

Child Support Report



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President's FY 2011 Budget Proposal Includes Critical Extension of Child Support Funding

By Jennifer Burnszynski
OCSE

For the past 20 years, the President has been required to submit his budget for the federal government to Congress by the first Monday in February. On Feb. 1, President Obama released his budget for fiscal year 2011. It focuses on economic recovery through creating jobs and laying a new foundation for long-term prosperity for all American families.

The budget proposes that the five-year reauthorization of the TANF program be postponed. The Administration for Children and Families' budget notes that "As the economy recovers, states will be better prepared to engage in a more comprehensive updating of the TANF program that focuses on improving child outcomes by helping parents succeed in the labor force and provide for their children's basic needs."

For the Child Support Enforcement program, the upcoming year will be a time for much discussion, since child support-related provisions typically are included as a part of a TANF reauthorization legislative package. TANF reauthorization is an opportunity to examine and update the Child Support Enforcement program. Discussion about the overall mission and funding of the Child Support Enforcement program will be a critical component of the TANF reauthorization planning process this year.

The FY 2011 budget requests \$4.3 billion for the Child Support Enforcement program, proposing congressional action on four legislative proposals. First, this budget proposes to allow federal matching funds for state expenditures made with child support incentive payments in FY 2011. This continues a longstanding policy that

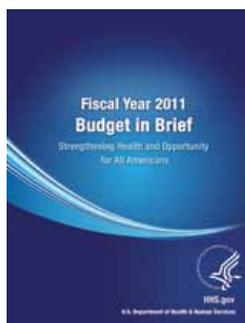
was suspended by the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 and temporarily restored through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Two improvements to the child support enforcement process also are part of the budget.

The FY 2011 budget proposes to improve child support enforcement by authorizing the Secretary of HHS to take administrative action on behalf of a state to freeze and seize assets in accounts in multi-state financial institutions to satisfy child support obligations. This develops a uniform federal approach to freezing and seizing financial accounts that will greatly assist states in enforcing child support orders across state lines and will benefit financial institutions by standardizing and centralizing the freeze and seize.

It also provides for garnishment of certain benefits under the Longshore and Harbor Worker's Compensation Act for payment of child support. This proposal would

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

close a loophole to ensure that child support debt is honored regardless of whether the compensation benefits are pursuant to a state or federal statute.

Finally, Access and Visitation grant funding would be increased to \$12 million and also would be made available to tribal child support programs that have operated for at least one year. This proposal recognizes the importance of helping the emotional connection between noncustodial parents and their children, the strong demand for these services, and the link between access and visitation services and increased child support compliance.

Also significant to the child support program is a proposal to use TANF funds to create a new Fatherhood, Marriage and Families Innovation Fund with two equal funding streams to support states' development, implementation and evaluation of comprehensive fatherhood initiatives (including those incorporating marriage components) and demonstrations geared toward improving outcomes for custodial parents who face

serious barriers to self-sufficiency.

The ACF Congressional Budget Justification document accompanying the Innovation Fund proposal specifies that "Strong linkages with states' child support enforcement programs and community partners will be essential to successful implementation of these new initiatives."

Key priorities in the HHS FY 2011 budget include building the foundation for health insurance reform; strengthening the health care system and improving access to care, including increasing child health care access; reducing health fraud; promoting public health; protecting Americans from public health threats and terrorism; improving the wellbeing of children, seniors and households; and investing in scientific research and development.

The President submitted *the budget*; now Congress will craft and pass 13 appropriations bills.

Recovery Spending Update



February 17 marked the first anniversary of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The Department of Health and Human Services has led several initiatives to help spur new economic growth in response to the worst economic

crisis since the great depression.

The ARRA is a combination of tax relief, financial assistance to families, state fiscal relief, and infrastructure projects designed to cushion the impact of the downturn and lay a foundation for economic recovery. Public and private forecasters estimate the program is already responsible for about 2 million jobs—putting it on target to support more than 3.5 million jobs by the end of 2010.

