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New campaign targets children of incarcerated parents



Commissioner's Voice

On June 12, just before Father's Day, the White House hosted a [Champions of Change](#) event honoring 12 individuals who have dedicated themselves to supporting children of incarcerated parents and their caregivers. Some of these children and caregivers attended the festivities, and so did some Muppets!

Perhaps the most exciting part of the event was the announcement of a new partnership with [Sesame Workshop](#) (a nonprofit, educational organization) to reach young children of incarcerated parents. Sesame Workshop's newest initiative, [Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration](#), provides free, bilingual (English/Spanish), multimedia tools for families with young children (ages 3 to 8) who have an incarcerated parent. The tools include a guide for parents and caregivers, a children's storybook, Sesame Street videos, a tip sheet, and the Sesame Street: Incarceration mobile app, all at [SesameStreet.org/Incarceration](#).

Also at the event, the Administration released a [fact sheet](#) on its efforts to support children of incarcerated parents. It describes White House efforts to partner across the federal government to identify opportunities to support these children and their caregivers. The partnership produced a [toolkit for child welfare and federal corrections professionals](#) to ease coordination among child welfare agencies, federal prisons, and residential reentry centers, so incarcerated parents can stay engaged in their children's lives or work toward reunification.

continued ▶



A video about a child with an incarcerated dad, featuring new characters ([screenshot at left](#)), is one of many [Sesame Workshop resources](#) you'll find to promote help for children with an incarcerated parent. The campaign launched just before Father's Day. See articles in this newsletter about recent child support agency events that also honored Father's Day.

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The group also produced [Children of Incarcerated Parents Myth Busters](#) to support efforts to help children of incarcerated parents, and launched a [Web Portal](#). The portal consolidates information on federal resources, grant opportunities, best and promising practices, and government initiatives that support children of incarcerated parents and their caregivers.

I encourage child support professionals and stakeholders in the child support program to publicize all of these meaningful materials.

The [Family Room Blog](#) on the Administration for Children and Families website talks more about the event and the materials.

Why are we involved?

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, an estimated 1.7 million children under the age of 18 had a parent in prison as of 2007—an increase of almost 80 percent since 1991. The majority of federal and state prisoners are parents, and about half of incarcerated parents have support orders. Many child support agencies have prison and jail outreach programs to work with incarcerated parents.

OCSE is involved in several projects to assist the incarcerated population, including the [Federal Interagency Reentry Council](#).

Is your agency involved in a project to help engage incarcerated parents with the child support process and with their children? Please submit a comment on the blog.



Vicki Turetsky

Black men in America

OCSE Commissioner Vicki Turetsky was named one of **“30 Leaders in the Fight for Black Men”** in a June edition of *Newsweek*. Read the main article, **“The Fight for Black Men,”** a thoughtful perspective on black men in America, by Joshua Dubois, former head of the **White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships**.



California video to reach incarcerated moms

**By Laura Roth, Director
El Dorado County, California
Department of Child Support Services**

Two years in the making, the California Child Support Directors Association’s video production team completed a video for female inmates about their ongoing role as mothers despite their incarceration. The team, in collaboration with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, produced the 19-minute video to address key issues these women need to think about: child support, visitation, connecting with their children while “mom” is incarcerated, and ways to be successful when released.

The video encourages female inmates to take advantage of classes offered in prison on anger management, parenting, alcohol and drug abuse, and more. It also shows women ways they can stay connected with kids by mail while separated, and the importance of contacting the child support office as soon as incarceration begins to ensure support-ordered amounts are suspended while these noncustodial inmates are unable to work.

All actors in the video are child support employees from San Joaquin, El Dorado, Solano, and Marin counties. Filming took place in a closed California women’s facility. In May, the video was shown at the California child support conference.

For more information on this video, or to get on the list to receive a free copy, please contact Laura Roth at laura.roth@edcgov.us or the California Child Support Director’s Association at lbispham@csdaca.org. (See a video for incarcerated fathers, also produced by CSDA.)



Statistics: Honoring our military and veteran families

July signifies Independence Day and also a time to learn more about military and veteran parents in child support programs across the country. Here are some statistics of interest.

