

IN FOCUS

Canada Closer to Ratifying Hague Child Support Convention

International Team, OCSE

In the U.S., we're eagerly anticipating the day our northern neighbor, Canada, joins the Hague Child Support Convention so that families in both countries may benefit from streamlined and standardized case processing. Recent legislation in Canada moves it one step closer to ratification.

New family law legislation

Family law in Canada is an area of shared jurisdiction between the federal government and its provincial and territorial governments. The federal *Divorce Act* applies to married couples who are divorcing. Provincial or territorial legislation applies to unmarried or common-law couples, and married couples who are separated but not divorcing.

Provinces are responsible for the administration of justice, including the court system, which is where all family law cases are decided. Provinces are also responsible for enforcing support orders, but the federal government may assist them by helping find a support payor, or by garnishing federal money owed to a payor to satisfy a support debt.

In June 2019, [Bill C-78](#), a bill proposing amendments to Canada's federal family law legislation, was passed by Parliament and received Royal Assent. The majority of the bill, including provisions related to the Hague Child Support Convention, will come into force by Order in Council. Passage of the legislation is the first substantial update to Canada's federal family laws in 20 years. The new legislation amends the *Divorce Act*, the *Family Orders and Agreements Enforcement Assistance Act* (FOAEAA), and the *Garnishment, Attachment and Pension Diversion Act*. Notably, it amends the *Divorce Act* and FOAEAA to permit eventual implementation of the Hague Child Support Convention in Canada.

Hague convention provisions

The legislation adds definitions for Convention terms and clearly states that the Hague Child Support Convention provisions have the force of law in Canada when they relate to subjects that fall within the federal legislative competence of Parliament. The new legislation will apply if one party resides in a Convention country and the other lives in a province to which the Convention has been extended. *continued*

Child Support Forms in Foreign Languages

OCSE's [Hague Convention Requirements page](#) has Hague Convention forms translated into foreign languages. The webpage summarizes Hague country language requirements and includes Convention forms in Croatian, Czech, Dutch, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, Montenegrin, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, and Ukrainian.

[IM-19-07](#) has more information. Contact the OCSE International Team at OCSEInternational@acf.hhs.gov if you need forms in a language not listed or have questions about your Hague Convention cases.

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Child Support Awareness Month

States, counties, and tribes across the U.S. held recognition events in August. Read more about them on [page 8](#).

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Since the enforcement of family support falls primarily within the jurisdiction of Canadian provinces and territories, in order to carry out their responsibilities under the Convention, each province and territory must also pass implementing legislation. It is not expected that all provinces and territories will be ready to implement at the same time. When it ratifies the Convention, the Canadian federal government will indicate to which provinces and territories application of the Convention will be extended. Other provinces and territories can then join when they are ready to implement the Convention.

Other improvements

As a result of the new legislation, Canada will have more tools to establish, change, and enforce child support. For example, in some circumstances, the government will be able to release tax information to certain groups, such as courts or maintenance enforcement programs, to help ensure a child support amount is fair and accurate. A number of other measures will help streamline administrative processes. Provincial child support administrative services will be able to perform some tasks currently left to the courts, making it faster, less costly, and less adversarial to determine or recalculate child support amounts. These provincial services will also be allowed to recalculate child support at any time if needed, instead of on a fixed schedule.

OCSE thanks Andina van Isschot, senior counsel and manager, Support Enforcement Law and Policy Unit, Family, Children and Youth Section, Department of Justice Canada, and her colleagues for their review of this article. For more information, review Bill C-78 on the [House of Commons website](#) or the [Legislative Background](#) prepared by the Department of Justice Canada. For information on the Hague Convention, visit the [OCSE International webpage](#) or contact the OCSE International Team at OCSEInternational@acf.hhs.gov.

Other Changes to Canadian Law under the New Legislation

In addition to international support, the amendments in [Bill C-78](#) impact domestic child support cases and family cases involving parenting arrangements. Among other changes, below are some of the amendments.

Divorce Act:

- Replace terminology related to custody and access with terminology related to parenting.
- Establish a non-exhaustive list of criteria with respect to the best interests of the child.
- Create duties for parties and legal advisers to encourage the use of family dispute resolution processes.
- Introduce measures to assist the courts in addressing family violence.
- Establish a framework for the relocation of a child.
- Simplify certain processes, including those related to family support obligations.

Family Orders and Agreements Enforcement Assistance Act:

- Allow the release of information to help obtain and change a support provision.
- Expand the release of information to other provincial family justice government entities.
- Permit the garnishment of federal moneys to recover certain expenses related to family law.
- Extend the binding period of a garnishee summons to facilitate garnishment of federal moneys (such as income tax refunds) to satisfy family obligations.

Garnishment, Attachment and Pension Diversion Act:

- Give priority to family support obligations.
- Simplify the processes under the Act.

UIFSA and Hague Convention Judicial Bench Cards

On Jan. 1, 2017, the 2007 Hague Child Support Convention went into force in the United States. The implementing legislation is the Uniform Interstate Family Support Act 2008 (UIFSA). OCSE recently provided state child support agencies with bench cards for judges, hearing officers, and others who have to make important decisions on cases that fall under UIFSA and the Hague Child Support Convention.

The bench cards cover the following Convention applications:

- [Establishment of a Convention Order Including, if Necessary, Establishment of Parentage](#)
- [Recognition and Enforcement](#)
- [Recognition and Enforcement of a Foreign Support Agreement](#)
- [Modification](#)

The [Judicial Resources](#) bench card lists resources available from OCSE and other external sources. These bench cards are a quick reference to key information to resolve a particular support application.

