THE COMMISSIONER’S VOICE

Taking the Helm — Moving Child Support Forward

Scott Lekan, OCSE Commissioner

As most of you know, life can be unpredictable, and I encountered this phenomenon early this past summer. I was presented with one of those once-in-a-lifetime offers. I was asked to take on the role of Commissioner for the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement. As a lifelong public servant, I could not pass up the chance to continue serving the thousands of child support professionals who daily impact millions of families in a positive way, so I accepted. The last two months have been a whirlwind of meetings, introductions, and a plethora of events. We are in the midst of change, which is exciting and challenging at the same time. I am confident that, as we work together, we can achieve great success.

Program improvements

The child support program continually evolves and 2016 was no different as we saw the passage of the final rule. In this edition of the Child Support Report, Meghan McCann from the National Conference of State Legislatures gives an update on what states are doing to change their rules involving suspension or modification of child support during periods of incarceration.

We see how four states developed creative partnerships with TANF to help noncustodial parents find jobs. Washington used geographic information system technology to help social services offices and the public find resources in their communities. And the District of Columbia has embraced its diverse ethnic populations by offering extensive bilingual services.

During my 20 years in law enforcement, I witnessed firsthand the challenges children in poverty have to deal with — hunger, violence, homelessness, and more. In many cases, consistent child support can help improve their lives. According to our new infographic, 2016 Child Support: More Money for Families, we serve 1 in 5 children in the United States.

In spite of the economic challenges over the last several years, I’m happy to report that state and tribal programs collected $33 billion in child support in 2016. We hope to see the percent of collections from income withholdings increase above the 75 percent level of 2016 as more employers use wage withholding to collect child support.

Program goals

During my time here, I want to continue to build relationships and collaborations with the state, tribal, and territorial child support programs; build stronger methods of communication; become more efficient; and tackle system modernization. Details will be forthcoming on how we will accomplish all of this.

Finally, I want to thank you for giving me such a warm welcome. I am truly looking forward to meeting you in person over the next year and working together to improve the child support program and the lives of families in your caseloads.

Scott Lekan
IN FOCUS

2017 Incarceration, Pass-Through, and Parenting Time Legislation

Meghan McCann, Senior Policy Specialist, National Conference of State Legislatures

As always, state legislatures have considered a significant amount of legislation addressing child support and family law. With over 850 introduced and more than 140 enacted bills, states have been looking at various ways to establish and enforce child support while supporting families and family economic stability.

Incarceration and child support

Following the publication of the final rule, 2016 Flexibility, Efficiency, and Modernization in Child Support Enforcement Programs, 21 states introduced 51 bills addressing incarceration and child support. Of those, 13 states have introduced 17 bills to address the suspension or modification of child support during periods of incarceration. Legislation in Connecticut, Louisiana, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Utah has passed while bills in Delaware, Illinois, Iowa, and New Jersey are still pending.

The legislation in Delaware, Illinois, New Jersey, and North Dakota addresses automatic suspension of a child support order during periods of incarceration of 90-180 days or more. The remaining legislation allows for downward modification or suspension of child support during periods of incarceration of 90-180 days.

Iowa, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Utah specifically prohibit incarceration from being treated as voluntary unemployment, or clarify that incarceration is a substantial and material change in circumstances for purposes of child support modification. Some exceptions to modification or suspension that a few states have included — or are seeking to include — in statute are incarceration for offenses against the custodial parent or child, if the incarceration is due to failure to pay child support, or if the obligor is able to pay child support while incarcerated. There are also some provisions that would allow the custodial parent to object to modification or suspension. As always, state legislation varies substantially from state to state. For specifics on this legislation, contact Meghan McCann, meghan.mccann@ncsl.org, or visit NCSL’s Child Support and Family Law Legislation Database.

Pass-through and disregard and parenting time

Maryland enacted a pass-through and disregard policy joining just over half of the states in passing through some amount of child support to families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, which is commonly referred to as TANF benefits. With the addition of Maryland, six states have enacted a pass-through policy following the Deficit Reduction Act. The act allows states to pass the first $100 of child support collected through to a family with one child and the first $200 to a family with two or more children. For more information, visit NCSL’s Pass-Through and Disregard page.

Also, Florida enacted Senate Bill 590 that establishes a standard parenting time plan and details procedures for incorporating those plans into all administrative child support orders. For more, visit NCSL’s Child Support and Parenting Time Orders page.

