

Child Support Report

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COMMISSIONER'S VOICE

2019: Finishing Strong



As we wrap up the 2019 calendar year, I begin my reflection with gratitude. I'm thankful for the collaboration, enthusiasm, and hard work of the child support professionals within OCSE and across the country. Your innovative ideas, customer service, and performance focus have continued to move the program forward and make a positive difference for children and families. As I look back on OCSE's accomplishments to advance the national child support enforcement program, I'm pleased to recount some of the highlights of 2019.

Father engagement

OCSE played key roles in the first-ever ACF-hosted Fatherhood Summit, which brought more than 600 participants together with a focus on engaging fathers to improve outcomes for children and families across human service programs. With the goals to build a national culture that embraces the essential role of fathers in society and minimize barriers fathers have to overcome to receive inclusive and effective family services, ACF is putting concept into practice. While child support is always a key topic at fatherhood events, OCSE shared many examples of state and tribal agencies partnering with local fatherhood programs to improve fathers' ability to provide for the social, emotional, and economic well-being of their children.

Technical assistance

For the first time in over 10 years, OCSE held an All-Staff Training Conference with two days of workshops on technology, policy, cost allocation, communication skills, leadership, and more. We made this investment for the professional development of OCSE employees and, ultimately, for the benefit of the states and tribes we serve. A few months later, we published a list of the numerous services we offer state and tribal child support agencies — an extensive menu of training, technical assistance, and resources that span all aspects of the program.

Innovation

OCSE awarded grant funding for the Intergovernmental Case Processing Innovation Demonstration to nine child support agencies to test innovations that will increase payments and improve case processing procedures for parents who live in a jurisdiction different from their child. By testing improvements to automation, staffing, data analysis, or system analysis, this grant will help develop creative and innovative processes that will make sharing information, transferring data,

continued

I encourage all of you to celebrate the holiday season, spend time with family and friends, reflect on your good fortune, and focus on yourself without thinking too much about work.

Wishing you happy holidays!

Scott Lekan



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OCSE-State Collaboration

Regional program specialist Nancy Mathieson helps with a reintegration simulation during a site visit to Oregon. Regional program specialists serve many functions including providing states with technical assistance and training staff on federal reporting requirements. Read more about the regional offices in [Collaboration Makes a Difference on page 5.](#)

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and communicating with other jurisdictions more effective. We anticipate the outcomes will improve case processing and increase consistent support payments on intergovernmental cases, and the grantees will share their innovations with the entire child support community for possible replication.

Increased flexibility

As OCSE continues to review requirements and regulations for areas where we could exercise greater flexibility, we have streamlined the requirements for states to conduct feasibility studies associated with modernization of statewide child support enforcement systems. We notified states that they will be held harmless while we review comments on the proposed changes to withholding of Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), and Social Security Retirement (SSR) concurrent benefits. OCSE has also clarified guidance on tribal funding allowability to include outreach and education, intensive case management, minor transportation, and domestic violence awareness and protocols.

Promoting work

OCSE paired the publication of an [information memorandum](#) about applying for a funding and regulatory waiver to help create employment services for noncustodial parents with the launch of [Knowledge Works!](#) — a collection of tools, resources, and extensive technical assistance to help assess, design, implement, and enhance a child support-led NCP employment program. Multiple directors told us it would be helpful to have information from states currently operating employment programs, and we agreed that child support agencies nationwide could benefit from having a consistent framework to incorporate a work promotion program and evaluate its results. Watch for announcements of upcoming training webinars.

Looking to 2020

In the New Year, we will focus on these priorities: modernizing state systems; data analytics; increasing program awareness; and strengthening our federal, state, and tribal partnerships.

But people come first, ahead of processes and performance. So before we get busy tackling priorities for 2020, I encourage all of you to celebrate the holiday season, spend time with family and friends, reflect on your good fortune, and focus on yourself without thinking too much about work. Wishing you happy holidays!

Scott Lekan

A Look Back at the Year's A Look Inside OCSE

October 2019

The Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS) does more than help state child support programs. It also provides wage and income data to federal or state agencies that want to determine the effectiveness of their programs through evaluations or research, or want to develop job programs for skills training.

Read [Requesting Research Matching Agreements](#)

September 2019

OCSE's partnership with employers helped collect \$24 billion through income withholding in 2018.

Read [OCSE and Employer Collaboration - a Multibillion-Dollar Partnership](#).