Child Welfare Collaboration



The Administration for Children and Families has two key priorities during this administration: (1) to prevent the need for children to be placed into foster care, and (2) to build parents' and families' capacity to sustain themselves economically. I encourage you to consider how a strong collaboration between the child support and child welfare agencies could advance these federal priorities as well as the agencies' missions, resulting in positive outcomes for families.

Background and data

Under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, the state child welfare agency is required, where appropriate, to refer cases to child support and to secure an assignment of support rights to the state. In those cases, both parents may be considered noncustodial parents during the child's time in foster care, and the child support agency may establish or enforce support against both parents.

From foster care referrals and assignment of support rights, child support collections data from 2018 shows that of the \$28.6 billion collected, \$68.9 million was collected on foster care cases.

Building collaboration

Many child support agencies have ongoing efforts to raise awareness among parents and the general public of how the child support program can benefit families. Similarly, child welfare staff may not know the positive impact of child support services. Collaboration can help child welfare staff understand how child support actions may be helpful to the parent-child relationship, when referrals are appropriately made. Collaboration can also improve both agencies' understanding of how efforts to prevent removals and foster care placement can be strengthened, including the value of accessing the Federal Parent Locator Service to identify noncustodial parents or other relatives as placement options.

Appropriate referrals

A primary way that child support and child welfare collaboration could improve outcomes is by determining appropriate referrals. Referrals can be for the noncustodial parent, the custodial parent, both, or neither. For example, from a child welfare perspective, a referral may be appropriate for the benefit of establishing a legal father, getting support payments to a custodial parent to help meet reunification plans, finding an engaged noncustodial parent as a placement option, or preventing a child's removal from poor living conditions

by getting support payments into a low-income, custodial parent household. The determination to refer would ideally be case-specific.

Promising approaches

Collaboration with child welfare colleagues can begin with cross-program training. Consider working together to develop a framework for pre-referral case assessment. Hold regular meetings and develop a protocol for as-needed, case-specific communication.

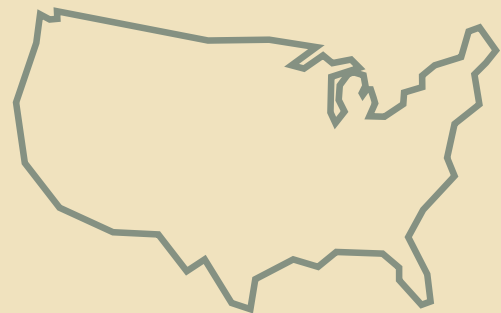
Please share your collaboration best practices that have resulted in solid referrals and appropriate child support actions. Replicating proven approaches is efficient and cost-effective. We are also available to provide technical assistance or facilitate partnerships. A closer collaboration between the agencies is a low-cost, high-reward enhancement to our services.

Scott Lekan

2019 U.S. Child Support and Family Law Legislation

With nearly 700 child support and family law bills introduced since January, this topic remains on the minds of many state lawmakers.

On [page 17](#), Meghan McCann, a policy specialist with the National Conference of State Legislatures, reports on the 120 bills that have been enacted and the 340 still under consideration.



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.

A LOOK INSIDE OCSE

OCSE and Employer Collaboration — a Multibillion-Dollar Partnership

Employer Services Team, OCSE

Thanks to our strong employer partnerships, the child support program collected \$24 billion through income withholding in 2018. OCSE has been growing this relationship since forming the Employer Services team in 1996 after passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. The team's primary responsibility was to help implement new hire reporting. Within a year, OCSE saw the need to expand outreach to employers who were eager to understand their child support responsibilities. Today, the Employer Services team collaborates with employers and child support agencies and provides training at national and state employer conferences.

Electronic income withholding orders

One of our most successful collaborations resulted in implementing the [electronic income withholding order](#) (e-IWO) program. Employers register with OCSE so they can receive income withholding orders quickly and conveniently. Currently, the e-IWO system contains over 15,000 Federal Employer Identification Numbers. Since its inception in 2005, the system has exchanged over 10 million orders and is responsible for over \$800 million in increased collections. The Employer Services team continues to enroll employers and responds to inquiries every day.

Child Support Portal

Hearing that the lump sum reporting process was difficult for employers because of variations in state laws and processes, the Employer Services team worked with representatives from states and employers to develop the [lump sum reporting application](#) on the [Child Support Portal](#). Now, employers have a central, standard process to report lump sums to multiple child support agencies at once. Portal functions quickly expanded to include the ability to report employee terminations, a useful feature for employers. They can report to almost all states, saving valuable time previously spent notifying each state individually. State child support agencies benefit by receiving prompt notifications of upcoming lump sum payments and employee terminations.

Ongoing improvements

Recently, we've added [Information Updates](#) to the Portal, allowing employers to provide addresses and their points of contact for different programs, such as income withholding and medical support. We also collaborated with the Department of Labor and the American Payroll Association to change Form W-4, Employee's Withholding Allowance Certificate. Employers can now add an employee's date of employment, which is the first day the individual performed services for pay. This corrects a previous change and allows employers to use the form for new hire reporting again. Another update added language explaining the requirement to report new hires.

Since employer withholding represents 75% of all program collections, maintaining the partnership between employers and the child support program is critically important to improving collections. OCSE's Employer Services team seeks new ways to increase employer-withheld collections by improving efficiencies of existing collection tools, tapping underused sources of collections, and educating employers about their program responsibilities.

For more information, visit the [OCSE Employers webpage](#) or contact the Employer Services Team at EmployerServices@acf.hhs.gov.



