

Executive Summary

The Department of Rehabilitation and Correction – Office of Child Support Collaboration was initiated near the end of 2007 by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC), the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) Office of Child Support (OCS), and the Ohio Child Support Enforcement Agency Directors' Association (OCD A). The purpose of the group, dedicated to the children of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated parents, was to develop targeted, specific initiatives and recommendations designed to empower parents so that they can successfully remove barriers to the payment of child support. An additional objective was to share information regarding the correctional system and child support services.

Members of the group included representatives of DRC, OCS, the ODJFS Office of Family Stability, OCD A, county probation and parole officers, court administrators, attorneys, and child support enforcement agency (CSEA) professionals. The group energy level was high, and participants reported that the group's work immediately helped them in providing services to children and families. The group took time to delve into identifying current practices and researched ideas to improve efficiency and effectiveness in serving the target population.

From a strategic perspective, increasing collaborations to increase access to child support services makes good policy sense. It is important to design unique strategies for targeted populations, including incarcerated and formerly incarcerated child support obligors (people with orders to pay child support).

Ohio has 32 prisons at or above capacity, with more than 51,200 inmates statewide. More than half of these inmates have child support orders. Many more will have child support orders at some point in the future.

The majority of these offenders are not incarcerated due to non-payment of child support. In fact, criminal prosecution for enforcement of child support orders is often a last-resort enforcement technique. CSEAs primarily pursue felonious non-payment charges once administrative and civil remedies have been exhausted.

In 2006 and 2007, 773 inmates were incarcerated annually because of felony convictions for non-payment of child support. These "non-support offenders" generally serve sentences of less than one year.

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

With prison costs increasing (the average cost to incarcerate an inmate in Ohio is \$25,000 annually), criminal non-support is also a very expensive enforcement technique.

The workgroup recognized the need to promote ways to rehabilitate non-support offenders without the high costs of incarceration.

Sub-groups

The collaborative workgroup identified five areas for improvement and assigned responsibility for determining potential strategies for those areas to five subgroups: Connecting Child Support Information with Programs; Incarcerated Obligor; Diversion Activities; Developing Ongoing Exchanges of Information; and Improving Understanding of Child Support. In addition, the workgroup recommended taking steps to educate stakeholders on the benefits of new strategies. Finally, by consensus, the workgroup developed 20 recommendations.

Recommendation Categories

Connecting Child Support Information with Programs

These recommendations identify methods and means to increase professional collaboration and knowledge, improve customer service, and ultimately empower incarcerated and formerly incarcerated child support obligors to manage their support obligations. The group had six recommendations in this category:

1. Develop staff outreach and education from DRC to OCS/CSEAs.
2. Develop staff outreach and education from OCS/CSEAs to DRC.
3. Create educational videos regarding child support for incarcerated parents.
4. Establish communication between CSEAs and wardens to increase the participation of incarcerated obligors in prison programming.
5. Establish communication between CSEAs and regional administrators to increase the participation of formerly incarcerated obligors in reentry programming.
6. OCDA will survey county CSEAs to measure each agency's involvement in outreach to prisons and participation in reentry fairs.

Incarcerated Obligor

This category focuses on how to deal more effectively with the establishment or modification of a child support order when an obligor is incarcerated. This category also deals with managing arrears (delinquent or past-due child support, also called arrearages) that are assigned (owed to the state) and unassigned (owed to the custodial parent). The group had four recommendations in this category:

7. Draft and promote legislation to include incarceration as a reason to request an administrative review of a child support order for eligible obligors.
8. Draft and promote legislation to require the use of the obligor's income during incarceration when establishing or modifying a child support order for eligible obligors, and to consider the obligor's status as a convicted felon when estimating the potential income of a formerly incarcerated obligor.

NOTE: For consensus, the workgroup favored recommending issuing minimum \$50-per-month orders relating to recommendation 7 and 8. Including the minimum orders in the draft statutory language will require additional work.