Under the ARRA, states and territories became eligible to again receive Federal Financial Participation matching of state expenditures using incentive payments in FY 2009 and FY 2010. Child support agencies in 50 jurisdictions have shared with OCSE how they are using these federal funds. Though these jurisdictions may direct the ARRA funding to several areas of the program, most plan to target one of three general areas: basic program operations, systems upgrades and

customer service. Here's the breakdown (as of January 2010):

- 31 have said they are using the funds on basic program functions, including staff, contracts, training, and general program operations;
- 16 have said they are using the funds on systems or technology enhancements, including data interfaces with other agencies; and
- 3 have said they are using the funds on improvements to customer service, including web-based or interactive voice response services, and expanding partnerships with fatherhood and workforce programs.

In the *November 2009 Child Support Report*, the Georgia Division of Child Support Services shared its story about using the federal funds to expand its fatherhood program, customer service, and data systems—all of the areas listed above.

See the <http://www.recovery.gov> for everything you ever wanted to know about the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Sending a Message About Communication



Mark Twain said: “The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightening and the lightning bug.”

Twain’s insight is timeless, even in our age of Facebook, Twitter and texting. And it’s a notion that’s getting a lot of attention by the Administration, which is well under way with plans to improve communications throughout the federal government.

When President Obama signed the Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government on his first day in office, he envisioned a new era of open and accountable government meant to bridge the gap between the American people and their government.

Then in December 2009, the White House issued an Open Government Directive requiring federal agencies to take steps to achieve key milestones in transparency, participation and collaboration. Posted on the Department of Health and Human Services’ Web site is its [Open Government Plan](#).

At OCSE we are trying to do our part to communicate more effectively with our stakeholders. We are focused on the message—what is the child support program all about? And we are focused on the process—how do we reach our stakeholders? We have many audiences, including federal, state, tribal, local and community partners that all have a stake in improving child support services to parents.

To keep pace with our society, our communications need to be shorter, clearer and faster. For starters, I send

periodic “chirps”—my version of tweets—about the program through the child support community.

For now, I e-mail the chirps, but like other forms of communication, these are a work in progress.

We will be looking at other collaborative communication solutions, such as the new free service that uses mobile phones—one of the most widely used technologies in the U.S.—to promote maternal and child health. The [text4baby](#) program provides moms with timely health tips via free text messages to help them take care of their health and give their babies the best possible start in life.

Updating our program’s communications strategies calls for creativity, participation and organizational change. In communications, as with other promising practices, child support agencies are learning from each other. In this issue on page 4, the California Division of Child Support Services shares its experience in delving into social media—Facebook and Twitter. Please share your experiences, too, about evolving methods of communication. The *Child Support Report* [editor](#) would like to hear from you.

So what would Mark Twain have to say about podcasting, texting, and YouTube? Whatever it is, I’m sure he would say it clearly and succinctly.

Vicki Turetsky



Facing Change at NCSEA Policy Forum

The annual policy forum in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the National Child Support Enforcement Association (NCSEA), Jan. 25 – 27, featured several panel discussions that reflected its theme, “The Changing Faces of Families.” Attendees tackled such issues as medical child support and health care, new research about American families, and the variety of judicial and administrative processes in state child support agencies. OCSE Commissioner Vicki Turetsky joined child support directors and researchers in considering the future of the child support program’s mission. The Commissioner focused on the program’s “opportunity to serve as a portal—or connector—for families, a program that can combine enforcement with individualized assessment for referral to comprehensive services.”

California Leveraging Facebook and Twitter For Quick, Efficient Messaging

By Randy Juster

California Department of Child Support Services

Social media offers a variety of tools for reaching child support stakeholders in an efficient and timely manner. With low cost and high public acceptance, the use of social media has become a priority for the State of California.

In addition to distributing information and updates, the California Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) uses Facebook and Twitter to support its critical agenda—the establishment and collection of financial and medical child support—and the requirement that all child support payments be sent to the California State Disbursement Unit.

After researching options and looking at child support agency Web sites in other states, DCSS chose a combination of Facebook and Twitter for its social media-based outreach needs. We chose Facebook for its popularity and ease of implementation by DCSS staff. We selected Twitter for the unique nature of its “Tweets”—messages limited to 140 characters.

The two services compliment each other, with Facebook providing detailed information on DCSS functions and services and Twitter providing instant news flashes. The Facebook and Twitter sites link the agency to a network of individuals and associations working to deliver better lives for California’s children and families.