SPOTLIGHT: GRANDPARENTS

More Grandparents are Caring for Grandchildren

John Langrock, OCSE

The Sunday after Labor Day is the national day to recognize grandparents. As the number of grandparents living with their grandchildren continues to grow, child support agencies nationwide may see this segment of their caseload growing. In 2017, the Census Bureau estimates that there were 7.2 million grandparents who lived with their grandchildren, up from 5.8 million in 2000. In a [2012 U.S. Census Bureau report](#), demographic and socioeconomic characteristics such as trends in increased life expectancy, single-parent families, and female employment have increased the likelihood that grandparents will actively help bring up their grandchildren.

The opioid epidemic also appears to be a contributing factor, as found in a recent paper by the Census Bureau titled [The Opioid Prescribing Rate and Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: State and County Level Analysis](#), which provides a statistical analysis of their relationship.

In June, the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation published results of a comprehensive literature review along with information from interviews with experts, investigating how substance use among noncustodial parents affects the payment of child support. [Illicit Substance Use and Child Support: An Exploratory Study](#) included an investigation into how child support programs approach substance use and opioid misuse.

While the study noted the general absence of program practices to help parents with substance use disorders better comply with child support obligations, it also identified promising practices and emerging ideas from experts in the field.

The authors also noted that child support agencies might consider the following emerging practices when working with noncustodial parents with substance use disorders:

- Review child support orders for a potential modification when a noncustodial parent is in treatment.
- Suspend arrears accumulation while a noncustodial parent is in treatment.
- Partner with an employment program that has a tiered approach.
- Help noncustodial parents sign up for Medicaid to access treatment.
- Partner with a community-based organization with expertise in working with individuals with substance use disorders.
- Work with a medical-legal partnership.
- Consider how license suspension and reinstatement is used in the context of treatment.
- Train staff on how to interact with these parents.

As the national conversation about how substance use, by either parent, is affecting the child support program, we look forward to learning about new approaches to working with parents or grandparents in the child support caseload. OCSE salutes grandparents during September and all year long.

Honoring Grandparents

The percentage of adults age 30 and over who are raising grandchildren is higher in states that have high opioid prescribing rates. Read the results of a statistical analysis released by the U.S. Census Bureau, [The Opioid Prescribing Rate and Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: State and County Level Analysis](#). This [table from their poster](#) shows that Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Alabama are among the highest for both the percent of adults raising grandchildren and opioid prescribing rates

Several agencies and organizations can provide help to grandparents. The [Eldercare Locator](#), a public service of the [HHS Administration on Aging](#), provides older adults and their families with connections to services. People can visit their website or call them at 800-677-1116.

The HHS Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration provides free, confidential, around-the-clock treatment referral and information services (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental or substance use disorders. Call 800-622-HELP (4357) or visit the [National Helpline](#) for information.

Five states with the highest and lowest percent of the population aged 30 and over raising grandchildren

	Percent
Mississippi	2.9
Arkansas	2.2
Louisiana	2.2
Alabama	2.2
Kentucky	2.1
U.S. Average	1.4
Maine	0.8
Vermont	0.8
North Dakota	0.8
Wisconsin	0.8
Minnesota	0.7

Five states with highest and lowest opioid prescribing rates per 100 people

	Rate
Alabama	121.0
Arkansas	114.6
Tennessee	107.5
Mississippi	105.6
Louisiana	98.1
U.S. Average	66.5
Minnesota	46.9
California	44.8
New York	42.7
Hawaii	41.9
District of Columbia	32.5

Note: Estimates shown in this table may not differ statistically from one another or from estimates for other states.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2016 Opioid Prescribing Data.

GRANTS

Increasing Awareness of Services through Digital Marketing

OCSE awarded \$2.2 million to 14 grantees through a two-year demonstration called [Using Digital Marketing to Increase Participation in the Child Support Program](#). The following articles from Indiana and Colorado continue our series featuring grantees that are testing approaches and analyzing data to see if digital marketing can help child support programs reach and serve families more effectively.

For general information, visit the [OCSE Digital Marketing grant webpage](#), or contact OCSE project officers Michelle Jadczyk at Michelle.Jadczyk@acf.hhs.gov or Melody Morales at Melody.Morales@acf.hhs.gov.

Changing Just One Word Can Make a Big Difference

Jeff Obst, Strategic Initiatives Director,
Indiana Child Support Bureau

Have you ever applied for a job and felt the embarrassment of rejection? Did it make you wish you hadn't applied and hesitant to apply for anything again? Something as simple as the words we use can compel people to take action or drive them away. In Indiana, we were curious to see if our citizens were worried about the fear of rejection. When visiting [Indiana's Child Support website](#), the word "apply" — as in How to Apply for Child Support Services — is prominent. Does the use of the word "apply" have a direct correlation to the way people feel about our services?

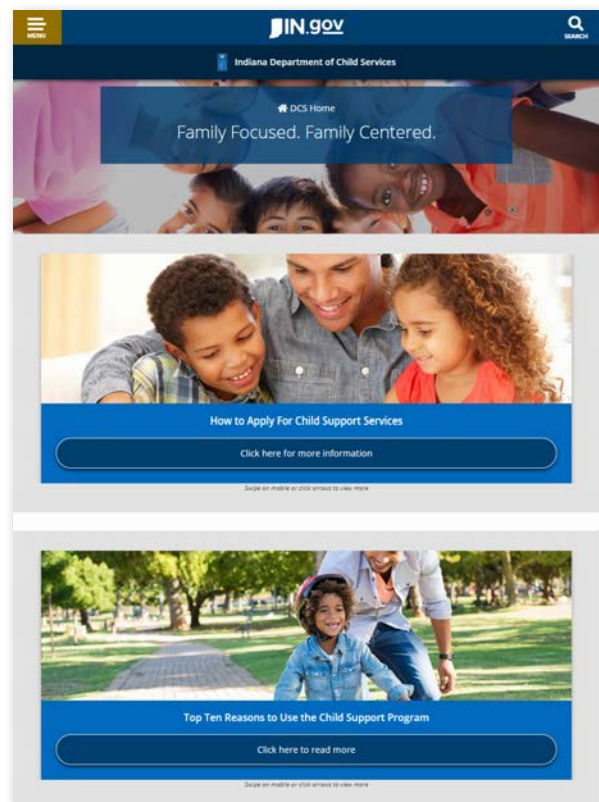
Something as simple as the words we use can compel people to take action or drive them away.

