

oppaga Progress Report



November 2000

Report No. 00-19

Child Support Enforcement Demonstration Projects Continue to Show Mixed Results

at a glance

Florida's two long-standing child support enforcement demonstration projects, located in Manatee and Miami-Dade counties, continue to show mixed performance results. The Manatee County demonstration project has generally performed better than the Department of Revenue. However, the performance of the Miami-Dade County demonstration project continues to be lower than that of the department.

As recommended by OPPAGA, the Department of Revenue has included performance targets for Manatee and Miami-Dade counties in their Fiscal Year 1999-2000 contracts. The department has requested both counties to submit explanations for performance targets not met in accordance with the contracts and has required both counties to submit corrective action plans.

The department and demonstration counties should view each other as cooperative partners and work together to improve both individual and statewide performance.

Purpose

In accordance with state law, this progress report informs the Legislature of actions taken by the Department of Revenue in response to a 1999 OPPAGA report.^{1, 2}

This report presents our assessment of the extent to which the department has addressed the findings and recommendations included in our report.

Background

The Department of Revenue (DOR) is assigned overall responsibility for administering child support enforcement in the state. The department provides a variety of child support services, including locating parents, determining paternity of children, establishing court orders for payment of support, initiating enforcement action when parents fail to comply with their support obligations, and distributing funds to custodial parents. The department provides these services to public assistance recipients and to any parent that requests and pays an application fee for the services.

¹ Section 11.45(7)(f), F.S.

² *Child Support Enforcement Demonstration Projects Show Mixed Results, But Should Be Continued*, OPPAGA [Report No. 98-39](#), January 1999.

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In 1985, the Florida Legislature created two child support enforcement demonstration projects in Manatee and Miami-Dade counties. The clerk of the Circuit Court in Manatee County administers the Manatee County demonstration project while the state attorney for the Eleventh Judicial Circuit administers the Miami-Dade County demonstration project. These demonstration projects were established to address concerns such as delays in providing services and the cost-effectiveness of different agencies providing child support services. Child support enforcement services for the remaining 65 counties in Florida are provided by the Department of Revenue.

The Manatee County clerk of the Circuit Court and the Miami-Dade County state attorney provide the same general child support enforcement services that the Department of Revenue provides in the other 65 counties in the state. The only significant differences between the department's services and those provided in the demonstration counties are the manner in which legal services are provided and how the child support function is organized.

The department contracts with private attorneys and the Office of the Attorney General to provide legal support, while the two demonstration projects use their own staff to provide these services. Manatee County has organized its child support activities using a caseworker model, in which a caseworker is assigned a child support case and handles the majority of activities necessary to establish and enforce child support orders involving that case. In contrast, the department and Miami-Dade County have organized their child support functions around a process management model. A process management system employs teams with specialized knowledge to handle separate tasks for each case such as opening a case, locating the non-custodial parent and establishing paternity.

Funding for child support enforcement in the state is derived from general revenue, federal matching funds, federal incentive payments, and application and processing fees. The two

demonstration projects are provided funds on a cost reimbursement basis pursuant to contracts with the Department of Revenue. During Fiscal Year 1999-2000, reimbursable costs for Manatee and Miami-Dade counties totaled about \$2.3 million and \$15.3 million, respectively.

Prior Findings

Performance of demonstration projects

Our prior report found that the child support enforcement demonstration projects located in Manatee and Miami-Dade counties showed mixed performance results. In general, the Manatee County demonstration project had performed well. However, the Miami-Dade County demonstration project had not performed as well as peer counties and had been less efficient in collecting support than the Department of Revenue.^{3,4}

The performances of both demonstration projects were affected by a number of factors. These factors included population size, court practices, cultural characteristics, and internal organizational processes. However, the impact of these factors affected each demonstration county differently due to differences between the counties. Manatee County's relatively smaller population along with an adequate and trained staff allowed it to perform well. Miami-Dade County's relatively larger population coupled with varying cultural characteristics and recent change from a caseworker model to a process management model of handling cases led to performance problems for Miami-Dade County.

³ Peer counties are considered comparable counties for the purposes of comparison and analysis. For Manatee County, our peer counties were Lake, Leon, Marion, Pasco, and Sarasota. Our peer counties for Miami-Dade County were Broward, Duval, Hillsborough, Orange, and Palm Beach.

⁴ For the purposes of this progress report, the term "Department of Revenue performance" describes the combined performance of the 65 counties in which the Department of Revenue performs child support enforcement functions. The term "statewide performance" describes the combined performance of all 67 counties in Florida.

Continuation of demonstration projects

In our prior report, we recommended that the Legislature continue funding the two demonstration projects. The recommendation to continue the Manatee demonstration project was based on its good performance. In contrast, the recommendation to continue the Miami-Dade demonstration project was based on recent steps that had been taken to improve performance and an understanding of the factors that have affected Miami-Dade County's performance.

