

GOVERNOR'S EXECUTIVE ORDER, SENATE BILL 170

A GUIDE TO ADDRESSING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- The State's targeted deadline for all counties to have completed reviews is March of 2003.
- Early in the project, in order to plan for the refunds, the State estimated that about \$38 million would be reimbursed to 160,000 families. The State also estimated that about \$6 million in interest payments would be issued. As the project progressed, the overall refunds have turned out to be less than the original estimates.
- As of February 23, 2003, the Governor's Executive Order project was 94.7% completed statewide.
- In completing the Executive Order project, each county worked to ensure that families that were due a refund received a refund. This work was accomplished in accordance with a "family first" policy, indicating that the family would receive money prior to any reimbursement due to the state of Ohio.

WHAT IS THE GOVERNOR'S EXECUTIVE ORDER PROJECT?

In August 2001, Governor Bob Taft issued an Executive Order instructing the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to reimburse families that were due money because of changes in federal law.



The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 made substantive changes in the principles underlying the assignment of child support. Beginning in

October 2000, a state could no longer take child support arrearages that were already owed to the families prior to their participation in the public assistance program.

Between 1997 and 2000, the federal government gave states the option to claim some arrearages to help offset the costs of public assistance. By the Executive Order of Governor Taft and by mandate of Senate Bill 170, county child support enforcement agencies were required to review arrearage payments made during this period. The Executive Order was consistent with Governor Taft's

commitment to children.

As defined by federal law, the area of concern was for families who:

- Went on public assistance after October 1, 1997, and
- Had a child support order established at the time, and
- Were already owed an arrearage prior to entering public assistance.

In addition, the non-residential parent must have paid the current monthly amount of support and have paid extra toward the arrearage through some means other than IRS tax offset.

WHAT WAS THE ROLE OF THE COUNTY CSEA?

Dedicated county personnel worked hard to complete the Executive Order project. Upon the Governor's announcement, work began immediately. The counties and the state cooperated to ensure the project moved ahead. Some problems were experienced as might be expected with any large project of this nature.

The extra work of the project was accomplished while child support workers continued to focus on the tenets of the child support program: locating parents, determining paternity, establishing support obligations, and collecting

child support. Accountability, customer service, and collaboration were key to the project completion.

The process of the review was highly labor intensive.

In most counties, the review required personnel to analyze records from more than one computer system. The state of Ohio was converted to the statewide Support Enforcement Tracking System in the year 2000. During the review period, many counties had different computer systems.

Several counties had the opportunity to implement an automated process for the review. Most counties were required to manually review cases to determine eligibility for a refund. The manual review of cases took an average of one hour per case.

Several counties served as "test sites" for the state. This means that the counties worked with the state to develop a process for a statewide worksheet, known as the Central Data Repository.

WHAT QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES WERE IMPLEMENTED?

County agencies developed detailed processes to help reasonably ensure that the correct families received the correct refunds. Prior to a check being issued by the state, county Supervisors reviewed the information that was input into the statewide worksheet. Several counties enlisted the help of internal quality assurance professionals or an independent accounting firm to review the work accomplished for accuracy and reasonableness. Customer service personnel were trained on the subject so that those served by the child support program would have accurate responses to questions.



HOW WERE FAMILIES NOTIFIED OF THE PROJECT AND THEIR RIGHT TO A STATE HEARING?

With the media attention to the project, counties stepped up customer service efforts in order to answer increased phone calls, walk-in appointments, and written inquiries about the project. Many people served by the child support program believed they were due a refund even though their case activities did not meet the timeframe and assistance requirements mentioned above. With the cases that did meet the review criteria, parties were sent notices by the state. The notices outlined the outcome of the review. The notices were sent whether a refund was due or not. From the notices, the parties could request a state hearing if they believed the calculations were incorrect.

WHAT WAS THE STATUS OF THE PROJECT AT THE END OF JANUARY 2003?

As of the end of January 2003, 55 counties reported successful completion of the project. At that time, 58,073 checks totaling \$13,100,507.59 had been issued to families. Statewide, less than 500 state hearings have been requested. About 75% of the state hearings have been abandoned. Of the state hearings held, 24 decisions have been communicated to the state Office of Child Support. Of the 24 cases, 20 were overruled, and 4 were sustained, or found in favor of the party to the case.

WHAT COUNTY SPECIFIC INFORMATION SHOULD LOCAL AGENCIES SHARE WITH THE MEDIA?

Below is an example of what type of county specific information you could share with the media regarding your county's activity on the Executive Order project.

total number of cases analyzed, 859 cases met the review criteria. With these cases, parties were sent notices outlining the outcome of the review.

Fairfield County served as a test site for the state. The first reimbursement checks were mailed in April 2002. At the end of December 2002, Fairfield County had successfully completed the project.

A total of 594 cases were entitled to a refund, and parties were mailed a refund. Overall, Fairfield County refunded a total of \$104,629.91.

Fairfield County analyzed a total of 2,466 cases that potentially met the timeframe and assistance requirements. Of the

In Fairfield County, two state hearings have been held. Both were overruled.

About 92% of Fairfield County

cases involve parties *not* currently on public assistance. This statistic draws attention to the fact that many child support customers are maintaining employment and are depending on the CSEA for vital services.

In 2002, Fairfield County collections of court ordered support totaled about \$19.9 Million, an increase of 6% over the prior calendar year. Fairfield County manages activity on more than 6,800 cases.

The purpose of the child support program is to provide children with the opportunity for a better life. By working with both parents to establish and enforce support orders, the child support program helps children receive the financial and medical support that has been ordered for them and that they deserve. The program helps families work toward becoming and remaining self-sufficient.