One of the first road tests for Indiana's Digital Marketing Research Grant Team was to change the words "apply for" to "enroll now" to see if more parents would request services. What a difference that made! Website visitors clicked through to the next hyperlink at a rate of 60% — a nearly 9% increase over past results! What's next? The team is testing other words such as "get started," "register," "sign me up," and "open a case."

We're leveraging the support of several other partnerships to evaluate success rates for each new word or phrase we try. The evaluation team includes five county prosecutor offices that represent subsets of Indiana's rural, suburban, and urban populations. These counties are actively involved in the grant, providing data about their case activity weekly. In addition, the team gathered baseline data about Indiana's cases and citizens from the statewide child support enforcement system and the state's Data Warehouse. A market research company also conducted focus groups and online surveys to get user feedback. After analyzing all the data, the team defined issues, developed hypotheses, and

built a road map detailing the road tests they would conduct along the way. Indiana has 12 interventions planned, and three are testing website updates. The website road tests started in April and run through December 2019.

We're very proud of our child support program and its history, but we want to make it better. Our website focuses on the IV-D program, local county prosecutor offices, and the variety of ways to make payments. Is that what potential Indiana customers want to know? The hypotheses say otherwise! During 14 of our planned road tests, we'll include changing the terminology to what the general public is used to hearing: not IV-D, but Child Support Program; not prosecutors, but navigators, etc. The team will also update website content to explain the process from paternity through order establishment and case monitoring. We're excited about working with OCSE to conduct this research. If you'd like to follow Indiana's progress or have specific questions about our processes, just email CSBDigitalResearch@dcs.in.gov.



Colorado Child Support Website Going Mobile Friendly

Amanda Terkildsen, Program Innovation Unit Interim Lead, *Colorado Division of Child Support Services*, and Maggie Spain, Principal, *Spearca Communications*

When OCSE awarded one of its Digital Marketing grants to Colorado, we were eager to tackle one of our biggest priorities: increasing online engagement and educating customers about our child support services. With the help of two contractors, we felt our first step should be updating our outdated website. The site had been static for six years and was created on a platform that only software programmers could change. The team used a two-pronged redesign approach: update the content by focusing on the reading level, and reenergize the visual layout.

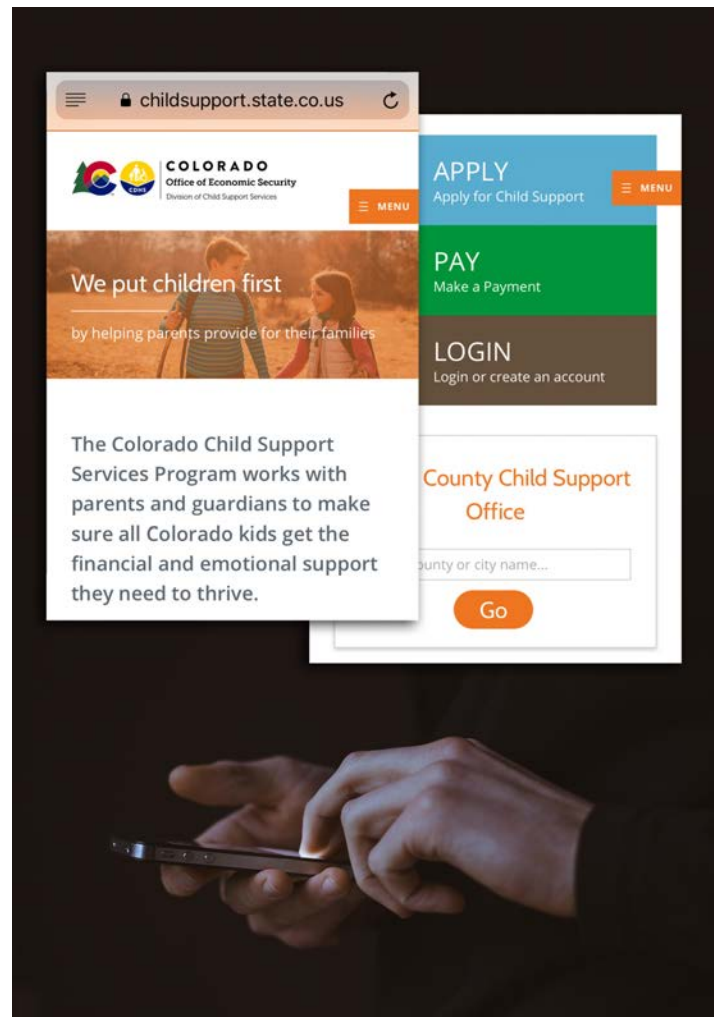
We are in the process of streamlining the site from over 50 pages to 10 available buttons. Subject matter experts reduced the reading level of the content from college level to a range between grades 6-8. The team also changed the flow of information so it would be more intuitive to parents.

