling frustrated. Voice mail systems are also overloaded and customers often do not know how to navigate these systems. Thus, a major challenge is providing courteous,

accurate, and efficient information to customers (including parents, tribunals, employers, etc.). Customer service in interstate cases is even more difficult because policy and procedures differ among States. Participants agreed that clients needed to be educated as to the appropriate referral processes since sometimes they have no idea of which entity or agency (IV-D, county, private attorney, etc.) is appropriate for their particular case.

### **Suggested Solutions/Considerations:**

A lot of discussion centered on the need to improve child support services through better use of technology such as CSENet 2000, telephonic hearings, and video conferencing. Participants suggested that States should offer more options to customers such as a combination of e-mail, voice response unit (VRU) and the ability to contact a staff person. States also need to re-examine use of available resources; i.e. staggered work hours and use of web sites to allow parents, employers, and tribunals to contact the IV-D agency. Some participants indicated that customers should be given written information which at least covers basic answers to common customer questions.

### **I-2K Recommendations:**

- Share State "Good Ideas"/best practices on effective customer service approaches.
- Encourage States to develop brochures with most frequently asked child support enforcement questions.
- Encourage States to better use technology to serve clients (i.e. Internet, telephone hearings, VRU.)
- Create contact lists and protocols to facilitate State to State customer service communications.

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## ***B. STAFF AND PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES***

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### **Challenges:**

Participants indicated that customers sometimes only hear what they want to hear and it is difficult for them to accept reality. However, they also acknowledged that workers sometimes do not know the answers and thus, do not provide good customer service. Participants mentioned that customer service workers are often newer and lower-paid employees, which causes high turnover in this critical area. In addition, they noted that CSENet is of limited use to workers since it only transfers bulk case information and often workers do not have current information on interstate cases. States may also be serving different customers (i.e., a State may be providing service to only the custodial parent, or may only serve the parent who lives in the State).

### **Suggested Solutions/Considerations:**

Participants agreed that there needs to be better education of staff so they can, in turn, provide better information to customers. Staff training should cover customer relations, communication skills and stress management. Customer service workers should also have extensive casework experience. Also, staff should have the ability to send and receive e-mail and workers should have electronic access to cases so that they can more quickly respond to customer inquiries.

Participants suggested that customers be involved in how to improve customer services; i.e. use of surveys to determine needs of users of IV-D services. Also, some participants brought up the possibility of conducting orientation sessions for new customers so that they have a better idea of the realities of child support enforcement services and what they are expected to do. Participants agreed that more public outreach is needed and materials need to be written in clear language.

### **I-2K Recommendations:**

- Provide customer service and communications training for caseworkers.
- Encourage States to involve customers in improving child support services.
- Encourage States to incorporate orientation/client responsibilities as part of their intake process.
- Develop public relations strategy to educate the public on child support enforcement.

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### **"GOOD IDEAS" FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE**

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- **California Attorney General's Child Support Program Web site** -- the web site (<http://caag.state.ca.us>) provides an on-line case status inquiry page offered by the CA central registry. Results: Hard copy correspondence is not required to obtain the status of a case and the time required to send an inquiry and receive a response is reduced. Contact: Virgil Chapman at (916) 323-5660.
- **Hawaii's use of telephonic hearings in interstate cases**--The goal of telephonic hearings is to provide an expedited, convenient forum for parties to address child support issues. Results: Approximately 40% of all hearings (about 110 per week) are conducted via teleconference (both intrastate and interstate cases). Contact: Wanda Chong-Mendonca at (808) 692-7118.