May-June 2019

OCSE has resources to help answer questions about interstate or international case processing issues. Policy staff have held several training sessions to help state, local, and tribal child support professionals understand these often complicated cases.

Read [Interstate and International Case Processing Training](#).

March 2019

OCSE helps more than 100,000 children spend more time with parents and guardians through its Access and Visitation program.

Read [Access and Visitation Mandatory Grant Program](#).

January 2019

OCSE has a dedicated staff who make sure various audiences — from child support professionals to the White House and members of Congress — know what's going on in the child support program.

Read [Communicating with our Customers](#).

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Child Support and Sheriff Collaborate in Ashland County, OH

Dana Gillespie, Supervisor, Ashland County Child Support Agency

Successfully delivering effective child support services, especially in small jurisdictions, is often tied to leveraging extensive cooperation and collaboration to carry out our mission. When we work alone, we struggle and ultimately isolate ourselves from the community we're serving. As well trained as our staff are, they often need that extra bit of outside help. An external agency could find the piece of the puzzle that gives us a whole picture, moves us one locate away from advancing the case, or boosts noncustodial parents to cooperate and be partners in the financial support of their child.

A contract that works

One collaboration that's worked well for us is the cooperative relationship between our child support agency and the local sheriff's office. Ashland County, Ohio, has a population of about 53,000 people and a child support office that serves approximately 3,500 families. From the outset, we knew that it would be critical to locate our parties so we could provide services and effectively enforce child support orders. We entered into a contract to purchase services from the sheriff's office so they could administer our support enforcement program.

We certified that all of their services were eligible for federal financial participation reimbursement to keep the costs manageable. The list of tasks included service of process, control and safety, transportation, warrants,

and location. The key was to tailor our IV-D contract to meet the needs of our county so we could see the impact and benefits of the resources we committed to the program.

Service of Process

We use personal service on most of our administrative hearings. The sheriff's deputy that works with us travels throughout Ohio delivering child support paperwork. Our experience has been that most parties show up for hearings because of this personal service. They seem to take this more seriously so we rarely experience no-shows.

We use certified mail for out-of-state services. It takes 25-30 days for us to receive certified mail receipts; therefore, it's almost impossible to send out timely notices by regular mail. Our assigned deputy sheriff, Monica Viloría, often has the party sign a waiver if they were not given 30 days advance notice. Using due diligence, the deputy tries to locate the party by checking with neighbors, friends, family, and employers. Amazingly, Deputy Viloría tracks down everyone. Many times the address we provide gets stale, but she still finds the party she's tracking.

Control and safety

We usually schedule the deputy to attend hearings for domestic violence cases, but we always check with the victim first so they don't feel doubly victimized. We advise the other party that a deputy will be present during the hearing and ask if that will be a problem. Most times they are fine with it, otherwise we schedule hearings separately.

Deputy Viloría will also contact a child support party about harassing phone calls or do welfare checks because of suicide threats. These cautionary interventions have been very effective because the harassment usually stops.



Deputy Sheriff Monica Viloría with members of the Ashland County child support staff



Dana Gillespie and Deputy Viloría discuss activities

As part of her contractual duties, Deputy Vioria transports hearing officers to surrounding jails and juvenile detention centers so the officer can perform genetic testing and handle support orders. She coordinates this with the jails and detention centers in advance.

Warrants and locates

Before we had a IV-D contract with the sheriff's office, we had approximately 300 outstanding warrants, some as much as eight years old. Clients would call to tell us the parent's location and demand we pick them up because they have an outstanding warrant. It was hard to explain that, as a child support enforcement agency, we couldn't do anything. To the public, this was a poor reflection on the child support agency. At the start of our IV-D contract, the deputy conducted a round-up and cleared the outstanding warrants.

The partnership with our sheriff's office gives us peace of mind. We have all the resources and tools that enable us to focus solely on the core child support program mission

In 2014, the Ohio State Patrol began permitting civil warrants to be entered into its Law Enforcement Automated Data Systems. Ashland County sheriffs entered all warrants into the system and validated them regularly. Each month, the Juvenile Court and Domestic Court review the data and provide an active warrant list. Our child support agency along with the deputy sheriff match this list to our agency warrant database to create a work schedule for the deputy.

We use the electronic location tools we have; but when those don't yield results, we turn our locate actions to the deputy who invariably finds the parties we need.