AIAN service members and veterans

American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) service members and veterans serve in the U.S. Armed Forces at a higher rate and a younger age than other service members. In 2010, there were 154,305 AIAN veterans. They had:

- The lowest median personal income (\$27,129)
- Statistically lower attainment of college credits and degrees
- A 7.1% unemployment rate compared to 4.9% for other races
- A significantly higher disability rate, 36.4%, more than 10 points higher than all other races (26.2%)

Learn more from the Department of Veterans Affairs report, “[American Indian and Alaska Native Servicemembers and Veterans](#)” (September 2012).

Military divorce rate down

A [Military.com](#) article reported in January that the military divorce rate went down slightly in 2012, to 3.5 percent, according to Pentagon statistics. Between 2011 and 2012, the divorce rate went down slightly in every service among male and female service members of all ranks.

“Enlisted female soldiers and Marines, however, continue to experience the highest rate of divorce—9.4 percent and 9.3 percent respectively. In the Army, the female enlisted divorce rate is more than triple that of enlisted males. Still, those rates are down from the 2011 rates of 9.6 percent in Army and 9.8 percent in the Marine Corps.”

Although the overall rate, which had crawled slowly up from 2.6 percent in 2001 to 3.7 percent in 2011, is starting to move downward, researchers hesitate to call the decrease a trend until they see it continue for a longer period.

News briefs

Child support bill passes House

On June 18, the House passed [H.R. 1896](#) – International Child Support Recovery Improvement Act of 2013 – by a vote of 394-27, under suspension of the rules (an expedited voting process). This bill, in part, amends the Social Security Act to ensure that the U.S. can comply with the requirements of the Hague Convention on the International Recovery of Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance. The next step toward ratification of the Hague Treaty is for the Senate to take up similar legislation. (For a full description of the required steps toward U.S. ratification of the Treaty, please see the [Dear Colleague Letter on the OCSE website](#) – Hague Convention on the International Recovery of Child Support.) Look for updates in future editions of the *Child Support Report*.



New storybook for families

OCSE published its first storybook for families, [Child Support Services and You, Let's Work Together](#). See a link to the storybook on the [OCSE Families page](#). The storybook illustrates the importance of both parents working with the child support program. Please share it with families and organizations in your communities.

President's Father's Day message

In honor of Father's Day, President Barack Obama dedicated his June 15 Weekly Radio Address to fathers. In it, he mentions child support reform and why father engagement matters to children. [See the video on YouTube](#).



Volunteers offer valuable services in Texas child support division



Laurie Sellars from Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania is volunteering this summer for the Family Initiatives section of the Texas Child Support Division



**By DeeDee Cauwe, Public Information Officer
Texas Office of the Attorney General, Child Support
Division**

Deputy Director Charles Smith started his career with the Child Support Division, Texas Office of the Attorney General, as a volunteer in 1988. He was a student at Texas Tech University when he took his uncle’s advice to volunteer at the child support office in Lubbock.

“Coming from a two-parent home, I don’t recall ever hearing about child support prior to my first day at the office,” Smith says, recounting his experience. “Needless to say, it was the people and not the mission that initially brought me into the child support community. Everyone at the office was so nice and willingly shared their knowledge with me. The positive atmosphere they created for me as a volunteer made me stay long enough to fall in love with the mission of the program.”

Smith’s success story is just one of many echoed throughout the Attorney General’s Child Support Division, and the future potentially holds more. With the start of summer comes a new crop of student volunteers eager to learn and contribute, and the Child Support Division is just as eager to have them.

How volunteers help

Each year, the Texas Attorney General’s Office extends the reach of its child support workforce by using the skills and abilities of hundreds of volunteers. Volunteers from all walks of life help the Attorney General’s Office serve families and

children more efficiently and effectively. The volunteers perform data entry and filing, assist attorneys and child support officers, and more. Volunteering can benefit people seeking new job skills, student interns seeking to satisfy course requirements, and retirees and others who simply wish to give back to their communities.

The volunteers help children in the long run; they have a positive effect on taxpayers as well. Last year, volunteers and student interns donated more than 54,000 hours, saving Texas taxpayers \$1.1 million.

Summer is the perfect time for student volunteers to make a difference and gain valuable skills. For the past seven years, students from the Notre Dame School in Dallas, which serves students ages 8 to 21 with developmental disabilities, have volunteered in local child support offices. The students perform tasks such as metering mail, shredding, sorting, and filling copiers and fax machines with paper.