As an update, Illinois’ new child support guidelines went into effect on July 1, 2017, following the enactment of 2016 House Bill 3982 that changed their child support guidelines from garnishing a percentage of the obligor’s income to using income sharing. See NCSL’s Child Support Guideline Models page for more.

About NCSL

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) is a bipartisan legislative research organization that serves legislators and legislative staff in all 50 states and the territories.

Through a partnership with the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, NCSL tracks legislation related to child support and writes various publications including a quarterly newsletter on child support policy. The conference also provides programming for state legislators and legislative staff at our annual Legislative Summit.

For more information about NCSL and the Child Support Project, contact Meghan McCann at meghan.mccann@ncsl.org.
These states acknowledge that interagency partnerships take considerable effort. It starts with a vision that enables each agency to leverage shared goals to benefit families. Everyone must be committed to the relationship and recognize opportunities for cross training.

In these states, co-location played an important factor during the initial collaborative discussion, and it continues to be an integral aspect of program operations for some. For example, in Kansas, Maryland, and New York, the child support and TANF programs are located within the same state agencies, which facilitated initial collaborative discussions and funding the programs.

In Texas, the child support program works with the Texas Workforce Commission to operate its noncustodial parent employment program called NCP Choices. The commission receives TANF funding to provide employment services to both TANF recipients and noncustodial parents in the child support program, and the child support program has an OCSE-approved waiver to partially fund these services with incentive dollars. Since Texas uses a court-based model, the staff assigned to the employment program spend part of their time in court.

Next Steps
We are looking at exploring this subject further and producing a fact sheet on findings. This would allow us to examine state collaborations between TANF and child support agencies much more closely. The American Job Centers, authorized through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act, might also be resources for child support programs looking to support job services for parents. Providing job services will help parents who owe child support meet their financial obligations and make reliable payments.

For information, contact John Langrock at John.Langrock@acf.hhs.gov.
Since mid-2014, the Washington Division of Child Support’s Alternative Solutions Program has worked to help parents in its caseload become more self-sufficient. Using the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) family-centered strategies focus and vision as motivation, the program connects struggling parents who are participating in the program voluntarily to service providers that can help them fill their basic needs. These include finding employment, education, and training; developing financial literacy; and participating in other barrier removal programs. When they secure employment and other supportive services, they can meet their financial obligations more successfully.

OCSE Policy Interpretation Question 12-02 allows child support agencies to refer parents to social service agencies, workforce programs, and community and faith-based organizations that can help parents meet their basic needs. The Alternative Solutions Program staff catalogued over 3,300 community-based organizations so caseworkers could find the specific services that each parent needed. Program specialists use the information every day as they guide struggling parents to services that can help them work towards financial sustainability.

Partnership and collaboration

Partners often asked us how we worked so well with vulnerable parents and how we managed our resources to make sure parents got what they needed. We went on the road to meet with community partners, state agencies, and even parents themselves, to present our internal tools, describe our service delivery models, and publicize that we were there to help.

Once partners and other state agencies saw our demonstration in detail, we received a flurry of access requests. They appreciated the usability of the database. From our perspective, it was great to see that people were starting to consider the child support program part of the solution. Admittedly, outreach was not our goal, but in hindsight, it was an obvious way to combine our efforts with other programs.

Community Resources Database available online

In 2015, our friends at the state Children’s Administration asked if our database was accessible on the internet. Their program supports vulnerable children and their families. Many members of their staff printed out information about the services available in their assigned counties so they could use the hard copies while they were in the field. The database was also a valuable training tool for new staff because it helped them identify and locate community resources they could use to support children and their families in their assigned areas. The Children’s Administration leaders said their staff could really use an electronic version.

Our database was only available to staff sitting behind the state firewall, so we set a course to publish our database. After a bit of research, we developed the Division of Child Support Community Resources Database by collaborating with our Enterprise Geographic Information Systems (GIS) team. The team built a platform that functions like Google Maps. Users select a location and the interface will identify the community resources within a 10-mile range. By simply clicking the car icon, a user could then get step-by-step directions to travel to the resource.

While Alternative Solutions set out to do something for parents in the child support program, we also found a way to help other state programs at little to no cost with just a little repackaging. We hope that publishing the information will positively affect many families in our state and that our partnership with other programs, grown through the GIS tool, is something that thrives for years to come.

