

Progress Report



July 2001

Report No. 01-32

State Child Support Case Registry Is Fully Operational; Receives Reimbursement

at a glance

- The State Case Registry, which is part of Florida's child support enforcement system, is fully operational and is now able to transmit updates of its initial submissions and process data received from the Federal Case Registry.
- As a result of the implementation of our recommendations, the federal Department of Health and Human Services approved an additional \$500,000 as reimbursement for expenses relating to the development of the State Case Registry.
- The Department of Revenue reported that it has reduced the percentage of child support orders that cannot be forwarded to the Federal Case Registry from 16% to 0.4%.

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 1999 report.

Background

The Department of Revenue is responsible for administering the Florida Child Support Enforcement Program under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act. Department activities include location of parent and establishment of paternity; support order establishment, modification, and enforcement; and collection and distribution of child support payments.

¹ Section 11.45(7)(f), *F.S.*

² *Child Support Enforcement State Case Registry Is Operational, But Several Issues Should Be Resolved*, [OPPAGA Report No. 99-10](#), September 1999.

Congress amended federal child support requirements as part of the Federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. For the first time each state was required to establish and operate a State Case Registry. The case registry is a centralized electronic repository of child support case records and orders. The department contracts with the Florida Association of Court Clerks and Comptroller to collect data from each clerk of the court in Florida and to transmit this data to the Department of Revenue.³ To facilitate the collection of this information, the clerks association uses the automated Clerk of Court Child Support Collection (CLERC) System.

Each state's case registry must link to the Federal Case Registry, which serves as a national registry of persons involved in child support cases. Each state must be able to transmit extracts of data for its child support cases, such as the name, Social Security number, and date of birth for each parent and child identified in a support order. This information will be available through the Federal Case Registry to assist states in locating persons who may be involved in a child support case; in establishing paternity; and in establishing, enforcing, or modifying child support obligations.

Prior Findings ---

Our 1999 review found that while the State Case Registry was operational, several issues needed resolution. Clerks of court were not reporting all required information, and information received back from the Federal Case Registry could not be processed. We also found that Florida was eligible to receive up to \$1.8 million in additional federal funding for the State Case Registry.

Information Reporting

Although Florida's State Case Registry appeared to be in general compliance with state and federal requirements, there were several unresolved implementation issues. Specifically, the department was not providing all required information to the Federal Case Registry and the department was not able to process data received from the Federal Case Registry. We recommended that the related issues below be addressed.

- Clerks of courts were not providing information on support orders in which payments were made directly to the custodial parent because this information was not maintained on the CLERC System. In addition, three counties, Collier, Dade, and Suwannee, had not submitted any support order information for these cases to the case registry as of September 20, 1999, because these counties had not completed their conversion to the CLERC System, as required by s. 61.1826, *Florida Statutes*.

³ The Florida Association of Court Clerks and Comptroller is a voluntary, nonprofit, statewide association established to serve the Clerks of the Circuit Court and County Comptrollers of the state of Florida.

We recommended that the department work with the clerks association to develop procedures to ensure that information on all child support orders are included in the State Case Registry.

- The Department of Revenue was unable to report some required information to the Federal Case Registry because the department lacked complete data on these cases. The department stated that it did not report 16% of Florida's child support orders because the cases lacked information such as Social Security number or date of birth.

To speed resolution of this problem, OPPAGA recommended that the department confer with the Office of State Court Administrator to facilitate the inclusion of this information in all future support orders. For example, standard language or forms for including this information should be developed for all support orders.

- The department was neither able to process the data it received from the Federal Case Registry nor able to transmit updates of its initial submissions of support information to the Federal Case Registry. We recommended that the department ensure that information received from the Federal Case Registry could be processed and that plans were in place to use this information to improve the state's location and collection efforts.

Additional federal funding

Florida's costs for developing and operating the State Case Registry were eligible for partial federal reimbursement (also known as federal financial participation). These costs were incurred to meet federal requirements under federal regulations, and

as such 66% of the cost were eligible for reimbursement through federal matching funds. There were two potential areas for increased federal funding.

First, OPPAGA recommended that the department determine if federal reimbursement was available for costs associated with the conversion of 12 county clerks of court to the CLERC System. Based on estimates of conversion costs provided by the clerks, OPPAGA estimated that the state could potentially receive an additional \$1.1 million in federal reimbursement.

Second, we recommended that the department determine if federal reimbursement is available for more Fiscal Year 1998-99 CLERC System operational costs. We reported that while the eligibility of the additional operational costs is open to interpretation, the department should request that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services make the determination rather than assuming that the full costs are not eligible for reimbursement. OPPAGA estimated that approval of federal financial participation for all CLERC System operational expenses could result in the recovery of \$700,000 through additional federal reimbursement.

Current Status —————

The State Case Registry is now fully operational. All counties are submitting support order information through the CLERC System and the State Case Registry is able to process data received from the Federal Case Registry. Also, the federal department of Health and Human Services approved an additional \$500,000 in federal reimbursement for expenses relating to the development of the State Case Registry.

Information Reporting

The department has not implemented our recommendation to develop procedures to ensure that information on all Non IV-D support orders are included in the State Case Registry. However, both the department and the clerks have reduced the number of cases that cannot be transmitted due to the unavailability of data.

The department reported that information for 3,756 child support orders, which represents only 0.4% of the child support orders in the State Case Registry, cannot be forwarded to the Federal Case Registry because of a lack of data. This represents a significant improvement since our initial report when 16% of the child support orders in the state could not be transmitted due to incomplete data. However, clerks of courts are still not providing information on support orders in which payments are made directly to the custodial parent because this information is not maintained on the CLERC System. We continue to recommend that the department develop procedures to ensure that information for all of Florida's child support orders is forwarded to the Federal Case Registry.

The department reported that it is now able to transmit updates of its initial submission of support information to the Federal Case Registry and process data received from the Federal Case Registry. The program uses the information received from the Federal Case Registry to more effectively locate and resolve jurisdictional problems caused by the interstate movement of parents.

Additional federal funding

The federal department of Health and Human Services approved an additional \$500,000 in federal reimbursement for CLERC system conversion costs. The federal Department of Health and Human Services disallowed the request for federal reimbursement for CLERC system operational costs because of the lack of an approved cost allocation methodology.

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