University students also volunteer at local child support offices. Through these opportunities, student volunteers not only gain valuable skills and experience to add to their resumes, but they can potentially launch a career with the child support division. Adding to his fond memories of volunteer work, Deputy Director Smith says, “Today, I hope we create that same sense of community and purpose for every volunteer who walks through our doors.”

For further information, contact DeeDee Cauwe at devone.cauwe@texasattorneygeneral.gov.

Georgia cites successes in its Problem Solving Court



By Gary Driggers
Georgia Division of Child Support Services

In Augusta, GA, Problem Solving Court (PSC) Coordinator Reggie Cofer received a call from the PSC judge who wanted to connect someone to the program. The individual had been in jail for contempt of court for nonpayment and basically had given up hope for a productive life. The following morning, the participant met with Cofer in his office and learned about a hiring event by an employment agency. Cofer went with the participant to the event. Before the end of the next week, the young man was working and able to start paying consistently.

While in PSC, the participant also worked with the Access and Visitation provider to improve relationships with three custodial mothers of his children. He is seeking legitimation for his children, working, and considering a psychology or criminal law degree.

“PSC has helped me realize my potential and decide what I want to do with my life,” said the father.

PSC’s responsibility

The Georgia Child Support Problem Solving Court, also known as Parental Accountability Court, uses a problem-solving court approach to help noncustodial parents, including the father mentioned above, to overcome barriers to meeting their child support obligations. Problem solving courts focus on rehabilitation and personal responsibility. The program combines the justice system with rehabilitation services to address the barriers faced by the noncustodial

parent.

The Georgia Division of Child Support Services (DCSS) has partnerships with public agencies and community groups, which provide services that address the personal barriers of the noncustodial parent. The program uses a team approach through intense monitoring, judicial oversight, and partnerships with community agencies. Participants can graduate from the program by paying child support consistently for six to twelve months and by maintaining employment and improving themselves through education.

“For most people who have jobs or who have resources, the threat of taking their driver’s license or professional license is all it takes,” said Coweta Judicial Circuit Superior Court Judge John Simpson. “This is a different subset. This group of people can sit in the county jail for 100 days. They can’t borrow. They can’t get a relative or a friend to help them come up with that money.”

Achievements, one and all

PSC coordinator Frank Van Houten in Ellijay, GA, worked with a noncustodial parent who has multiple children on three different cases. The young man was over \$10,000 in arrears and had no direction in his life. The coordinator saw that the father had determination to change, but he lacked the tools to break down his financial barriers. After completing the program, the young man told the judge that he feels proud that he put his children first and thanked the PSC program for teaching him life skills and showing him that no matter how high the barrier, he could achieve a positive outcome.

During the period July 1, 2012 – April 30, 2013, the program helped 313 participants in 11 problem solving courts statewide, resulting in 76 percent now paying their child support. Incarceration cost-savings to Georgia taxpayers reached \$3.8 million during the same period. Additionally, 538 children are being cared for financially—the real human side to this—which has led to better lives for the people involved.

“The program works,” said David, a previously unemployed participant with three cases. “I have learned a great deal about becoming a father. Any man can be a daddy, but not a father. The Problem Solving Court has given me a second chance to do right by my children. The program has taught me how to think positively. I now have a closer relationship with my children and I’m no longer at odds with their mothers.”

For more information about the Child Support Problem Solving Courts in Georgia, contact PSC Manager Susan Cosby at 404-657-3875 or sfcosby@dhr.state.ga.us.

“Any man can be a daddy, but not a father. The Problem Solving Court has given me a second chance to do right by my children.”

Change management: Connecting can make a difference

By Robert A. Gruhl, Assistant Director
Montgomery County, Ohio,
Department of Job & Family Services

Robert Gruhl shares additional thoughts on managing change in the child support program. See his original article about change management in the [January 2013 Child Support Report](#).

All too often, the child support world uses vernacular that speaks volumes about our bureaucracy. Such words express to our customers a system that is overwhelmed and void of the personal attachment we are trying to promote to help families and children.

One example is the word *refer*. This overused idiom is a piece of our nomenclature that I wish never existed and, in fact, is a figure of speech that I highly discourage our staff from using. For example, a phrase such as “we’d like to refer you to our seek work program” demeans the human

spirit and connotes a defeatist perception on the part of our staff to our customers.