For more information, send an email to AlternativeSolutions@dshs.wa.gov or call 360-664-5028.
According to the Census Bureau’s Hispanic Heritage Month 2017 webpage, in 1968, President Lyndon Johnson proclaimed National Hispanic Heritage Week as the week that includes Sept. 15 and Sept. 16. In 1989, Congress expanded the observance to a month-long celebration of the culture and traditions of immigrants from Spain, Mexico and the Spanish-speaking nations of the Caribbean and Central and South America.

The observance starts on Sept. 15 because five countries celebrate the anniversaries of their independence on that day: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Mexico celebrates its independence day on Sept. 16 and Chile celebrates on Sept. 18.

In July 2016, the U.S. had 57.5 million people who claimed Hispanic origins making it the nation’s largest ethnic or racial minority at almost 18 percent of the population. Of those, 40 million spoke Spanish in their home. The Census Bureau estimates that by 2060, the Hispanic population will be at 119 million.

**District of Columbia Gets High Marks for Language Access**

Justin Latus, Policy Analyst, Child Support Services Division, Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia

Washington, D.C., is a city with residents from all over the world, some of whom have limited-English proficiency (LEP) or are non-English proficient (NEP). That means the District of Columbia Child Support Services Division has to be ready to help everyone who walks in the door, no matter what their preferred languages are!

**On-call interpreter services**

The highest percentage of LEP/NEP customers are native Spanish speakers. The District has a big immigrant population from El Salvador. Our division has bilingual staff that can help these customers. We also use a language line telephone service that provides interpretation for customers who speak a language we are unable to support. The staff member calls the language line, connects to an interpreter who speaks the customer’s language, and then proceeds with the interview.

We have all received training on the District’s language access law. It says we must provide the same level of service to all customers, even if they have limited or no English skills. As part of the training, we tried out the language line so we would understand how the service operated.

The sizeable Ethiopian population speaks Amharic, our second-most frequent non-English language. In fact, we have translated our Acknowledgement of Paternity into Amharic. The other top non-English languages are French, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese.

**The 2016 evaluation**

We have come a long way in a few short years. When the District Office of Human Rights (OHR) updated the language access section of the municipal regulations in 2014, it added child support to the list of agencies that were given a higher standard to meet for language access services. Two years later, the OHR evaluated our agency for the first time on how well it provided services to LEP/NEP customers. According to the Language Access Compliance Review 2016 report, our office scored 12 out of 12 on its provision of language access. Of the 33 agencies OHR examined, child support was one of seven with a perfect score.

They based our score on five criteria: the agency’s ability to capture data on encounters with LEP/NEP customers, whether all staff were trained on language access requirements, how well we performed outreach activities targeted to the LEP/NEP community, whether we had translated important agency documents into other languages, and whether any customers had filed complaints against the division.

OHR summarized our achievements by saying that the child support services division “adopted a new tracking form, incorporated a language field with a drop down menu in its case management system, and trained staff on how to utilize these systems to document daily interactions with LEP/NEP customers.” The report went on to say that the “case management system now displays the preferred language of the LEP/NEP customer across the top of the screen, and the Language Line cards have been posted at individual employee desks and made available in the agency’s portal.”

For more information on the District’s language access program, visit the Office of Human Rights website.
Although data is limited, parental substance abuse may be contributing to the rise in grandfamilies.

In 1978, the U.S. Congress passed legislation proclaiming the first Sunday after Labor Day as National Grandparents Day. It gives us a chance to honor and recognize all that they do to contribute to our children’s development and, in some cases, their care and well-being. This year, we celebrated our grandparents on September 10.

The number of children living with a grandparent has been increasing during the past 10 years. Census information shows that 7.2 million children under the age of 18 lived with a grandparent in 2016 – just under 10 percent of all children, up from 5.7 million children in 2006. In homes where children live with grandparents, it is likely those grandparents are the primary caregivers. The GrandFacts 2017 state fact sheets have more data.

Stepping up amid the opioid crisis

The increase in the number of children living with a grandparent is likely to continue because of a serious public health crisis in the United States — the opioid epidemic. Already, child welfare officials say that the widespread and growing abuse of opioids and methamphetamines has played a significant role in reversing what had been a positive trend in the number of children needing foster homes. Although data is limited, parental substance abuse may be contributing to the rise in grandfamilies.

Congress recognizes both the growing need for — and the benefits of — grandparents raising a grandchild. The Senate is working on legislation called the Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act. If enacted, it will create a federal task force that will develop and disseminate information designed to help these grandparents. For example, the information would help them navigate the school system, plan for their families’ future, address mental health issues for themselves and their grandchildren, and build social and support networks.

