



Office of Program Policy Analysis And Government Accountability



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Child Support Enforcement Demonstration Projects Show Mixed Results, But Should Be Continued

Abstract

- Florida's two long-standing child support enforcement demonstration projects, located in Manatee and Dade counties, show mixed performance results. The Manatee County demonstration project has generally performed well. However, the Dade County demonstration project has not performed well and has been less efficient than the Department of Revenue in collecting support.
- Both demonstration projects were affected by several key factors, including population size, the characteristics of the families served, court practices, and internal organizational processes. However, these factors affected the two projects differently due the specific circumstances in each county. Manatee County's relative smaller size and sufficient, trained staff allowed it to perform well while these factors were more problematic for Dade County.
- We recommend that the Legislature continue funding the two demonstration projects. The Manatee demonstration project should be continued based on its good performance. In contrast, the Dade demonstration project's continued funding should not be based on past performance but rather on recent steps taken by the Legislature and Dade management to improve performance, and an understanding of the factors that have affected Dade's performance. Future funding for both projects should be based primarily on their performance.

Purpose

The 1998 Florida Legislature directed the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) to evaluate the child support enforcement demonstration projects in Manatee and Dade counties. Specifically, the Legislature directed OPPAGA to assess the demonstration project's performance and recommend whether it should continue to fund these projects. After discussions with legislative committee staff, we focused our analysis on three questions.

- How have the demonstration projects performed compared to the Department of Revenue and department-administered offices in selected counties?
- What factors have contributed to each of the demonstration project's performance?
- Should the two projects be continued?

Background

The effectiveness of Florida's child support program can directly impact custodial parents, the state's public assistance expenditures, and federal program funding. Families that do not receive child support can suffer financial hardship and may require financial aid from public assistance programs. State child support programs receive federal incentive payments based in part on the amount of child support collected. States may have their payments reduced if they do not perform well.

Florida created a statewide child support enforcement program in 1975. In 1985 the Florida Legislature created two child support enforcement demonstration projects, located in Manatee and Dade counties.¹ The Clerk of the Circuit Court administers the Manatee County demonstration project, while the State Attorney for the Eleventh Judicial Circuit administers the Dade County

¹ Chapter 85-178, Laws of Florida, authorized three demonstration projects. The department now administers the Palm Beach County demonstration project.

demonstration project. These demonstration projects were established to address concerns about administrative fragmentation, inconsistencies in enforcement services, delays in providing services, and the cost-effectiveness of different agencies providing child support services. Each demonstration project involved the consolidation of services under a single governmental entity.

In 1994, the Florida Legislature assigned overall responsibility for administering the state's Child Support Enforcement Program to the Department of Revenue.² 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, collecting support from local county depositories, and distributing funds to custodial parents. The department provides these services through the local offices to public assistance recipients and to any parent that requests and pays an application fee for the services.

The Manatee County Clerk of the Circuit Court and the Dade County State Attorney provide the same general child support enforcement services that the Department of Revenue provides through offices in the other 65 counties in the state. The only significant difference between the department's services and those provided in Manatee County and Dade County is in the manner which legal services are provided. The department contracts with private attorneys, the Office of the Attorney General, and several state attorneys to provide legal support, whereas the two demonstration projects use their own staff to provide these services.

Funding for the state Child Support Enforcement Program is derived from general revenue, state share of temporary assistance to needy family collections, federal incentives, federal matching funds, and application and processing fees. The two demonstration projects are provided funds on a cost reimbursement basis pursuant to a contract with the Department of Revenue. During Fiscal Year 1997-98 the Department of Revenue expended \$180 million to administer the state Child Support Enforcement Program. Reimbursable costs for Manatee and Dade counties for the same fiscal year totaled about \$2.2 million and \$15.1 million, respectively.

² The Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services administered the program prior to July 1994.

Questions and Answers

Question 1

How have the demonstration projects performed compared to the Department of Revenue and department-administered offices in selected counties?

The Manatee County Child Support Enforcement Demonstration Project generally performed well compared to the Department of Revenue's activities in peer counties. However, the Dade County Child Support Enforcement Demonstration Project did not perform well compared to the department's activities in peer counties.

To assess the performance of the two demonstration projects, we analyzed data on five key performance indicators and compared the demonstration projects' performance to that of the Department of Revenue. We considered both the department's statewide performance as well as the department's performance in five peer counties where it administers child support activities. We selected the peer counties based on caseload size.³ Four of the five key performance indicators relate to the programs' effectiveness in establishing support orders for children and collecting the support, while the remaining indicator relates to the efficiency with which support was collected.⁴

Manatee's performance was generally positive compared to the Department of Revenue.