Words like *refer* can signify a lack of trust or follow-through and sometimes leave our customers with a feeling that they’re just another case, just another number. When addressing my team and colleagues, I insist that we substitute with words like *connect* or *link* when we have the privilege of speaking with our customers.

By definition, *refer* indicates that someone is submitting something to another for consideration. On the other hand, *connect* and *link* imply that we intend to attach or join someone to another person. This difference is significant, and customers will tell you that! Does it take more time and resources to personally link individuals? Absolutely. Does it stand in the way of moving cases through the system faster? Perhaps. However, using the power of positive language to connect people together is clearly at the heart of where our industry is headed.

Toward that end, our fatherhood coordinator in Montgomery County consistently uses this form of colloquialism when working with ex-offenders and child welfare participants. One individual (known to us as Clipper D.) stated in a recent workshop, “Had it not been for Mr. Mike connecting me to the Office of Ex-Offender Re-entry, I would never have gotten to see my kids.”

Underestimating the potency of our words clearly hinders our ability to connect and link individuals to the programs they need to thrive in our complicated world. To sum it up: *refer* people to a good book, but *link* them to service delivery systems and to people that can make a difference in their lives. You’ll be amazed at the results.

Delaware puts on sporty Father’s Day tribute

By Valerie Merritt, OCSE

Chuck Hayward (*in photo*), director of the Delaware Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE), spearheaded a partnership with the Wilmington Blue Rocks, a popular Delaware minor league baseball team, for a special Father’s Day tribute to dads and their children.

DCSE sent 3,300 post-card invitations to noncustodial parents who have paid over 80 percent of their current support in the past year offering them Blue Rocks tickets at a discounted group ticket rate. DCSE and two other state agencies developed two public service announcements to promote parent involvement with their children at outings such as baseball games. The PSAs are airing at Blue Rocks games throughout the playing season.

The Delaware Department of Health and Social Services and other community organizations will have tables at the games to promote services available to children. The first 1,000 males through the gate on Father’s Day received a free Blue Rocks T-shirt with a department logo on the back and the tagline “Raising a child is a team sport!”



Child support agency teams up with library in Alameda County, CA



Event honors fathers: Matt Brega and Rosemary Gray (second and third from the left), and Ignacio Guerrero, Jason Wright, and Kicheko Reese (first, second and third from the right) honored fathers from the Volunteers of America and The 7 Step Foundation with athletic equipment donated by Alameda County Division of Child Support Services staff.

**By Matthew Brega, Director
Alameda County, CA, Department of Child Support Services**

To increase family-centered services to its customers, California's Alameda County Department of Child Support Services and the Alameda County Library teamed up to create a library branch in Pleasanton, CA. This new P.U.L.S.E. (Pop Up Library Services for Everyone) branch allows clients to get a library card, provides programming, and distributes children's and parenting books, as well as serves as an information hub for services related to employment, custody and visitation, health information, paternity, life-long learning, and other child support-related issues.

In addition to celebrating the partnership with the library, the department used its June reopening event to recognize Father's Day and the important role of dads. Department staff donated 75 new balls to give out to its noncustodial parents at the event to reinforce the fact that financial support is only one aspect of raising a healthy child and to encourage a strong father-child relationship through the opportunity to play together.

The DCSS lobby offers children literacy work stations, a P.U.L.S.E. machine, and a public kiosk with links to county programming and job search sites.



Lisa Harris from the Alameda County Library meets with a father to demonstrate the P.U.L.S.E. machine.





Mobile apps are here Director recaps experience from California conference

By Kathy Sokolik, Director
*Regional Department of Child Support Services
Santa Cruz-San Benito, CA*

Recently, my mother asked me, “What exactly is an app?” (This was shortly after I had explained to her what Wi-Fi means—I frequently serve as my mother’s help desk.) In the simplest terms, an app is a software application designed to run on a mobile device. MS Word is a software application designed to run on my PC and make me more productive. “Angry Birds” is an app designed to run on my smart phone during long meetings. However, as more of us have switched to using tablets to meet our computer needs, mobile apps have quickly migrated from the bored room to the boardroom.

Our first app-venture

The California Child Support Directors Association recently ventured into the mobile app world to support our 2013 Annual Training Conference. In early May, more than 600 child support professionals gathered in Orange County to learn new skills, trade best practices, and meet their colleagues from around the state. It was another wildly successful conference, but something was missing: binders, hand-outs, and tote-bags full of paper—and overflowing recycle bins at the end of the conference.