Facebook content originates with the DCSS Office of Public Affairs. The simplicity of Facebook makes it easy for staff to upload content without requiring assistance from the IT department. Tweets can originate in Public Affairs or local county child support agencies can send them to DCSS for posting. Generally, we can create and upload Facebook and Twitter content in a few minutes, although it can be a challenge to compose Tweets with no more than 140 characters!

Child support agencies in other states follow DCSS Facebook and Twitter updates, receiving targeted messages such as: “All child support payments must be remitted to the California State Disbursement Unit.” DCSS also uses the opportunity to direct viewers to the DCSS Web site to access forms, publications and additional resources.



Check out the [California Department of Child Support Services Facebook page](#).

Being a part of the Facebook and Twitter networks means that DCSS news and updates also are picked up by Facebook and Twitter pages run by the American Payroll Association, Chambers of Commerce, media outlets and other professional organizations.

Facebooking

Leveraging Facebook requires displaying everything DCSS does on a single page. Since DCSS works with parents, employers and payroll professionals, we need to target information to each group quickly and efficiently. By displaying all services and functions on a single page, child support stakeholders can learn about DCSS and get information quickly.

For this reason, DCSS chose to start its Facebook site with a “Boxes” page. The boxes explain the agency’s mission and services with sections for each type of child support stakeholder: 1) Description & Mission; 2) Individuals Receiving Child Support; 3) Employer

Information; 4) Parents Paying Child Support; and 5) Additional Resources, which includes links to all local county child support agencies. Each section links to the related area on the DCSS Web site. Feedback from visitors is welcome but for security reasons the Facebook comments page (the “Wall”) is configured to prevent posts of personal or case-specific information.

Twittering

Leveraging Twitter requires posting news in 140 characters. Twitter compliments Facebook by enabling DCSS to send brief updates about child support events, scheduling and other news. With their 140-character limit, Tweets are up-to-the-minute news flashes aimed at users who want news in a “get in/get out” format. Media outlets follow Twitter to identify potential stories. DCSS also uses Tweets to direct attention to press releases and to the DCSS Web site.

DCSS is reaching more people as its online network grows. More individuals, employers, payroll professionals, other agencies and the media are following DCSS Tweets and becoming “fans” of the DCSS Facebook site. This social media exposure underscores that DCSS is forward-looking to trends in communication and outreach.

For more information, contact Randy Juster in DCSS at 916-464-3256 or randy.juster@dcss.ca.gov.



Take a look at [California's Twitter site](#).

Grant Projects

Thirty-Four Grants Awarded

In the tradition of OCSE grant projects, the 34 awarded this fiscal year will test new ways to meet the diverse needs of parents served by the child support program. The grant awards go to 30 Section 1115 grants—the most in any year—and four Special Improvement Project (SIP) grants. The awards for 1115 grants total \$2.4 million; for SIP grants about \$378,000.

Nine state child support agencies received Section 1115 grant awards for projects that will respond to the nation’s economic downturn—a new “priority area” for the Section 1115 grants. Four state child support agencies will partner with both welfare agencies and

universities on projects to improve services to families. Other Section 1115 projects will pursue methods for helping prisoners reenter society and better provide for their children.

The SIP grants will focus on improving the rate of child support collections and various methods for collaboration with courts.

See summaries of new and previous OCSE grant projects on the Web site:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/>

Consider displaying the link—or bookmarking the site—on your child support agency intranet to stay informed about upcoming grant opportunities and results.



New York City's New Modification Programs

Helping Noncustodial Parents Support Their Children



By Frances Pardus-Abbadessa
Deputy Commissioner
New York City HRA/Office of Child Support
Enforcement

The economic downturn continues to spur increases in petitions for downward modifications, and no state appears exempt from challenges in responding to these growing numbers of requests in a timely and effective manner. But the world of child support professionals is full of ingenuity, as exemplified by the New York City Office of Child Support Enforcement, which recently enhanced its ability to help eligible noncustodial parents expeditiously adjust their child support obligations to levels consistent with their new financial circumstances. This is its story.

—OCSE Region II Staff

The New York City Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) is constantly reminded of the increasing difficulties that some low-income noncustodial parents face in complying with their child support orders. OCSE responded in March 2009 by developing several new programs; but not at the expense of the initiatives' ultimate goal to increase compliance with child support orders and collections for families.

The core of these initiatives is the "Modified DSS Order/DSS Arrears Cap" program, referred to as MDO.

