

Solano County Department of Child Support Services 2002-2003 Grand Jury Report

Reason for Investigation

The Grand Jury elected to review the Solano County Department of Child Support Services.

Procedure

The Grand Jury:

- Toured Department of Child Support Services
- Interviewed Department of Child Support Services Director
- Reviewed information on Complaint and Resolution and Outreach Services

Background

1. The mission of the Department of Child Support Services (CSS) is to ensure that court ordered child support payments are made as directed. State and Federal law mandate all functions, programs and services of the Department.

2. The functions of CSS are to provide child support services when requested by the custodial parent. The Department:

- Locates non-custodial parent
- Identifies their assets
- Establishes paternity or maternity
- Establishes support orders through traditional legal process
- Enforces support orders through customary creditors remedies with significant emphasis on wage withholding
- Collects/distributes support
- Enforces payment within mandated time frames

3. Some accomplishments of the Department for 2001-2002 were:

- Expanding their community outreach program
- Collecting and distributing \$32.1 million in support payments (an 11% increase over the prior year)
- Providing 24 hour access to account information by installing a telephone voice response unit
- Establishing a Memorandum of Understanding with Solano County's Responsible Fathers Program
- Achieving the highest monthly collection in history (\$3,541,642 for April 2001)

For 2001-2002, the Department of Child Support Services had an estimated active caseload of 22,900.

On a monthly basis, an average of:

- 390 cases opened
- 450 cases closed
- 11,000 appointments made
- 22,500 documents generated
- 4,000 civil court filings
- 26,000 telephone calls received
- 315 court hearings held

The projected active caseload for the years 2002-2003 is 23,700.

4. Testimony indicated for the increase case load more space is required.

5. Funding is being requested by CSS to lease additional office space to accommodate the Department's needs. The Department is negotiating for a full service office in the city of Vallejo.

6. The Department has Customer Service, Complaint Resolution and Outreach Units. Approximately 1000 customers are seen in the Fairfield office each month. Clerical staff receives payments, answers general questions and gives referrals to the Family Law Facilitator or other agencies. Forty percent of the customers sit down with a case worker to discuss their concerns. Approximately 2000 phone calls per month are routed through Customer Service and answered by "live" clerical staff. The Department's web page is now available at www.childsup.ca.gov and provides general information, downloadable forms and driving directions. Customers will soon be able to e-mail their concerns directly to the Customer Service Unit in Fairfield.

7. There are four case workers in the Vallejo office serving approximately 180 customers each month. All staff has received Complaint Resolution Training. The Department attempts to resolve complaints informally.

8. CSS sponsors a Child Support Awareness Month where information tables are set up. Other social service agencies (e.g., Responsible Fathers Program) attend and there are games and projects for the families. This event is advertised in local newspapers and in public announcements on local radio stations.

9. CSS staff attends Responsible Fathers Support Group meetings to answer child support questions. There are also events where Parole and Community Services outreach to recently paroled men and women. One of their goals is to reduce recidivism.

Finding and Recommendation

Each finding is referenced to the background paragraph number

Finding #1 - The Department of Child Support Services needs additional space. (4, 5)

Recommendation #1 - Funds be allocated for additional space.

Comments

The Director and staff are to be commended for the services and programs they provide to the public.

Affected Agencies

- Solano County Department of Child Support Services
- Solano County Board of Supervisors