- **Texas has a "free form" email that can be used for generic child support questions and another form for individuals who have case specific information** (see [http://www.oag.state.tx.us/forms/cs\\_case\\_status.html](http://www.oag.state.tx.us/forms/cs_case_status.html)). In addition, there is a form caseworkers in another State can use if they want information on an existing case (see [http://www.oag.state.tx.us/forms/cs\\_agencies\\_case\\_status.html](http://www.oag.state.tx.us/forms/cs_agencies_case_status.html)). **Results:** Both the individual inquiry form and the other State agency form are now available for use. Because each form is sent to a different email recipient, the ability to respond quicker is enhanced. Contact: Barry Brooks at (512) 460-6691.
- **Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement GPRA Video Conferencing.** This Federal demonstration project involved one child support enforcement office and three local DSS agencies, in which TANF clients were video interviewed to update child support cases at the time of their face-to-face TANF redetermination interview. **Results:** Held over 60 child support video interviews; provided TANF clients with "one stop" shopping at the time of their redetermination interview, and increased clients' understanding of the role of CSE in providing financial and medical support to TANF clients. **Contact:** Todd W. Areson at (804) 692-1463.
- **Washington's Division of Child Support Community Relations Unit (CRU).** CRU responds to customer complaints, complaint letters written to the Governor, Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and the Division of Child Support as well as other correspondence. **Results:** The CRU has an e-mail address published on the DSHS/Child Support page. The e-mail address has only been in effect since November 1998 but it is a very effective and efficient communication tool. Customers have been very pleased with the prompt responses. **Contact:** Rob Huffman at (360) 664-5447.

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## OCSE ACTIONS UNDERWAY AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR I-2K

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The activities listed below represent many of the ongoing OCSE initiatives that address Summit participants' I-2K recommendations. In addition, OCSE and our Regional Offices will work in partnership with States to follow-up on the concerns identified in this report and continue to address States' needs to improve interstate child support enforcement efforts.

- OCSE will continue to promote use of the Federal standardized interstate curricula for child support enforcement professionals using such mechanisms as computer-based and web-based training. States can access the Federal interstate curricula via the National Electronic Child Support Resource System (NECSRS). OCSE is also exploring the development of additional curricula topics such as customer service training.

- The Interstate Reference and Referral Guide (IRG) is being expanded and is expected to be available to States via OCSE's web site by December 1999. In addition, we will encourage States to use the IRG and other electronic mechanisms to facilitate communication among States, the child support enforcement community including tribunals, and all child support customers.
- OCSE has developed a number of matrices, which include State contacts, for various interstate related topics such as new hire reporting, liens, financial institution data match, etc. In addition, the revised version of the IRG will include State contacts on various interstate areas. OCSE will also encourage States to develop protocols and share lists of local contacts with other States to improve interstate communications.
- The Interstate Reform Initiative Work Group is considering various approaches on how interstate cases can best be processed under UIFSA in order to develop future Federal regulations.
- As of August 1999, CSENet was upgraded to improve its effectiveness. OCSE will continue to make enhancements to CSENet 2000 and encourage States to increase its use among CSE agencies.
- OCSE has begun to collect "Good Ideas" on various topics, especially those related to interstate concerns. Currently the fourteen "Good Ideas" identified in this Executive Summary are available on NECSRS. OCSE plans to expand these as States identify additional "Good Ideas."
- States may request through their respective regional offices individualized technical assistance and/or take advantage of our technology transfer program of promising practices to help improve their interstate efforts.
- OCSE will continue to provide the opportunity for States, Tribes, and other eligible applicants to apply for competitive Special Improvement Project (SIP) grant funds to support their innovative efforts to improve child support enforcement (including interstate activities).
- The OCSE Customer Service Work Group has developed and disseminated a sample survey instrument to help States identify and respond to customer needs.
- OCSE will continue to provide assistance to States to help them enhance their public education and outreach activities emphasizing parental responsibilities for the financial and emotional support of their children. At the Federal level, OCSE has been working in partnership with States on a variety of public education initiatives including the development of the Advertising Council "Parental Responsibility Campaign;" a video geared to unwed parents regarding the importance of paternity acknowledgement; as well as a "Child Support Enforcement (CSE) Handbook"

written in English and Spanish and other publications providing basic CSE information which are available through OCSE's web site or in paper copy.

- OCSE has developed a video presentation to help educate the CSE community on the various training tools and technical assistance initiatives available. As new initiatives are developed, OCSE will also showcase these at regional and national meetings and conferences as well as through publications like the Child Support Report and the OCSE web site.

We hope every jurisdiction will join us in making a commitment to improve interstate case processing in the Year 2000 by trying some of the "Good Ideas" identified, or undertaking some of the recommendations outlined in this summary. If you are interested in more details regarding the Interstate "Good Ideas," you can access these on NECSRS via OCSE's web site [www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/)). To help support your State's commitment to improve its interstate child support enforcement efforts, please contact your respective Regional Interstate Liaison or Dianne Offett, OCSE's Interstate Liaison Officer at (202) 401-5425 for more information.