We also recommended that the Legislature amend Ch. 85-178, *Laws of Florida*, to show that Manatee and Miami-Dade counties are not demonstration projects. These counties no longer serve the purpose of demonstration projects, but rather offer local solutions to providing child support enforcement services.

Funding of projects based on performance

In our prior report, we recommended that future funding for both projects be based primarily on their performance. To facilitate this process, we recommended the department establish agreed-upon performance targets and make these targets part of its contracts with each county. We also recommended that the demonstration projects be required to develop corrective action plans when they did not meet the specified performance levels and that these plans should be reviewed and commented on

by the department. If the corrective actions did not result in improvement, we recommended that the department consider asking the Legislature to direct the department to terminate the contract and either take over the day-to-day program activities or contract with another entity for such services.

Current Status

We reviewed the performance of the demonstration counties using six measures. Five of the measures are included in the department's contracts with the demonstration counties, for which performance targets were established for Fiscal Year 1999-2000.⁵

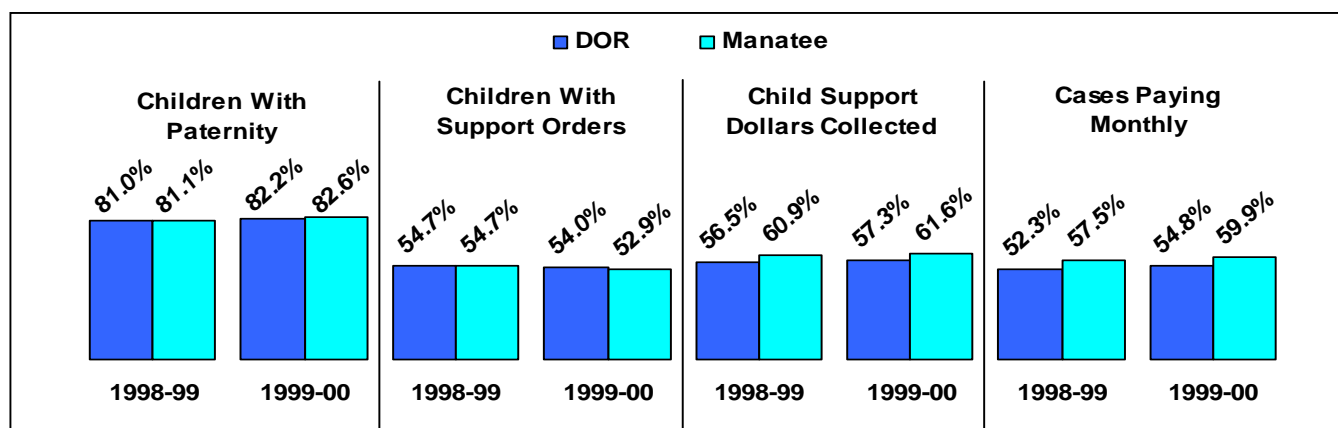
Performance of demonstration projects

Manatee County. The performance of Manatee County is generally similar to or exceeds that of the department. As seen in Exhibit 1, Manatee's performance on the four effectiveness indicators was generally better than the department's performance during Fiscal Years 1998-99 and 1999-2000.

⁵ The department included four effectiveness indicators in its contracts with demonstration counties: (1) children with paternity established, (2) children with support orders, (3) child support dollars collected, and (4) child support cases paying monthly. The output measure, children with newly established support orders, was also included in the contracts. OPPAGA also used the ratio of dollars collected to dollars spent to measure program efficiency.

Exhibit 1

Fiscal Year Performance by Manatee County Is Generally Better Than the Department's Performance



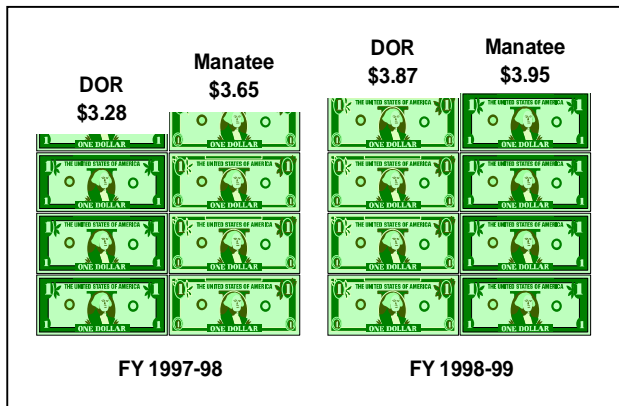
Source: Department of Revenue.