Google Analytics showed that the majority of website visitors were coming from mobile devices

We upgraded the website to match the larger Department of Human Services visual branding guidelines. Now it features diverse images highlighting parent-children relationships and Colorado's stunning scenery. Beyond what is visible, the state is excited to have the new website platform built on Drupal so program staff will be able to make nimble changes in the future.

Prior to our relaunch, Google Analytics showed that the majority of website visitors were coming from mobile devices even though the site was not mobile friendly, which made for a cumbersome and tedious visit! The new platform provides functionality that internet users demand these days: it is mobile friendly and translatable to other languages.

We're confident that our redesigned website will help engage Colorado parents. With the Digital Marketing grant's focus on improving knowledge to increase applications for services, Colorado is poised to provide the right information at the right time for parents. The first intervention the state will test is enhancing our search engine keywords that lead parents to the site. Stay tuned for results!



Child Support Report

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SPOTLIGHT – CHILD SUPPORT AWARENESS MONTH

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 and tribes continue to recognize Child Support Awareness Month in August with events to highlight the importance of child support and to celebrate families. Here are photos from some of this year’s events and campaigns.

California



The California Department of Child Support Services provides statewide services, coordination, and oversight for 49 distinct self-managing county and regional child support agencies. Early each year, we hold a competition with county offices to create the year’s Child Support Awareness Month concept and tagline. Once the winner is chosen, state communications staff build out the campaign materials for statewide distribution while the counties plan outreach events.

Tulare County provided 2019’s campaign focusing on services to parents with the tagline You are There for Them, We’ll be There for You. We created three posters in eight languages, video and audio public service announcements, and a press release. Counties such as El Dorado County held events including back-to-school drives, community resource fairs hosted by agencies, and employer assistance workshops. Outreach teams set up booths and tables at fairs, libraries, and other public venues. Several counties have created annual events that just keep growing – one in its fourth year attracted 60 community service exhibitors in 2019.

California - San Bernardino County

County child support staff handed out 150 backpacks stuffed with school supplies to local children at our Back to School Health and Resource Fair August 1. Approximately 625 children and 300 parents attended the fair with events that included the following free resources for kids between 4 and 18 years old: vaccinations, haircuts, dental check-ups, children’s books, games, and prizes. We even gave out educational material for adults who attended.



California - Los Angeles County

Members of LA County Child Support Services pose (right) with the Child Support Awareness Month Resolution they received from the county Board of Supervisors. Child support staff participated in over 120 special awareness month activities including back-to-school giveaways and events to help justice-involved individuals and people experiencing homelessness. Every Thursday in August was Color Day where child support staff could wear the color of the day. The Torrance office went all in for Yellow Day (bottom right). And Intergovernmental Division Chief Eric Lee (left) and staff members held a special Child Support Awareness Month workshop for representatives from local Consulate offices. Representatives from Japan, Mexico, Bolivia, China, Brazil, and the Philippines heard information about LA County child support services and international child support.



Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes

The Tribal Child Support Enforcement Program (TCSEP) held its first Child Support Awareness Month Awareness Day on Aug. 23 in the Ronan Community Center. According to [a story in the Char-Koosta News](#), the staff wanted to bring in families and children who participate in the tribal child support program. “I am always looking for ways to promote and create a positive program within the Tribal community to let them know we believe in our participants [and] are here to assist them when needed,” said Hank Conko-Camel, child support division manager. She also invited local Montana Child Support Enforcement staff because she felt, “It was a time that State Caseworkers were able to meet our mutual TCSEP clients face to face, a very warm welcoming for both of the programs.” The day included fun activities, lunch, and free hair cuts.



Louisiana

This year's theme was "Stepping up for the Children of Louisiana." Staff held a reading of the governor's proclamation declaring August as Child Support Awareness Month. Later that morning, the secretary and deputy secretary of the Division of Children and Family Services joined staff at a display table. They blew bubbles to attract attention to their brochures and information on child support services and statistics.



Mississippi

To commemorate Child Support Awareness Month, Mississippi launched a new [artificial intelligence solution](#) on its website. Division of Child Support Enforcement Director Lyndsy Irwin describes their [online Genbot tool](#) as chatbot technology that will enhance the experience for Mississippi customers. Genbot can provide users with general information and calculate estimated child support payments. Parents can even submit help tickets and other requests through the assistive technology. Genbot also



provides employers with information such as how to handle income withholding orders. The program is gathering analytics so that the staff will be able to add features later and make website improvements. Irwin believes that "users who are using the Chatbot technology will feel like government is catching up with the times."

Nevada - Clark County

The Clark County District Attorney's Family Support Division held a Child Support Super Saturday in honor of Child Support Awareness Month. Agency team members gave their customers the opportunity to engage with the program in a positive manner and establish new relationships moving forward. Parents could handle outstanding child support issues, get



suspended driver's licenses reinstated, and even quash outstanding bench warrants for 50% less than the usual cost. Social workers and TANF staff were on hand to help parents with issues outside of child support. Of the 850 people who attended, 450 were customers with cases. More than 425 parents and children walked away with backpacks filled with school supplies. The backpacks were donated by generous support division team members through annual fundraising efforts.

New York - NYC

The Office of Child Support Services at New York City's Department of Social Services sponsored multiple activities in recognition of Child Support Month 2019, including donating more than 1,000 age-appropriate books to nearly 40 libraries within Department of Homeless Services family shelters throughout the five boroughs, with agency leadership visiting a shelter for families with children in the Bronx to personally distribute some of these books.