The Family First Prevention Services Act of 2017 was introduced to the House of Representatives at the beginning of the year. While it does not provide any new subsidies for caregiver-grandparents, it does make several important changes, including allowing states to use federal dollars on efforts that would help keep kids out of foster care. If the bill becomes law, states would be able to proactively offer programs such as mental health services, substance abuse treatment, and in-home parenting programs to help keep families intact rather than having to wait until the state takes custody of the child. The bill will also allow states to use federal dollars to develop and strengthen kinship navigator programs that connect grandparents and other relative caregivers with information they need to raise children and access services.

Ways child support professionals can support grandfamilies

As a first step, child support professionals can review the Generations United’s 2015 State of Grandfamilies in America report, which ranked states based on supports available to grandparents, including whether they had education and health care consent laws, de facto custody laws, policies that eliminated barriers to receiving support from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and other factors.

Next, professionals can familiarize themselves with the state-specific resources in GrandFacts 2017. You can often find local programs that provide support, resources, and assistance to grandfamilies, such as local schools, area agencies on aging, community centers, faith-based organizations, and children’s services agencies.

Finally, they could develop a protocol for talking with grandparents in their caseload about a plan to reunite the child with the parent, and make case management decisions regarding establishment and enforcement of child support obligations accordingly.

You will find more resources on the National Family Caregiver Support Program website. For information about this article, contact John Langrock at john.langrock@acf.hhs.gov.
August is an important month for the child support program. The Social Security Act of 1975 authorized the formation of a federal office to manage legislation and policy for a nationwide child support program. On August 16, 1984, President Ronald Reagan signed Public Law 98-378, The Child Support Amendments of 1984, which required state and local child support offices to make specific, significant program improvements. President Bill Clinton proclaimed August 1995 as “National Child Support Awareness Month” in honor of the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the federal child support enforcement program. Many states, counties, and tribes continue to hold recognition events in August to bring awareness to the importance of child support and celebrate families. This section looks at some of the events held across the country this past August.

**California**

The Department of Child Support Services went big for Child Support Awareness Month. They launched a “Give Them Something Great to Imitate” campaign that included four official posters in seven languages along with bilingual video and radio public service announcements. The department orchestrated a robust social media campaign that included family-centered memes, informational short videos, and dozens of posts that community partners shared.

**Colorado**

The Colorado Child Support Services program celebrated its 600-plus child support professionals in August and engaged the 150,000 families they serve every day. State and county offices hosted several community outreach events including information booths, fairs, children’s activities, and resource navigation services.

**Delaware Tribe of Indians in Oklahoma**

The Delaware Tribe of Indians located in Oklahoma held a Family Fun Day to highlight the importance of providing financial support for children. They also used the time to recognize all the child support professionals and parents who are committed to making an emotional and financial difference in the lives of children.

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District of Columbia

The Office of the Attorney General offered several events including a three-week amnesty period to help parents who were behind on their child support payments get back on track. At the amnesty kick-off on Aug. 18, staff gave away school supplies to families in their caseload. They also highlighted office programs that provide tools parents need to support their children including workforce development resources for parents and free books for children under six years old.

Georgia

The Department of Human Services Division of Child Support Services (DCSS) observed the month by telling the public about their programs and services such as the Parental Accountability Court program and the Fatherhood program. These and other services give parents the resources they need to emotionally and financially support their children. “Throughout the month of August, the department has been ‘DCSS Strong’ in educating the public on the programs and services offered by child support, as well as giving the public more insight on who we are and what we can do as DCSS strives to build stronger families for a stronger Georgia,” said Division Director Tanguler Gray.

The Georgia DCSS hosted its first livestreamed “Fatherhood Conversation” on Aug. 16. “Fatherhood conversations are directly tied to effectively servicing our customers’ needs, as well as being operationally transparent,” said DCSS Deputy Director of Operations Reed Kimbrough. The exchanges helped parents learn more about the Fatherhood program and addressed their questions and concerns.

Iowa

Iowa took advantage of Child Support Awareness month to release new outreach materials about services they provide. The state developed a public service video that described the importance of child support along with a press package that included posters, bookmarks, wallet cards, and other materials. They wanted to share their message that child support is so much more than money; a child needs love, care, and financial support from both parents.