The partnership with our sheriff's office gives us peace of mind. We have all the resources and tools that enable us to focus solely on the core child support program mission of locating the parties, establishing paternity, creating support orders, and enforcing and modifying those orders.

For more information about the Ashland County collaboration, contact Dana Gillespie at Dana.Gillespie@jfs.ohio.gov

TANF Arrears Continue 10-Year Decline

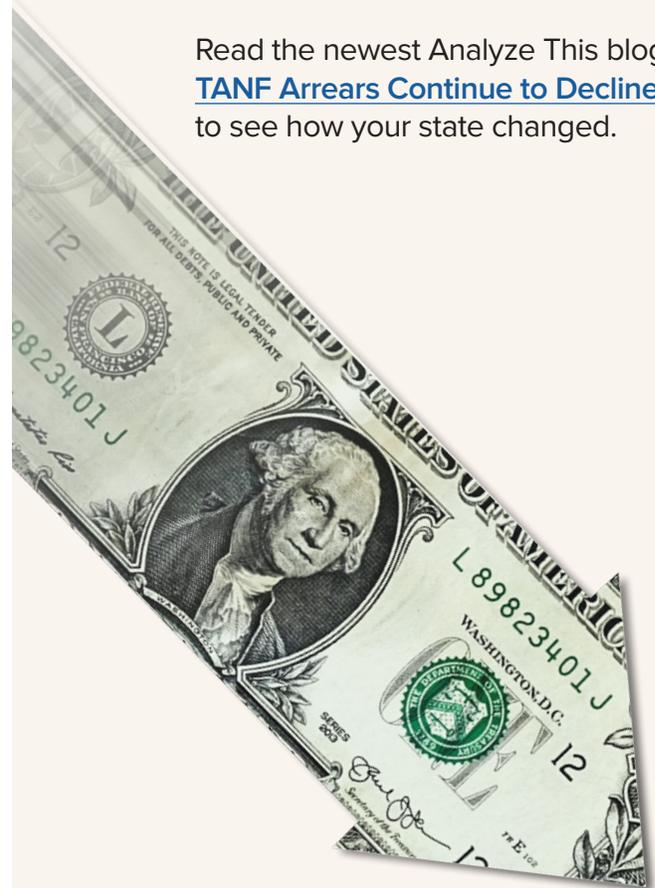
A blog by OCSE's Elaine Sorensen examines how TANF arrears have changed.

Since FY 2008, nearly every state and jurisdiction had a decline in TANF arrears (cash assistance money owed to the government as child support). Nationally, between FY 2008 and FY 2018, TANF arrears declined by 32%.

At the same time, total arrears (child support owed to families as well as to federal and state governments) increased by 14%.

Several states reduced their TANF arrears significantly. In FY 2008, seven states had TANF arrears that represented more than half of their total arrears. By 2018, only one state remained in this situation. California has the largest amount of TANF arrears among states. It dropped from 51% in FY 2008 to 40% in FY 2018.

Read the newest Analyze This blog, [TANF Arrears Continue to Decline](#), to see how your state changed.



A LOOK INSIDE OCSE

The Office of Child Support Enforcement provides more services than people generally see. This column highlights tasks that federal child support staff handle. To read previous articles, visit [A Look Inside OCSE](#) on our website.

Collaboration Makes a Difference

Tasha Brown, OCSE

OCSE regional offices host periodic trainings on financial management and federal reporting to ensure states comply with federal regulations and to help our grantees address program challenges and meet performance standards. This is one of many activities regional staff offer, working directly with state, local, and tribal child support offices.

Diverse tasks

Regional offices play an essential role in implementing, monitoring, and evaluating activities associated with planning and administering the child support program. Here are examples of routine tasks:

- Perform timely and accurate reviews of state and tribal plans and [OCSE waivers](#)
- Monitor state and tribal submissions of federally required reports and provide technical assistance as needed
- Conduct research of child support enforcement statutes, regulations, and legislative history
- Conduct annual site visits with grantees, and track and identify technical assistance activities with child support grantee agencies

Each quarter, we analyze grantee-submitted statistical reports and prepare summary reports. These summaries contain our analysis, appropriate corrective action proposals for program improvement when needed, and recommendations.