Adel Torres, assistant executive director, Help Bronx Morris Shelter and Krystal, Kips Bay Afterschool Program



Aileen Rosario, executive director, Help Bronx Morris Shelter; Doreen Howe, associate commissioner of Transitional Family Services, NYC DSS/Department of Homeless Services; Gary Jenkins, first deputy commissioner, NYC DSS/Human Resources Administration

Ohio - Franklin County

Rather than hold one large event, one Ohio Child Support Enforcement Agency hosted and participated in a number of smaller events in a variety of locations. By having several Franklin County Family Empowerment Days and community events, parents could connect with child support while participating in family fun activities, learning about parenting and fatherhood support, and gathering community resource and employment information. Events were hosted at two community centers within caseload ZIP codes with high concentrations of child support clients. On Aug. 21, Department of Job and Family Services Director Kimberly Hall joined the child support staff at Gladden Community House in Columbus to talk with staff members.



Pennsylvania - Allegheny County

While the Allegheny Family Division celebrated Child Support Awareness Month in various ways throughout August, the highlight was recognizing staff accomplishments. The division gave out the first Honorable Lawrence Kaplan Award of Excellence this year. This award recognizes late Judge Lawrence Kaplan who passed away in early 2019 after serving in the Family Division his entire judicial career of over 25 years. The staff developed the concept for this award to not only honor the judge's memory, but also recognize individual staff for the excellence they display every day. The nomination and selection process was 100% staff driven. Congratulations to this year's awardees, Denise Connelly and Gail DeStout.



Pennsylvania - Bradford County

Domestic Relations Office staff held Child Support Awareness Day on the Bradford County Courthouse lawn in August. Local organizations joined in by providing activities, games, and fun activities for children. Several other government agencies were "on the scene" including a police officer and his canine. The state police performed car seat safety checks. And volunteer firemen brought along a local firetruck. Kids could even tour the Bradford County Bookmobile. Children enjoyed playing corn hole, twirling with hula hoops, getting their faces painted, and eating snacks.



Pennsylvania - Bucks County

For a staff team building exercise, Bucks County Domestic Relations created a child support-themed Escape Room. Employees broke down into teams of five and raced against the clock to solve puzzles related to the support guidelines, their co-workers, surrounding counties, and daily domestic relations work duties. Members of the team who solved the puzzles and escaped the room the fastest each won gift cards donated by the management team. One staff member said, "That was the best [Child Support Awareness Month] event ever." Another said, "That was better than the professional escape rooms I've done in the past."



Pennsylvania - Franklin County

Franklin County Domestic Relations staff recognized Child Support Awareness Month with a back to school-themed celebration that included music, food and activities for the kids.



Penobscot Nation

Again this year, the Penobscot Nation Child Support Agency in Maine celebrated Child Support Awareness Month by hosting several community outreach events. The staff used various themes including Tribal Community Days, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and other family-centered events. The agency dedicates the month of August to child support awareness by educating community members on the program and providing updates on recent activities. This year, we started with an outreach table at Community Days, and then hosted a Parent Appreciation meal and a family fun night. Our annual events are well attended and provide an excellent platform to engage with the community and answer child support questions.



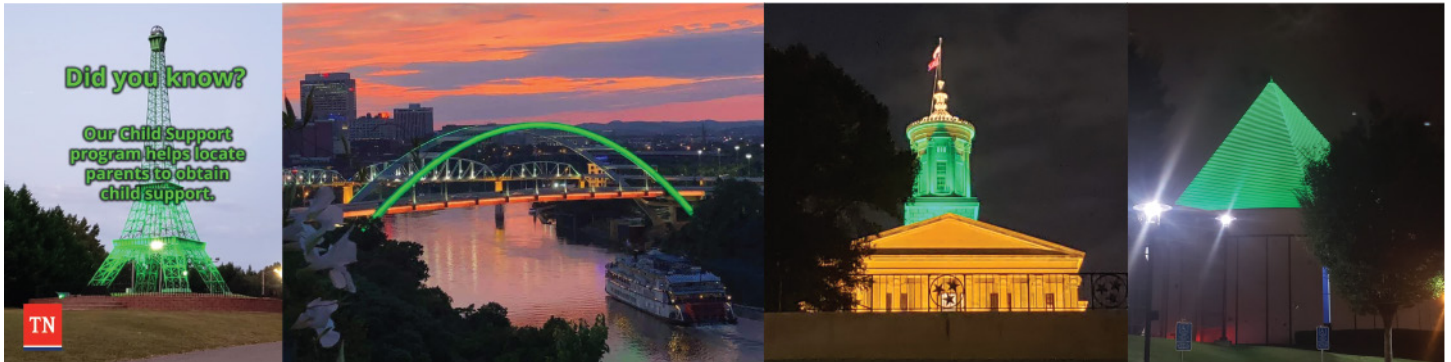
Stockbridge-Munsee Tribe

Our Tribal Child Support Agency held a "ribbon shirt" sewing class in July and August as part of our Fatherhood Outreach Program. Ribbon shirts have our Agency Motto on the upper back: "Any man can be a father, but it takes someone special to be a dad." We borrowed sewing machines from the Stockbridge Family Center/Family Services. The Tribal TANF and Family Services programs paid for all materials and Tribal Elders and organizations helped prepare supplies and guided our fathers on the task. The dads got to pick out their colored ribbons and did their own sewing. Dads who were able to finish on time wore their ribbon shirts proudly at the Stockbridge-Munsee Pow Wow in mid-August.



Tennessee

Notable Tennessee landmarks turned green in early August to recognize the positive impact that the Department of Human Services Child Support program has on families. Tennessee uses green to recognize Child Support Awareness Month. The department loaded photos of the brightly lit monuments onto its [Facebook page](#) and Twitter account, [@TNHumanServices](#), along with short explanations about what the program does.