9. Draft and promote legislation for compromising child support arrears that are assigned (owed) to the state (for all qualifying obligors – not just those formerly incarcerated).
10. Draft and promote legislation to authorize the CSEA to deviate from the guideline calculations when issuing a child support obligation any time that the parents agree with the deviation, as long as the deviation does not violate state or federal law.

Diversion Activities

These recommendations deal with developing diversion activities to divert non-compliant obligors from conviction, incarceration, or re-offending, so that they can continue to work and meet their child support obligations. Diversion activities can include such things as basic probation supervision, intensive probation supervision, pretrial services, day reporting, electronic monitoring/house arrest, work release, domestic violence programs and community service. Diversion programs piloted in seven Ohio counties have demonstrated promise through focusing on employment, supervised probation, and providing the courts with alternative sanctions for non-payment of child support. The group had two recommendations in this category:

11. Increase funding for existing Community Correction Act Grant diversion programs, to decrease DRC costs and increase child support collections.
12. Fund a continuum of diversion services to address the varying needs of the target population.

Developing Ongoing Exchanges of Information

This category of recommendations recognizes the importance of developing ongoing communication networks when agencies serve the same population. The exchange of information is important not just to improve services to clients, but also to increase the likelihood of obtaining federal grant funding. The group had four recommendations in this category:

13. Station a child support expert in each prison to help with reentry plans.
14. DRC should provide the CSEAs with data so that non-support offenders can be identified and prevented from "slipping through the cracks."
15. Create a process for incarcerated obligors, DRC staff, and community-based programs staff to contact CSEA-DRC liaisons to obtain case information and child support services. The liaisons should also network regularly with one another in order to share good ideas and practices that work.
16. Support the State Agency Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition with reporting to the legislature in accordance with Ohio Revised Code section 5120.07.

Improving Understanding of Child Support

This subgroup conducted face-to-face interviews with incarcerated parents and gauged their understanding of child support procedures and practices. Based on those interviews, the group made three recommendations in this category:

17. Include financial management, cooperative parenting, child support and job opportunity topics in education and outreach materials provided to DRC inmates.
18. Continue to seek input and feedback from incarcerated parents regarding child support by conducting surveys and on-site visits at prisons.
19. Include "third-party release" forms (also known as release of information forms) in outreach packages provided to inmates so that incarcerated obligors may authorize the CSEAs to speak to their family members regarding their cases.

Finally, to win the support of stakeholders—including courts, legislators, advocates, parents, tax payers and others--the group made a final recommendation:

20. Continue to seek input from partners and stakeholders, while communicating the group's recommendations, to determine how to increase efficiency, improve services for the incarcerated population, and build new or stronger partnerships, such as strengthening existing connections with the Ohio Benefit Bank initiative.

Collaborative Group Membership

Sara Andrews – ODRC, Adult Parole Authority, Superintendent
Carri Brown – ODJFS, Child Support, Assistant Deputy Director
John Brunner – Auglaize County CSEA, Attorney/Administrator
Cheryl Casto – ODRC, Adult Parole Authority, Mansfield Region, Parole Officer
Tiffany Chinn – ODJFS, Child Support, Human Services Program Consultant
Carole Crockett-Harris – ODRC, Pickaway Correctional Institute, Unit Manager/Administrator
Deb Cunningham – Hamilton County CSEA, Enforcement Section Chief
Heather Donnelly – ODJFS, Child Support, Policy Analyst
Rona Dorsey – ODRC, Office of Prisons, South Region Programs Administrator
Michael Falatach – Cuyahoga County CSEA, Direct Services Manager
Deborah Franklin-Jones – ODJFS, Child Support, Human Services Program Consultant
Erica Gordon – Seneca County DJFS, CSEA, Staff Attorney
Rose Handon – ODJFS, Children & Families, Family Services Bureau Chief
Alicia Handwerk – ODRC, Community Sanctions Bureau Chief
Bryan Headley – ODJFS, Child Support, Human Services Program Consultant
Linda Janes – ODRC, Parole and Community Services, Deputy Director
Karla Kerns – Guernsey County CSEA, Case Manager
Angi Lee – ODRC, Policy and Offender Reentry, Reentry Administrator
Laura Mandeville – Lorain County CSEA, Fiscal Supervisor
Angie Martin – ODJFS, Child Support, Administrative Assistant II
Scott Neely – ODRC, Legislative Liaison
Kim Newsom Bridges – Ohio CSEA Directors' Association, Executive Director
Holly Payne – Clark County CSEA, Case Manager
Jon Pence – ODRC, Ross County, Correctional Program Specialist
Lisa Pertee – Fairfield County CSEA, Supervising Attorney
Richard Portnick – Lorain County CSEA, Supervisor/Hearing Officer
Teri Raftery – ODJFS, Child Support, Business Analyst
Athena Riley – ODJFS, Child Support, County Services Section Chief
Amy Roehrenbeck – Ohio CSEA Directors' Association, Senior Policy Analyst
Sherri Rose – ODRC, Pickaway Correctional Institute, Correctional Program Specialist
Amy Ruppert – Auglaize County CJFS, Business Administrator
Valerie Rust – Richland County CSEA, Assistant Director
Shelley Swartztrauber – Montgomery County CSEA, Division Administrator
Gwen Wells – Coshocton County CSEA, Hearing Officer
Patrick Welsh – Fairfield County CSEA, Attorney
Mike Willets – Lorain/Medina Community Based Correctional Facility, Executive Director
Gary Yates – Butler County Common Pleas Court, Administrator