In June 1998 Manatee's performance equaled or exceeded that of the Department of Revenue statewide and was generally comparable to that of the peer counties. As shown in Exhibit 1, Manatee's performance on the four program effectiveness indicators was generally better than the department's statewide performance. When compared to department-administered peer counties, Manatee's performance was generally favorable, with it outperforming some counties on certain indicators and falling behind some peer counties on other indicators.

³ The department-administered county offices were selected in terms of caseload size. Comparing Manatee County and Dade County to peer counties helped control for the influences of factors such as size of caseload. The counties selected to compare Manatee were Lake, Leon, Marion, Pasco, and Sarasota. However, it is difficult to compare Dade solely on caseload because it is the most populous county in the state and it accounted for 17% of the entire state's caseload at the beginning of Fiscal Year 1997-98. The counties selected to compare Dade were Broward, Duval, Hillsborough, Orange, and Palm Beach.

⁴ The measures used to evaluate performance included (1) percentage of children with support orders, (2) percentage of children with paternity, (3) percentage of child support collected that was owed, (4) percentage of cases paying monthly, and (5) total child support collected per \$1 of expenditures.

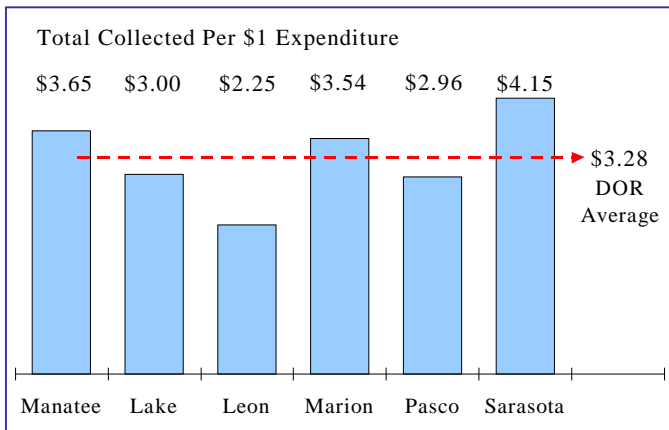
Exhibit 1
Manatee County 's Demonstration Project Performed Well Compared to the Department and Most Peer Counties for June 1998

Performance Indicator	Manatee	Overall DOR	Peer Counties				
			Lake	Leon	Marion	Pasco	Sarasota
Percentage of children with support orders	58%	58%	49%	55%	66%	61%	62%
Percentage of children with paternity	83%	83%	85%	79%	88%	87%	86%
Percentage of child support collected that was owed	59%	53%	58%	50%	58%	50%	55%
Percentage of cases paying monthly	58%	53%	56%	47%	60%	52%	56%

Source: Department of Revenue

Manatee was also more efficient in collecting child support compared to the overall department and most of the peer counties. As shown in Exhibit 2, Manatee collected \$3.65 in child support for every dollar that it spent collecting the support, while the department collected \$3.28 in support statewide for every dollar it spent. Manatee was also more cost efficient than the department and four of the five peer counties.

Exhibit 2
Manatee County's Demonstration Project Was Generally More Efficient in Collecting Child Support Than the Department and Peer Counties for Fiscal Year 1997-98



Source: Department of Revenue

Dade's Performance Was Generally Not Favorable Compared to the Department of Revenue

In contrast, the Dade demonstration project's performance was generally below that of the Department of Revenue for June 1998. As shown in Exhibit 3, Dade performed lower than the department's statewide average for three of the four effectiveness indicators. Dade's performance in establishing support orders for children was significantly below that of the department (38% compared to 58%), although Dade had a slightly better rate of paternity establishment than the department. Dade's performance was also somewhat lower than that of the peer counties for the other measures.

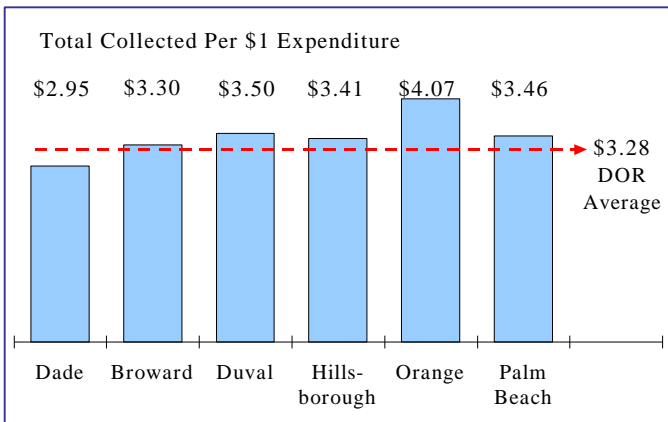
Dade was also less efficient in collecting support compared to the overall department. As shown in Exhibit 4, Dade collected \$2.95 in child support for every dollar that it spent collecting the support. In contrast, the department collected \$3.28 in child support for every dollar it spent statewide collecting the support. Dade was also less efficient in collecting support than each of the peer counties.