Some local offices also got into the spirit. The staff in the 28th Judicial District offices serving Trenton and Brownsville showed their support by wearing green. And 29th District employees in Dyersburg collected school supplies for an elementary school in Tiptonville.



Virginia - Abingdon

Abingdon child support staff participated in the National Night Out program for Smyth County on Aug. 6. The National Night Out program is designed to build police-community partnerships and camaraderie, which can lead to safer neighborhoods.



Virginia - Charlottesville

The Charlottesville District Office participated in a donation drive to benefit the Emergency Shelter for Help. This local shelter provides emergency residential facilities to women and children who are the victims of domestic violence. The drive focused on collecting general supplies the shelter needed and school supplies for children. When the staff visited the center to drop off the shelter donations, they also gave the staff a supply of child support applications and information they could use to help shelter residents who wish to apply for services.



Virginia - Danville

Danville District Office staff also participated in local National Night Out activities to recognize Child Support Awareness month. They handed out child support brochures and tote bags, Sesame Street videos, treats, and balloon animals. The staff interacted with many parents and children, engaged them in discussions about child support, and gave back-to-school encouragement. Based on the number of participants who stopped by the Department of Child Support Enforcement tent, the evening was a success.



Virginia - Eastern Virginia District Office

On Aug. 16, staff from the Eastern Virginia District Office attended the Parks and Recreation Center Aloha Back To School Movie Night to engage with parents. This year, the district office wanted to hand out totes containing more than just pamphlets and flyers, so the staff held a Back to School Supply Drive from July 1 to Aug. 9. They collected enough supplies to fill 300 child support totes and gave them to movie night attendees along with other treats and goodies.



Virginia - Home Office

Home Office staff hosted an informational table in the lobby for Child Support Awareness Month. They were there to educate state staff in other Department of Social Services divisions about the services the Division of Child Support Enforcement provides to its customers.



Virginia - Lynchburg

The Lynchburg District Office participated in several community outreach events. Staff set up information tables in various county social services offices and a Virginia Career Works center. They spent a few hours at each site talking with clients and local staff. Based on these conversations, the child support office found they needed to interact more with their sister organizations. Lynchburg staff will be making presentations throughout the district.



Virginia - Richmond

The Richmond District Office held a back to school drive to collect school supplies. Staff collected enough supplies to fill 26 back-to-school bags that they handed out to children who visited the district office in August.



Virginia - Winchester

District office staff participated in Winchester's National Night Out in Old Downtown Winchester on the walking mall. It was a great way to network with local agencies, community partners, and families. The Winchester staff volunteers handed out stickers, pencils, coloring sheets and crayons, and bookmarks to kids.



Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement

OCSE had an outreach table in our Switzer building in Washington, D.C., to bring awareness and educate our ACF sister agencies about the child support program. Every Wednesday throughout August, we set up our table on a different floor ready with program information like the [national infographic](#) and [Child Support Report](#), and bookmarks with child support facts! We also launched a social media campaign on the [ACF Facebook page](#) and [Twitter feed](#).



2019 Child Support and Family Law Legislation

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With nearly 700 child support and family law bills introduced since January, this topic remains on the minds of many state lawmakers. These bills address a variety of issues, including custody and visitation, economic stability, enforcement of child support orders, family violence collaboration, child support guidelines, health care coverage in child support orders, healthy family relationships, implementation and administrative requirements, and parentage. Of these bills, 120 have been enacted, and 340 are still under consideration.

Through a partnership with the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) maintains a publicly available [database](#) of child support and family law legislation. Keep reading for a summary of laws introduced thus far in 2019.

Custody and visitation

Forty-six states and Puerto Rico have introduced 235 bills addressing custody and visitation in 2019. Of those, 28 bills have been enacted. Topping the list are bills related to shared parenting, factors to be considered when determining custody, court procedure requirements when a child is being relocated, and situations where family violence may be involved. Bills related to grandparent custody and visitation, and custody and visitation when parents are on active duty in the military are also big topics of legislation in 2019.

Shared parenting time has been a leading topic of legislation in recent years. In 2019, lawmakers in 27 states introduced 42 bills regarding shared or equal parenting time. Three bills have been enacted so far. Oregon established a rebuttable presumption that equal parenting time is in the best interests of the child. Tennessee now permits parents with equal parenting time to designate a primary residential parent. Utah's new law stipulates the factors the court may consider in determining joint custody.

Hawaii passed legislation that prohibits the disability of a parent or caregiver from being the sole factor in determining custody or visitation. Indiana authorized drug testing as a condition of exercising parenting time in certain circumstances. Indiana, Missouri, and Washington enacted legislation about child relocation or what to do when one parent moves far enough away to impact parenting time agreements. Texas and Virginia enacted legislation to address safe pick-up and drop-off procedures when custody is ordered and family violence is a factor.

Eight states enacted legislation allowing for grandparent custody or visitation, detailing procedures and requirements, creating standing for grandparents in custody or termination of parental rights cases, establishing stepparent visitation rights, and creating a commission to study grandfamilies. Arkansas, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, and North Dakota enacted legislation allowing grandparents and great-grandparents to have custody or visitation rights and outlining the procedure for petitioning for custody and visitation. New Hampshire established a commission to study data regarding grandfamilies, barriers to their success, and options to remove those barriers. A new Tennessee law establishes procedures and requirements for stepparents to petition for visitation. Wyoming created standing for biological grandparents to act “in loco parentis” in a petition for termination of parental rights.

Legislators from six states introduced 13 bills addressing custody when a parent is on active duty as a member of the U.S. armed forces and deployed outside the country. Arkansas enacted legislation requiring that any modification of child custody during periods of active duty deployment of a parent be temporary and revert back at the end of the deployment.