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Also in terms of efficiency, Manatee remains more efficient in collecting child support payments than the department. As shown in Exhibit 2, Manatee collected \$3.95 in child support payments for every \$1 that it spent collecting the support in Fiscal Year 1998-99, while the department collected \$3.87 in support for every \$1 it spent.⁶

Exhibit 2

Manatee County Continues to Be More Efficient in Collecting Child Support Than the Department



Source: Department of Revenue.

Miami-Dade County. In contrast to Manatee's performance, Miami-Dade County's performance is generally below that of the Department of Revenue. As seen in Exhibit 3, Miami-Dade's performance on the four effectiveness indicators was generally below that of the department during Fiscal Years 1998-99 and 1999-2000.

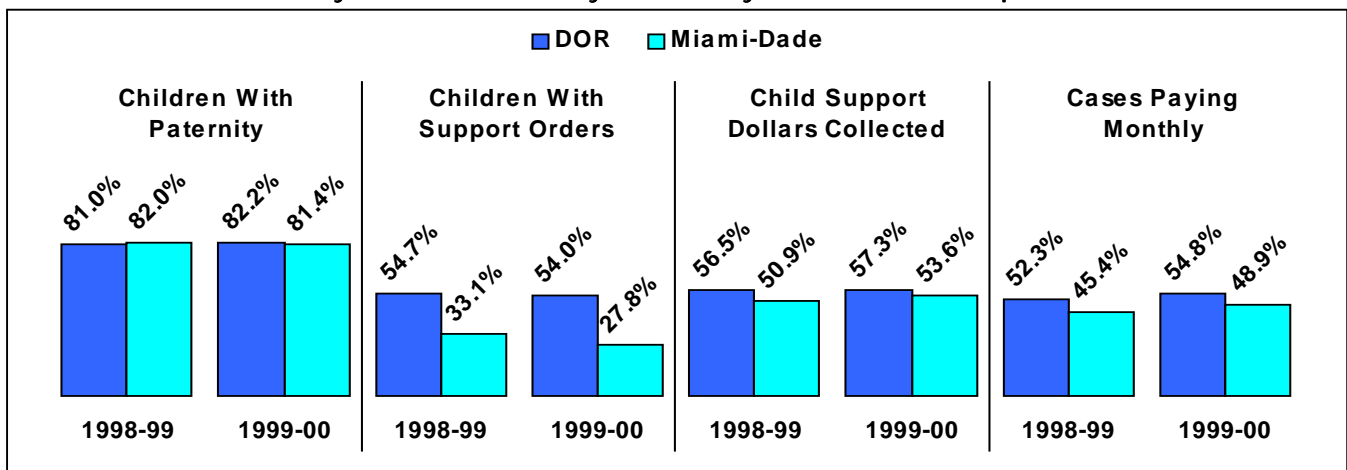
Miami-Dade County also has been less efficient in collecting support compared to the department. As shown in Exhibit 4, in Fiscal Year 1998-99, Miami-Dade collected \$2.84 in child support payments for every \$1 it spent collecting the support. This is a drop of \$0.11 in collections per \$1 spent from Fiscal Year 1997-98. In comparison, the department collected \$3.87 in child support for every \$1 spent collecting the support in the same period of time, an increase of \$0.59 in collections per \$1 spent in Fiscal Year 1997-98.⁷

⁶ Fiscal Year 1999-2000 information on efficiency in collecting support will not be available for the demonstration counties until December 31, 2000. However, to provide a two-year context of performance, we included Fiscal Year 1997-98 data in Exhibit 2.

⁷ Fiscal Year 1999-2000 information on efficiency in collecting support will not be available until December 31, 2000. However, to provide a two-year context of performance, we included Fiscal Year 1997-98 data in Exhibit 4.

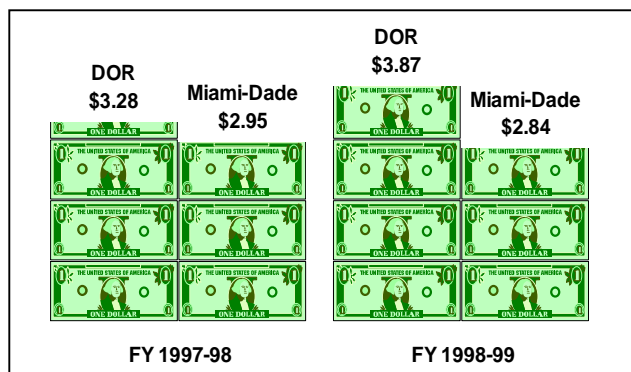
Exhibit 3

Fiscal Year Performance by Miami-Dade County Is Generally Lower Than the Department's Performance



Source: Department of Revenue.

Exhibit 4
Miami-Dade County Continues to Be Less Efficient
in Collecting Child Support Than the Department



Source: Department of Revenue.