Exhibit 3
Dade County's Demonstration Project's Performance Was Generally Below that of the Department and Peer Counties for June 1998

Performance Indicator	Dade	Overall DOR	Peer Counties				
			Broward	Duval	Hills-borough	Orange	Palm Beach
Percentage of children with support orders	38%	58%	51%	59%	53%	62%	53%
Percentage of children with paternity	84%	83%	76%	85%	80%	86%	74%
Percentage of child support collected that was owed	45%	53%	51%	52%	53%	61%	46%
Percentage of cases paying monthly	45%	53%	52%	52%	52%	61%	48%

Source: Department of Revenue

Exhibit 4
Dade County's Demonstration Project
Was Less Efficient in Collecting Child Support
Than the Department and Peer Counties for
Fiscal Year 1997-98



Note: The Dade County demonstration project may have incurred additional costs that were not reported.

Source: Department of Revenue

Question 2

What factors have contributed to each of the demonstration project's performance?

Both demonstration projects were affected by several key factors, including population size, the characteristics of the families served, court practices, and internal organizational processes. However, these factors affected the two projects differently due to the specific circumstances in each county. Manatee County's relative smaller size and sufficient, trained staff allowed it to perform well while these factors were more problematic for Dade County.

Several Factors Contribute to Manatee's Favorable Performance

Several factors contributed to Manatee's generally favorable performance in collecting child support. The characteristics of the families served by Manatee are favorable to child support collections. Staff said that parents are typically known in the community and are not very transient. Staff recognize many of the parents' names, which allows for personal service. If parents fail to pay their support, the sheriff also typically knows them and where they live, which facilitates serving them with summons and arresting them if necessary. In addition, many parents work for several major companies. This makes it relatively easy to enforce court orders because these companies automatically deduct child support from the employees' wages.

Manatee project staff and the courts also generally have a good relationship. The courts in Manatee County currently employ one hearing officer who hears child

support cases. The hearing officer makes recommendations to a judge who signs the final orders. Staff said that there is generally good cooperation between the demonstration project and the courts, and project staff and attorneys have established credibility with the courts. The judges respect the program, and generally support orders are finalized in timely manner.

Local court practices in Manatee also generally facilitate case processing. Non-custodial parents are allowed to stipulate to support instead of appearing in court. This frees up time on the court docket to hear other cases. Also, in most cases the non-custodial parent is not allowed to take credit for direct child support payments made to the custodial parent. This avoids disputes and delays in processing these cases. Further, there are relatively few individually tailored child support orders, which also allows for faster court processing because most support provisions are standardized. However, staff said that the courts take a conservative position regarding the incarceration of non-custodial parents' who fail to pay child support. Non-custodial parents are rarely incarcerated by the courts unless the non-custodial parent agrees to incarceration for failure to catch up on past due support by a certain date. Staff said that they do well in spite of this but it is an issue where improvements could be made.

Manatee also has had sufficient staff and limited turnover, which allows for efficient case processing. Manatee's staff are specialized according to general functions including intake, establishment, and enforcement. Manatee staff said that they have been able to handle the caseload because they have experienced little turnover. Employing sufficient number of trained staff allows for quality and efficient service.

Several other organizational processes help Manatee's performance. Project attorneys are located in the same building with project staff, unlike peer counties where the attorney services are contracted and are not colocated with program staff. This collocation eases communication between staff and attorneys and reduces delays. Paralegal staff processes income deduction orders, which reduces the burden on caseworkers. Further, being part of the Clerk's office allows closer interaction with other offices of the Clerk, such as deputy clerks for the civil and criminal courts and the child support depository. This allows for increased timeliness in obtaining copies of court orders and of court actions being filed. It also allows for close communication with depository staff regarding questions of balances and payment histories.

Several Factors Contribute to Dade's Generally Poor Performance

Similar factors that affect Manatee also affect Dade's performance. These factors include the size of the county, the characteristics of families served, court practices, and the caseload per staff. However, the circumstances

relating to these factors are different in Dade County and tend to hinder, rather than support, effective and efficient child support enforcement.