Collaborative Process

MDO was developed with the Family Court (New York is a judicial state). This extensive and successful collaboration culminated in an administrative process that eliminates the need for eligible noncustodial parents to seek modification relief in the court.

MDO recognizes that as income situations change, orders established years ago may no longer reflect a parent's ability to pay either current support or toward arrears. The program's success is based on diverting these parents (who have orders or arrears payable to the Department of Social Services) from a formal court setting to an informal administrative process that has authority to recommend a modification of the court order and/or cap on arrears.

Noncustodial parents can apply for the program at OCSE's Customer Service Walk-In Center, where

a caseworker will determine their eligibility. To qualify for the administrative process, the noncustodial parents must document that their income falls below the self-support reserve (\$14,620 for 2009). They can also reduce arrears owed to the Department of Social Services if they can show that their arrears accrued while their income was at or below the federal poverty level (\$10,830 for 2009).

Qualifying noncustodial parents enter into a stipulation to modify their order or reduce their arrears. Caseworkers complete the paperwork and Department of Social Services attorneys and OCSE's fiscal staff review and approve the stipulations. Approved stipulations then go to the court for a Support Magistrate's concurring signature.

Promising Results

New York City OCSE developed MDO based on the belief that a quick and efficient response to a noncustodial parent's request to align an obligation with current income and assets may have a positive effect on the respective collection rate and arrears accrual as well. So far, results look promising. As of January 2, 2010, less than one year after start up:

- The average monthly order amount (payable to Department of Social Services) was reduced from \$314 to \$54 for 60 noncustodial parents;
- The combined total amount of arrears owed to the department by 195 noncustodial parents was reduced from \$3,229,170 to \$1,340,373; and
- After signing stipulations, the percentage of noncustodial parents who paid support increased from 44 percent to 61 percent.

Plans to Expand

New York City OCSE hopes to expand its program in 2010, and the agency will continue with outreach in communities most likely to benefit from MDO. Plans are under way to incorporate MDO into an existing outreach program on-site at Riker's Island, New York City's largest correctional facility. That program, consisting of one-on-one case review discussions, would be expanded to processing modification stipulations on-site.

For further information contact Frances Pardus-Abbadessa at Ad9132@dfa.state.ny.us.



'Stand-Down/Hands Up' Event Assists Veterans in New Mexico

By Reta Oliver
OCSE Region VI

The New Mexico Child Support Enforcement Division presented a friendly face to veterans who attended the New Mexico "Stand-Down/Hands Up" event in Albuquerque last fall. The division is one of many child support agencies getting in on "stand down" events across the country to offer veterans assistance with a variety of services. The events are based on the military stand down during times of war when exhausted combat troops could return to a place of relative security to rest and recover.

Stand Down/Hands Up events—"Hands Up" represents the non-veterans who are homeless—are becoming common practice in many cities to advocate for veterans who are homeless and the entire homeless population. These events help this population with information about programs designed for specific needs. See a list of upcoming "stand down" activities around the country on the [VA Web site](#).

The next day, child support staff received numerous calls from attendees; some resulted in locating noncustodial parents and orders for immediate wage-withholding. Others called about license revocation and past-due child support or to learn about their options.

Judge Victoria J. Grant held on-site hearings for the homeless community, which offered a less intimidating location for those participating.

The annual event has grown over the past several years; word of mouth in the homeless community continues to bring in large numbers of attendees. Plans are under way for the October 2010 event in Albuquerque and possibly adding another event in Las Cruces.



STANDING FOR VETERANS — Child Support Enforcement Division's (CSED) Amanda Francia and Deb Taylor spearheaded the human services departments' involvement in the Albuquerque event, where 166 veterans were among the 466 who came by for assistance. In front (from left) are Ernesto Rodriguez and Mark Lailes, Medical Assistance Division; Amanda Francia, CSED; Reta Oliver, OCSE Region VI; and Deb Taylor, CSED. In back are Charles Johnson and Maria Ghahate, Income Support Division. Before the event, CSED staff gathered more than 400 pounds of food, plus bottled water, clothing and blankets. The event was hosted by the New Mexico Veterans Integration Center in partnership with the Veterans Administration Medical Center, the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions, and the Veterans Employment and Training Section.

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