We collaborate with our OCSE colleagues in the Office of Audit and Division of Federal Systems to provide child support grantee agencies with the best technical assistance on federal financial reporting. The data in these reports has to be accurate so regional program specialists can provide effective strategies for improving state and tribal performance.

Onsite assistance

We also schedule onsite visits with state and tribal programs to meet with grantee senior leadership, tour facilities, and discuss best practices and challenges. Besides this work, we analyze and communicate new statutory and regulatory policy requirements and objectives.

Staff provide policy interpretations and share education on child support core services in response to public inquiries. We even find time to collaborate with program officials across jurisdictions about strategies and OCSE activities to help guide families toward self-sufficiency.

Regional staff assist families on their road to becoming self-sufficient by meeting them where they are...

Interacting with the public

Regional staff assist families on their road to becoming self-sufficient by meeting them where they are, which has provided opportunities to engage justice-involved parents at correctional facilities. For example, since incarcerated parents can face many challenges affecting their reintegration efforts, Region 4 staff joined Georgia Child Support Services program staff in explaining the advantages of the child support system. During a visit to a transitional center in Columbus, GA, staff discussed ways that justice-involved parents could better manage their arrears. The staff also connected the parents to organizations tasked with addressing other issues such as housing, job training, debt management, visitation, and other supportive services.

Overall, regional staff are subject matter experts. We serve as facilitators and technical leads on special projects involving shared program information, issues, and challenges child support offices experience in a multitude of areas, including financial reporting, urban jurisdiction, and intergovernmental matters.

Tasha Brown is a program specialist in Region 4. For more information, contact [the OCSE program specialist for your region](#).



OCSE Region IV staff held a technical assistance visit for Georgia Child support staff in July 2019

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

OCSE is looking for examples of professional development training methods and programs. If your agency set SMARTER goals for 2019 that worked well or you're setting some for 2020, [send us your story](#). Help inspire child support professionals in the New Year!

SMARTER Goals for Supervisors

Jeff Isaacson, Trainer and Curriculum Developer, and Graham Button, Training Program Coordinator, *Child Support Training and Outreach Project, Professional Development Program*

In an era of high employee turnover, one of the most important jobs of child support coordinators and supervisors is to develop effective, individualized plans to help hire, train, and retain new and experienced workers. The first step of a successful training plan is for the supervisor to collaborate with each worker to develop goals. When goals are set effectively, workers know what their supervisors expect of them, how they can succeed, and what they should be working toward. An example of a goal for a new worker in the accounting track could be:

“You will learn how to do the accounting for a child support case.”

But is this goal effective? How will the worker or supervisor know when the worker has accomplished the goal? For a goal to be effective, it needs to be SMARTER.

S

Specific

What exactly do you want to accomplish?

M

Measurable

How will you know when the goal is met?

A

Attainable

Is this a goal you can reach?

R

Relevant

Does the goal tie in to your job tasks?

T

Time-Bound

What is the target date?

E

Evaluate

How successful are you?

R

Rework

Adjust the goal as necessary

An example of a SMARTER goal could be:

“Within the next two months, you will be able to correctly build accounts with appropriate ledgers and make any necessary financial adjustments with no errors.”

When compared to the original goal, this goal is SMARTER:

- **Specific:** It gives distinct tasks or actions that need to be accomplished — “build accounts” and “make any necessary financial adjustments.”
- **Measurable:** A supervisor can review the account and compare it with the court order to ensure that the account was built correctly (with no errors) and that the batches are correct.
- **Attainable:** Because this goal is specific and measurable with a realistic timeframe, and it's the natural first step for a new accounting track child support worker, it's attainable.
- **Relevant:** In this case, both goals are relevant because they directly relate to the worker's job tasks.
- **Time-bound:** It specifies that the goal needs to be accomplished within two months.
- **Evaluate and Rework:** These should be done by both the worker and the supervisor throughout the goal's timeframe. Maybe after a month, the worker has achieved this goal and needs another. Or perhaps after two months, the worker has not achieved the goal and the timeframe or training plan needs to be reworked. SMARTER goals should be flexible so they can be adjusted as they are evaluated and can be reworked as needed.

With an ever-changing workforce and evolving laws, regulations, and policies, supervisors and workers need to work together to create achievable and adaptable training plans. Using SMARTER goals helps ensure that child support workers get the training and support they need to understand and implement the program.