Checklist of Recommendations, DRC/OCS/OCDA Collaboration

		Stakeholder Support Needed	Programmatic Legislation Needed	Additional Funding Needed
1	Develop Outreach and Education from DRC to OCS/CSEAs.	X		
2	Develop Outreach and Education from OCS/CSEAs to DRC.	X		
3	Create educational videos regarding child support for incarcerated parents.	X		X
4	Establish communication between CSEAs and wardens to increase the participation of incarcerated obligors in prison programming.	X		
5	Establish communication between CSEAs and regional administrators to increase the participation of formerly incarcerated obligors in reentry programs.	X		
6	OCDA will survey each county CSEA to measure the agency's involvement in outreach to prisons and the agency's participation in reentry fairs.	X		
7	Draft and promote legislation to include incarceration as a reason to request an administrative review of a child support order for eligible obligors.	X	X	
8	Draft and promote legislation to require the use of the obligor's income during incarceration when establishing or modifying a child support order for eligible obligors, and to consider the obligor's status as a convicted felon when estimating the potential income of a formerly incarcerated obligor.	X	X	
9	Draft and promote legislation for compromising child support arrears that are assigned (owed) to the state (for all qualifying obligors – not just those formerly incarcerated).	X	X	
10	Draft and promote legislation to authorize the CSEA to deviate from the guideline calculations when issuing a child support obligation any time that the parents agree with the deviation, as long as the deviation does not violate state or federal law.	X	X	X
11	Increase funding for existing Community Correction Act Grant diversion programs, to decrease DRC costs and increase child support collections.	X	X	X
12	Fund a continuum of diversion services – to divert obligors from felony conviction, from incarceration or from re-offending – to address the varying needs of non-support offenders.	X	X	X
13	Station a child support expert at each prison to help with reentry plans.	X		X
14	DRC should provide the CSEAs with data so that non-support offenders can be identified and prevented from "slipping through the cracks."	X		X
15	Create a process for incarcerated obligors, DRC staff and community-based program staff to contact CSEA-DRC liaisons to obtain case information and child support services. The liaisons should also communicate with one another regularly, to share ideas and practices that work.	X		
16	Support the State Agency Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition with reporting to the legislature in accordance with Ohio Revised Code section 5120.07.	X		
17	Include financial management, cooperative parenting, child support and job opportunity topics in education and outreach materials provided to DRC inmates.	X		X
18	Continue to seek feedback from incarcerated parent regarding child support by conducting surveys and on-site visits at prisons.	X		
19	Include "third-party release" forms (also known as release of information forms) in outreach packages provided to inmates so that incarcerated obligors may authorize the CSEAs to speak to their family members regarding their cases.	X		
20	Continue to seek input from partners and stakeholders while communicating the group's recommendations.	X		