Staff in Miami-Dade County have stated that its child support enforcement performance has slowly improved in the last two and one-half years. They attribute the improvements to changes in management and a strategic plan to work its caseload. As seen in Exhibit 3, Miami-Dade's performance decreased in two and increased in two of the four effectiveness measures. However, Exhibit 4 shows that Miami-Dade's efficiency in collecting child support payments declined over the same period.

Continuation of demonstration projects

The Department of Revenue is continuing to contract, under legislative authorization, with the Manatee county clerk of the Circuit Court and the state attorney for the Eleventh Judicial Circuit for child support enforcement activities.

The Legislature has not amended Ch. 85-178, *Laws of Florida*, to show Manatee and Miami-Dade counties are not demonstration projects but rather are local solutions to providing child support enforcement services. We continue to believe that this change should be made in law so as to accurately reflect the status of these contractual relationships.

Performance to be monitored
by the department

The department established performance targets for Manatee and Miami-Dade counties for Fiscal Year 1998-99. Neither county met its standards for the establishment of support orders or paternity for Fiscal Year 1998-99. However, these performance targets were not made part of the contracts until Fiscal Year 1999-2000, making them unenforceable until that time. Because the standards were not enforceable until Fiscal Year 1999-2000, the department did not recommend that Manatee and Miami-Dade counties evaluate and identify problems adversely affecting performance or develop corrective action plans.

Performance standards were established for the demonstration counties for Fiscal Year 1999-2000. Manatee County met the standards for Fiscal Year 1999-2000 in four of the five contractual performance measures while Miami-Dade County met three measures (see Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5
Performance Standards Not Met
in Fiscal Year 1999-2000

	Children With Support Orders	Children With Newly Established Support Orders
Manatee County		
Performance standard	54.00%	NA
Actual performance	52.93%	NA
Miami-Dade County		
Performance standard	33.50%	6,800
Actual performance	27.85%	5,871

Source: Department of Revenue.

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The department has asked the demonstration counties to provide their explanations for variance (both positive and negative) of their actual performance in relationship to performance standards. On October 31, 2000, the department asked the demonstration counties to submit a corrective action plan for improving those areas in which they missed their standards.

Low performance affects the level of services to families and program funding

It will be important for the department to work with the demonstration counties, particularly Miami-Dade, to help them improve their performance and meet contract standards. Together, these counties serve almost 25% of the total child support cases statewide. Miami-Dade faces unique challenges in establishing child support orders and collecting support payments. However, it is important that families in Miami-Dade receive services that are at least similar to the efficiency and effectiveness of services provided to families living in other counties.

In addition, low performance in Miami-Dade can affect Florida's ability to collect federal incentive awards for its child support program. Under new federal regulations, incentive grants will be available to states based on five performance measures. States will not be eligible for incentive funding on a measure unless the state achieves a minimum threshold of 50% or demonstrates improved performance that exceeds the prior year level by at least 5%.

During federal Fiscal Year 2000, statewide performance for the measure Percentage of Cases with Support Orders was 47%, which was below the required threshold to be eligible for incentive funding for this measure.⁸ However, as shown in Exhibit 6, if Miami-Dade's performance had not been included in the state's reported performance, Florida would have reached the 50% standard for the

child support order establishment measure and thus increased Florida's eligibility for incentive funding by approximately \$1 million.

Exhibit 6 Dade County's Performance Can Affect Statewide Performance

Federal Fiscal Year 2000	Percentage of Cases With Support Orders
Statewide Performance	47%
Miami-Dade Performance	28%
Statewide Performance Minus Miami-Dade	52%

Source: Department of Revenue.

Summary and Recommendations

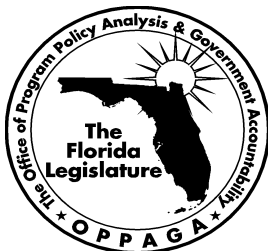
We continue to believe that the department should require corrective action plans if the demonstration counties do not meet performance targets. Hopefully, the demonstration counties will be able to improve their performance with the help of the department within a reasonable period of time. If not, then the department should request that the Legislature direct them to terminate the contract. The department could then either take over the day-to-day program activities or contract with another entity for such services.

The department and both counties should view each other as cooperative partners and work together to improve performance. Sharing information and enforcement tools will assist all partners in increasing their effectiveness and improving statewide program results. For example, we will recommend several best practices in our justification review of the state's child support enforcement program (to be released in the near future) that can be used to improve the department's reported performance and thus increase the receipt of federal incentive funding. It is in the partners' best interests to work together to apply these practices in the demonstration counties to improve the performance statistics for both the state and individual partners.

⁸ Florida's performance for this measure during Fiscal Year 1999 was 49%, which also prevented the state from meeting the 5% improvement criteria.

The Florida Legislature

Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability



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