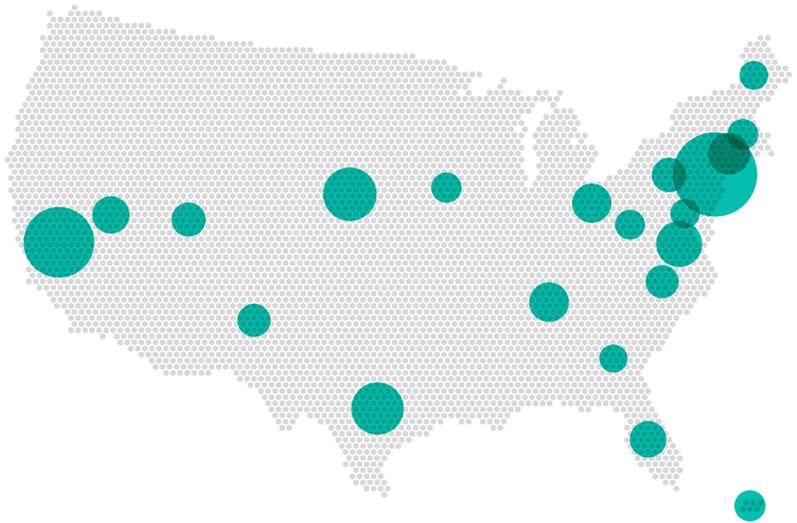
The Child Support Training and Outreach Project is part of the Professional Development Program of Rockefeller College at the University at Albany and the Research Foundation for State University of New York. For more information, contact Jeff Isaacson at Jeff.Isaacson@otda.ny.gov or Graham Button at Graham.Button@otda.ny.gov.

Passport Denial Program Heats Up

Fall's brilliant foliage is becoming a distant memory and colder weather is blowing in. But the OCSE Passport Denial Program is heating up as people plan their holiday and New Year's travel.

According to the article [Passport Denial Program 101](#), it's hard to collect past-due child support, especially when it reaches tens of thousands of dollars. Among noncustodial parents with child support debt, the average amount owed is more than \$21,000. When parents consciously choose not to pay, the Passport Denial Program can help child support programs collect past-due support from delinquent parents who want to travel outside of the United States.

Since January 2019, 53 states and territories have voluntarily reported total lump sum collections exceeding \$20 million. These payments have enabled noncustodial parents to redeem their passports so they can travel for graduations, weddings, vacations, employment, and more. Here are examples of recent collections provided by states:



- California \$146,000** – Parent took out a lien on personal property to pay support
- California \$126,000** – Parent sold property to pay arrearage
- California \$25,000** – Travel for work
- Connecticut \$50,000** – Travel
- Florida \$27,000** – Personal travel to the Caribbean
- Georgia \$5,000** – Personal travel to Europe
- Iowa \$9,000** – Travel for work
- Maine \$6,000** – Travel for work
- Maryland \$7,000** – Personal travel
- Massachusetts \$10,000** – Personal travel
- Nebraska \$123,000** – The court ordered parent to pay for the passport to be released
- Nebraska \$3,000** – Personal travel
- New Mexico \$16,000** – Travel
- New York \$401,000** – Travel to Asia
- New York \$89,000** – Travel for work
- Nevada \$30,000** – Personal travel to Asia
- North Carolina \$16,000** – Travel for work to Scandinavia
- Ohio \$38,000** – Parent sold property to pay arrearage
- Pennsylvania \$20,000** – Personal travel
- Puerto Rico \$11,000** – Personal travel to South America
- Texas \$116,000** – Travel
- Tennessee \$40,000** – Travel for work in Europe
- Utah \$19,000** – Personal Travel
- Virginia \$73,000** – Travel for work
- West Virginia \$8,000** – Personal travel to the Caribbean

States have reported passport denial collections of \$477.1 million since the program began in 1998. These monies provide significant financial support to children and families, some of whom have never received a child support payment.

For more information about the Passport Denial Program, email collections@acf.hhs.gov.

Make Your New Year's Resolution an Investment in Yourself

Patricia Theiler, OCSE

*"The best investment you can make is in yourself."
—Warren Buffett*

Do you want to make a New Year's resolution that will have huge payoffs not just for yourself, but for your organization, your community, and the people you serve? Make 2020 the year you create a Professional Development Plan.