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Illinois
The Healthcare and Family Services’ child support program celebrated awareness month with a resource fair on Aug. 16 at a state government center in Chicago. The fair included various state agencies. Regional offices held school supply drives around the state. Several also organized fundraisers such as office bake sales. The Cook County Central Regional Office, along with two of its vendors, raised enough money to purchase 400 backpacks for a local school.

Kansas
Kansas Governor Sam Brownback designated August as Child Support Awareness Month. Various state officials and child support program contract leads were on hand to witness his signature. The child support office held a two-day child support amnesty starting Aug. 24 so parents with bench warrants for back child support could pay a partial amount and have the warrants withdrawn.

Maryland
On Aug. 12, Maryland’s Child Support Administration, the Baltimore City Sheriff’s Office, and the Maryland Judiciary conducted its third child support warrant quashing operation in 18 months. Operation Reconciliation offers child support parents with outstanding warrants a fresh start and path toward providing consistent and reliable child support. So far, the program has quashed more than 220 warrants while providing each participating parent access to employment and training services and pro se legal assistance.
Missouri — State Fair

A Family Support Division booth gave fairgoers the opportunity to learn more about the child support program. Staff answered a variety of questions and provided applications, brochures, and other resources to those who stopped by the table.

Missouri — Central Office

The Missouri Family Support Division hosted a statewide, month-long book drive to recognize Child Support Awareness Month. Staff from the central office collected almost 4,700 books that they will give to libraries and community agencies in the Jefferson City area.

New York

Governor Andrew Cuomo proclaimed that August was Child Support Awareness Month for New York during a two-day child support professionals training event. “Child support is a vital source of income for hundreds of thousands of children and families in New York, and is often the key to keeping children from falling into poverty,” said Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance Commissioner Samuel Roberts. “When children receive financial and emotional support from both parents, they are more likely to do well in school and succeed later in life.” Throughout August, child support representatives participated in events that focused on improving the delivery of services they offered to children and families.

Oklahoma

Child Support Services in South Oklahoma City worked with a local department store to help gather back-to-school supplies on Aug. 19. Child support volunteers accepted donations on behalf of children in five area elementary schools. “Our mission at Child Support Services is to promote healthy families in our community, and this is just another way that we could help,” said Debra West, managing attorney for the South Oklahoma City child support office.

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Child Support Services manages an average of more than 400,000 cases and nearly 350,000 child support orders annually for children entitled to financial support. The staff recognized their critical role of helping provide for their state's children by wearing green, enjoying an ice cream social, and collecting school supplies that they will donate to local schools.

Penobscot Nation

The Penobscot Nation Child Support Agency, located in Maine, held several educational and community outreach activities during August. Through this year’s theme, How Easy Child Support Can Be, the staff stressed to parents that they should pay what they can as often as they can and communicate regularly with the agency. This year, 100 children and adults stopped by the agency’s educational table at the Tribal Community Days celebration. Staff also participated in family fun nights and held a parental appreciation potluck to honor parents.

North Carolina

Virginia

Division of Child Support Enforcement staff Michelle Knowles, Sharon Taylor, Marc Davis, and Hanby Carter kicked off Child Support Awareness Month with an appearance on Richmond’s NBC 12 “Call12” program on Aug. 2. They were on hand to answer the public’s basic child support questions and provide general information. During the 90-minute broadcast, the group received 38 calls. This is the 4th year that they participated in a TV segment during Child Support Awareness Month.
The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) is looking for organizations that would like to join the **Your Money, Your Goals 2018 cohort** to teach people how to manage their money better. Your Money, Your Goals is a suite of financial empowerment tools and resources that individuals and organizations can use to help build the financial well-being of the people in economically vulnerable populations. The bureau wants the following types of organizations: public and private social service, faith-based, legal aid, volunteer, and organizations that train workers.

The bureau will provide training, materials, and technical assistance, including support for your organization as it develops and executes its Your Money, Your Goals implementation plan.

If you think your program would be a good fit, complete the application and send it along with the requested attachments to **YourMoneyYourGoals@cfpb.gov** by Oct. 6, 2017, with the subject line “Your Money, Your Goals 2018.”

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**2016 Child Support: More Money for Families**

**Collections**
- 75% of child support unpaid
- 96% of child support collected
- $33 billion collected

**Caseload**
- 16.6 million children served
- 1 in 5 children

**Cost Effectiveness**
- $3.33 to collect $1 in support

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2016 — Child Support Served 15.6M Children