This year we elected to take one more step toward “green” (we are California, after all) by building a conference mobile app. We used Grupio as the platform for our conference content. (This is not an endorsement of Grupio. Google “conference mobile app” and you will find no fewer than 10 companies offering their services.) (And if my mother

is reading this, I’ll call you later and explain “Google” as a verb.)

Conference mobile apps offer attendees easy access to conference materials via their mobile device. We uploaded our conference program, included session descriptions, links to the session materials, and biographies and photos of speakers. That way, attendees were able to preview sessions and add the ones they were interested in to their personal conference calendar.

Even with all of that, and by adding a map of the area and the layout of the conference center, we barely scratched the surface of what the app could do. Features we didn’t use this year (but plan to explore for our next event) include more attendee-to-attendee interaction (Business Card Exchange, for example), giving presenters a way to poll their audience during sessions, providing other logistical information to attendees (maybe a list of local restaurants or airport transportation options), and integrating conference evaluations into the app. And, we can count on the app suppliers to continue to upgrade their products and offer more services by the time we’re ready to build an app for our 2014 conference.

Knowing our audience

We instinctively knew that most of our attendees carried some kind of mobile device—be it a smart phone, tablet, or eReader; but we wanted to ensure that all of our attendees could access our electronic conference materials. In addition to making the app available for mobile devices, we made it available for the PC as well, and set up a cyber café for our attendees who either didn’t have a mobile device or chose not to download the app in advance. Not surprisingly, we saw no long waiting lines at the cyber café. Our instincts were right. The take-up rate for the app was exceptionally high given this was our first experience with this technology.

Post-conference, I asked my staff who attended to give me feedback on the app. Did they download it? Did they use it? How did they like it? The feedback was 100% positive. They liked not carrying around the binders and tote bags. They liked being able to create a conference session schedule for themselves. And, they liked being able to access materials and speaker information before the conference—and after—whether they attended that session or not.

Printed programs are static and cumbersome; mobile app content lives on beyond the conference and can be updated to improve its relevance to attendees even after the event. For example, suppose during the Q&A portion of a session, new and interesting information emerged. That information could be added to the session materials and made available to all conference attendees through the mobile app.

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Lessons we learned

These are some lessons learned from our developers' and deployers' perspectives.

- Start early. We thought we'd need about six months, but we only had about four. Whatever amount of time you think you need, double it if you can. If you are an experienced conference planner, you know that it always takes more time than allotted for speakers to get their materials in. Once submitted, the materials may need to be reformatted to work smoothly with the app.
- Dedicate a team for your event devoted exclusively to working with the mobile app.
- Plan in advance. Get to know all the features your platform can provide, how they interact, choose the ones you will use, and then decide on content you need.
- Have someone on your team who is experienced with formatting (and reformatting) graphics. You'll want your app to include speaker photos, company logos, banner ads, and maps. Don't expect all of those entities to provide what you need in the correct format.
- Build in adequate time to test and retest. After you finish your testing, give the app to a novice or someone not involved in development, and let them user-test it.
- Advertise. Advertise. Advertise. This was our first eConference adventure. We published the app

information on our website, in every conference-related e-blast, in our conference registration materials, and on our onsite signage. We also provided a small "cheat sheet" onsite—at the registration desk, the cyber café, and booths in the Exhibit Hall. Attendees need to know where to find the app for download.

If you're interested, our conference mobile app is still available. Go to your favorite app store and download Grupio (it's free). Launch Grupio and then search for "CSDA." If you have questions about the app, feel free to contact our CSDA office at 916-446-6700 and talk to either Lisa Bispham (lbispham@csdaca.org) or Megan Greene (mgreene@csdaca.org) for your technical or financial questions.

I'm not going to use the old cliché that conference mobile apps are the wave of the future because they're *here*. (The National Child Support Enforcement Association will use a mobile app for its annual conference in Baltimore, Aug. 5 to 7.) Mobile app content management will only get easier, the features richer, and the costs lower. As our conference attendee base gets younger, we have increasing expectations of delivering content electronically. I heartily encourage you to look into using a mobile app for your next event—and retire your stapler and three-hole punch.