A google search of "professional development" shows hundreds of links by organizations and experts on how to improve your professional and leadership skills — often breaking the process into bite-sized portions, such as "10 Ways to Maximize" or "Five Steps to Improve" your performance and opportunities at work. Although the number of steps and the particulars vary, there are a number of common themes to the advice provided by business and academic leaders, life coaches, and motivational speakers.

Research the available resources

Not all professional development requires investment in expensive credentials. Find out about free training or materials in your organization or in your community. Resources also include contacting potential mentors who might appreciate the opportunity to share their expertise. At the same time, look at your gaps in skills and explore avenues that give you the expertise you need. Baby steps can work wonders. Need to improve your PowerPoint presentations? Your familiarity with using Excel? Find a library book, a friend or colleague, or a workshop and sharpen your skills.

What potential resources do *you* have to offer your organization that aren't being tapped? The organizational and management skills you use to organize a major fundraising drive for your church can be useful when helping your team track and manage projects more efficiently.

Take on new challenges

Don't be afraid to take on "thankless" tasks. Volunteering for the move committee in your office may provide a good networking opportunity — and don't be surprised if the team that stepped up for the "thankless" job is the one that is recognized for its achievements at the end of the year. Isn't a leader often the one who steps up when others aren't willing?

continued

How to Find Career Development Opportunities in Your Area

Interested in volunteering for a cause that you support? Want to find free (or low-cost) trainings in your community? Check out these resources and start exploring — your gift of time or your commitment to learning a new skill might open the door to professional opportunities you never considered! You can also put volunteer work on resumes and job applications.

- At your local library, the internet has replaced the card catalog, but local librarians are still top-notch researchers. They can point you to volunteer opportunities, training resources, community events, guest speakers, clubs, and other avenues for personal and professional development.
- Faith-based or community services, health care facilities, and community centers in your local community might offer low- or no-cost workshops on everything from CPR to yoga and more.
- The [Combined Federal Campaign](#) website for the annual CFC campaign has a repository of organizations and nonprofits that are worthy of your support. Type in your zip code to see what is available in your community. Check the box "Volunteer Opportunities Available" if you want to give your time to your favorite charity.
- Community colleges aren't just for high school graduates. See what's available for low-cost certification programs in your areas of interest.
- [Goodwill Industries](#) offers dozens of free online courses in technology (Microsoft Word, Windows, internet safety for kids), reading and math skills, job skills, life skills (critical thinking, freelance work, and adapting to change), and more. You can access the self-paced courses without registering or you can create a free account to track your history and create transcripts of completed courses.
- Always wanted to go to Harvard? Now you can access free online courses from [Harvard](#) and other universities and colleges. You can learn about everything from introduction to probability and data analysis to Shakespeare and emerging economics. Sign up for other freebie courses or lectures: [UCLA Free YouTube Lectures](#), [Duke University](#), and [Yale](#), among others!

Look for opportunities instead of waiting for them to come to you. Does your team need to document procedures or create templates to improve compliance with standards and efficiency? Is a new team member struggling with a task? By honing your sensitivity to situations, you become a problem solver – every supervisor’s dream employee!

Be a lifelong learner

In today’s work world where we all need to adapt constantly to change, there is no standing still in our skill set. Today’s 2.0 will be tomorrow’s 4.0. Are you ready? Keep your brain muscle ready for tomorrow’s innovation by embracing change and reveling in the joy of learning. A commitment to your own personal growth can’t help but translate into professional development.

Enjoy the conversations at work and home! You never know what you will learn from a co-worker. Lifelong learning includes life outside the office, including making time for hobbies and activities that give you fulfillment. Some coaches suggest taking an occasional “social media” break to energize.

Recommit to your mission

As a public servant working in child welfare, you affect the lives of millions of children and their families and communities. It’s easy to lose sight of the human side of our work if we spend most of our time in front of a computer. Create a *vision-board* in your office with quotations, pictures, and other items that inspire you. Be your own inspiration as you move along in your personal and professional development plan, and your vision will become a reality.



Protecting Parents from Scammers

Parents with arrearages and possible debt collection issues often find life challenging. Caseworkers can help protect parents from less-than-honorable debt collectors or scammers by sharing two different tools from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). The video [How to spot a debt collection scam](#) will provide parents with useful tips on spotting debt collection frauds and protecting themselves from scammers. The CFPB blog [Learn more about how to tell the difference between a legitimate debt collector and a scammer](#) also has useful tips to keep parents safe.



Child Support Report

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