Order enforcement

As in years past, child support enforcement is the most common topic of legislation across the country, with nearly 200 bills from 43 states and Puerto Rico considered so far in 2019. Topics of enacted legislation include general child support enforcement, child support and incarceration, child support cooperation requirements, interception of certain gambling winnings or tax refunds, and license restrictions. More than 30 bills from 17 states have already been enacted.

Incarceration and child support, and child support cooperation continue to be big topics, with 26 states introducing more than 40 bills. Arkansas now prohibits incarceration from being treated as voluntary unemployment and requires parents to cooperate with child support as a condition of eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. West Virginia authorizes the interception of civil judgments and settlements to pay court-ordered obligations, including child support, prior to depositing them into an inmate's account.

Interception and exclusion of certain property to be applied to child support obligations were also topics of enacted legislation in 2019. Colorado, Indiana, Maine, and Montana enacted legislation allowing for lottery winnings or winnings from sports wagering to be intercepted to cover outstanding child support obligations. Colorado allows unclaimed property offsets to be applied to child support debt. Texas exempts certain savings accounts from interception, execution, or seizure for the satisfaction of child support debt.

In addition, restrictions on licenses for failure to pay child support and reinstatement of licenses are perennial hot topics, and 2019 was no different with almost 40 bills introduced. Most of these bills provide a path for reinstatement of driver's licenses, set the threshold for reinstatement, and revise procedures for suspension of certain licenses. Nevada revised the procedure for suspending a recreational license. Virginia increased the percentage of arrearages that must be paid to have a driver's license reinstated from 5% to 7%.

Guidelines

Thus far, in 2019, 32 states have introduced 75 bills to update and amend child support guidelines, calculate parenting time and other adjustments to guideline amounts, and clarify when child support orders terminate. At least 12 bills have been enacted. Arkansas and Colorado updated their child support income schedules. Maryland altered the definition of extraordinary medical expenses to mean costs for medical treatment in excess of a specified amount in a calendar year. Washington directed its child support agency to prepare a child support review report for use in the quadrennial review of the state's guidelines.

Georgia enacted legislation to remove alimony as a deviation factor for child support, while Kentucky created calculation methods for use in determining child support obligations when shared parenting is ordered. Indiana clarified that child support terminates when the child reaches the age of 18, unless the child is a full-time student in a secondary school. New Hampshire now requires child support to terminate when the minor child is emancipated. Montana and Texas addressed the payment of child support for adult children with disabilities. Montana now permits child support to continue until the individual is no longer disabled or no longer financially dependent on the custodial parent. Texas authorized the establishment of a special needs trust and allows child support to be paid directly to the trust for the benefit of the adult child with disabilities.

Family violence collaboration

More than a dozen states introduced legislation addressing family violence and custody or parental rights, as well as domestic violence protections. Four states have enacted legislation to restrict or terminate the parental rights of parents who conceive a child by sexual assault, rape, or incest. Alabama, North Dakota, and Wyoming made conception of a child by sexual assault a ground for termination of parental rights, and South Dakota created a rebuttable presumption that it is not in the best interest of the child to award custody to a person who caused conception by rape or incest.

Child support prevention

Mississippi and Washington introduced bills about strategies to prevent the need for child support services or enforcement. Mississippi's bill to require teen recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families to receive referrals to programs that provide information about birth control, prenatal health care, abstinence education, marriage education, parenting skills, family preservation, and fatherhood education did not pass. Meanwhile, Washington's bill to include information about child support in sexual health education is still being considered.

Economic stability

Twenty-one states introduced 35 bills affecting the economic stability of noncustodial parents. In accordance with recently amended federal law, all nine bills that have been enacted in California, Florida, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Nevada, Utah, Virginia, and Wisconsin increase the annual fee for child support services from \$25 to \$35.

Health care coverage

Two states enacted legislation addressing health care coverage within child support orders. Maryland altered the definition of extraordinary medical expenses to mean costs for medical treatment in excess of the amount specified in the child support guidelines. Michigan clarified the procedure for the enforcement of child support, medical support, and parenting time.

Parentage

So far, in 2019, 11 states have enacted 17 bills regarding parentage. Topics include establishment of paternity or parentage and same-sex parentage, amendments to the Uniform Parentage Act, timing of disestablishment of paternity, authorizing assisted reproduction, and describing parentage rights when a child is conceived through assisted reproduction.

Implementation and administration

Lawmakers in 24 states have introduced 38 bills addressing implementation and administration of child support programs in 2019. Of the 12 bills that have been appropriated, four appropriate funds to their state child support division. Nevada appropriated funds to the Division of Welfare and Supportive Services for a child support enforcement modernization system. Iowa eliminated its child support advisory committee, while Maryland established a workgroup to study child custody. Arkansas listed the membership of the child support guideline review board. California now requires its Department of Child Support Services to develop uniform forms, policies, and procedures in consultation with the Child Support Directors Association of California.

Family law

Of the 43 bills addressing family law topics, 11 have been enacted. Topics of enacted legislation include the minimum age to marry, procedures for getting married, changes in terminology, and modification of alimony and spousal support.

States have been looking at their statutory minimum age of marriage for several years. In 2019, Arkansas, Georgia, and Utah increased their minimum age of marriage to 16, and New Jersey established its minimum age of marriage at 18 with no exceptions.

The [National Conference of State Legislatures](#) is a bipartisan legislative research organization that serves legislators and legislative staff in all U.S. states and territories. For more information, visit their [child support and family law database](#) or contact Meghan McCann at meghan.mccann@ncsl.org.