Media Matters

How to use teen cell phone statistics to your web design advantage

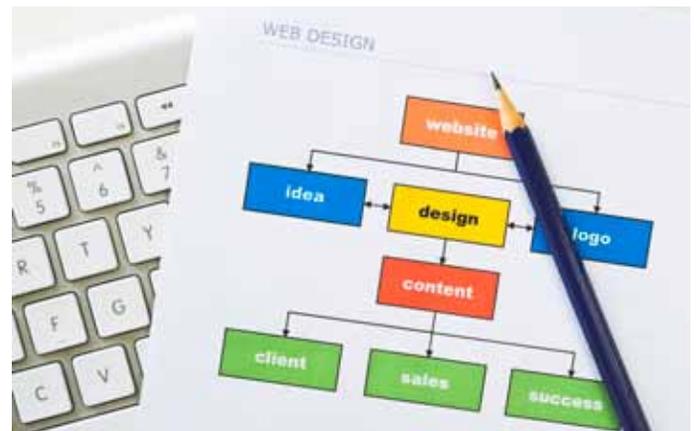
By Kim Danek, OCSE

The [June Media Matters column](#) featured data from a study called "Teens and Technology 2013," which gives insight into more than just teenager's mobile phone habits. This month's article reviews why such data matters when offices are determining the best ways to connect with their key audiences.

Understanding today's trends

Because teens are on the forward edge of using technology, child support professionals need to monitor and understand data about them. What teens do today can signal trends that adults will adopt a few years later. Here are the examples in last month's column plus another:

- Almost 75% of teens surveyed call themselves "mobile internet users" compared to 55% of adults who say the same thing about themselves.



- Of those mobile-user teens, 25% access the internet mostly from their cell phones; 10% more than adults.
- Nearly 75% of adults between 18 and 49 access the internet on a cell phone, tablet, or other mobile device.

If such a large percentage of your target audience may be accessing your web pages via a mobile device, or could be doing so in the future, what is the best way to get the information to them?

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Apps vs. mobile-friendly sites

When someone talks about getting organizational information out to a web customer who uses a cell phone or smart phone, the discussion often goes straight to smart phone applications (or apps). An app might be a great idea for interactive information exchanges with a customer; however, not every customer has a smart phone or app-friendly tablet such as an iPad. A single app does not work across all platforms (iPhone, Android, iPad, etc.), so one office may need several apps in order to reach a large audience.

Security could be an issue if the app contains or distributes sensitive data (child support case numbers, Social Security numbers, etc.). Apps also have to be updated periodically and distributed through a website or online store of some sort. It is often easier to make your website compatible for small-screens first.

Mobile-friendly websites

Do you know if your site is mobile friendly? Standard web pages do not always work on a cell phone screen. If your office is examining its future communications strategies, see if your websites are mobile-friendly. Drop down menus can be difficult to use. Large graphics can be time consuming to download and take up valuable real estate on small cell phone screens.

Look at your website on a smart phone or cell phone. Does it load properly? Is it easy to read? What could you do to make the experience better? The [HHS Digital Communications Mobile website](#) describes it as a bite-snack-meal approach. Give the visitor a few lines of text (bites) with the most important at the top of the page so they can snack on the information they want and decide whether to have the whole meal. [Usability.gov](#) can also provide valuable experience for agencies looking to “go mobile.”

With sympathy

OCSE and the child support community were sad to learn of the passing of former OCSE Commissioner Judge David Gray Ross on June 4. A retired Army colonel, Judge Ross was appointed in 1993 by President Clinton. His long and distinguished public service career also included tenure as Chairman of the Prince George's County Community College Board of Trustees, member of the Maryland House of Delegates, and Judge on the 7th Judicial Circuit Court of Maryland.

56% of adults use smartphones

The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project reported on June 5 that a majority of Americans own a smartphone of some kind. See [Smartphone Ownership 2013](#).

Pew's definition of a smartphone owner includes anyone who says *yes* to one or both of the following:

- Is your phone a smartphone? 55% of cell phone owners say *yes*.
- Does your phone operate on a smartphone platform common to the U.S. market? 58% of cell phone owners say *yes*.

The report says: “Taken together, 61% of cell owners said *yes* to at least one of these questions and are classified as smartphone owners. Because 91% of the adult population now owns some kind of cell phone, that means that 56% of all American adults are now smartphone adopters. One third (35%) have some other kind of cell phone that is not a smartphone, and the remaining 9% of Americans do not own a cell phone at all.”



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