Population. Dade County’s large population precludes the small community focus that enhances the Manatee program. Dade County is the most populous county in the state and, as such, staff typically do not personally know the families receiving child support services. The sheriff’s office staff that serve summonses also generally do not know the individuals being served, which hinders the effectiveness of this service. For example, because the sheriff typically is not familiar with the non-custodial parent, staff said that deputies might not be able to serve court documents even when parents live at the same residence. Project staff said that they ask the custodial parent to bring a picture of the non-custodial parent to the intake appointment and forward it to the sheriff when possible.

Characteristics of Families Served. The characteristics of families in Dade County also can make them harder to serve than in other areas of the state. In particular, three family characteristics can affect program performance—high immigration, low employment, and high public assistance rates.

Dade serves a high proportion of immigrant families. In Fiscal Year 1996, Florida ranked fourth among the states in admitting immigrants. Over half (52%) of these immigrants were living in the Miami area. This is an especially important factor if these immigrants are from countries where the United States does not have reciprocity to enforce support orders. A high proportion of immigrants adversely impacts performance in several ways.

- When custodial parents living in Dade County have obtained support orders, but the non-custodial parents reside in other countries with no reciprocity agreement, it is unlikely that these support orders can be enforced. Federal regulations require some of these cases to remain active even though the likelihood that collections will be received is minimal.
- Some custodial parents may not fully cooperate with the program to help locate the non-custodial parent because of fear that one or both parents will be discovered to be an illegal immigrant. Staff said that they set many unnecessary interviews and spend an inordinate amount of time trying to locate non-custodial parents only to find out that many parents have left the country.
- Immigrants frequently leave the state. The transient nature of immigrants hinders staff’s ability to effectuate good service and enforce support order provisions.

Dade also had the highest unemployment rate of the peer counties. It is difficult to collect child support when

parents are unemployed. As shown in Exhibit 6, Dade had the highest unemployment rate among the selected counties, the lowest percentage of cases making child support payments, and the lowest collections. Counties with lower unemployment rates had higher percentage of paying cases and higher collections.

**Exhibit 6
The Dade Demonstration Project Had the
Highest Unemployment Rate
Among Peer Counties and It Had the
Lowest Child Support Collection Rate**

County	Unemployment Rate (1996 and 1997)	Percentage of Cases Paying Monthly	Percentage of Owed Support Collected
Dade*	7.2%	45%	45%
Palm Beach*	6.4%	48%	46%
Broward*	5.0%	51%	51%
Duval	3.7%	52%	52%
Hillsborough	3.6%	52%	53%
Orange	3.6%	61%	61%

*Unemployment data for Dade, Palm Beach, and Broward counties is by metropolitan statistical area (MSA).

Source: Department of Labor and Employment Security.

Another employment characteristic that hindered Dade’s collection performance is the type of employment of the non-custodial parents. Although income deduction orders can be an effective means of collecting support, it is difficult to establish these orders for individuals who are self-employed and who do not report their income. Dade project staff said that they serve a very large population of non-custodial parents who can avoid implementation of income deduction orders because of these characteristics. Non-custodial parents who work in landscaping, automobile repairs, construction, and restaurant jobs are particularly problematic. There is no readily available data on the number of non-custodial parents that are self-employed or not reporting income statewide.

Dade’s performance was also affected by serving a larger percentage of custodial parents that receive public assistance. Over one-third of Dade’s caseload receives public assistance compared to about one-quarter (ranges from 21% to 29%) in the peer counties. This affects Dade’s performance because there is little incentive for some custodial parents who receive public assistance to fully cooperate with staff. This situation occurs because the moneys that are paid by the non-custodial parents are often retained by the state for repayment toward public assistance.⁵ The custodial parent most likely would rather receive public assistance and not report any monies paid directly to them by the non-custodial parent. In addition, many non-custodial parents also receive public assistance,

⁵ Public assistance clients may be sanctioned by having all cash benefits terminated for not fully complying with child support enforcement staff.

and as a consequence, these individuals will likely lack the financial means to pay their child support that is due.

Court Practices. Another factor that affected the performance of the Dade demonstration project's performance was court practices used to establish and enforce support orders in Dade County. Dade employs the services of general masters, similar to hearing officers used in Manatee, to hear cases. The general masters make recommendations to a judge who signs the final orders. However, project staff identified several court practices regarding due process that hinder their performance. These practices are discussed below.

- Courts in Dade County require very specific detailed orders and findings of fact in addition to boilerplate language in the support order. This results in individualized child support orders that are time-consuming to prepare, increases the length of the hearings, and slows the establishment process. Project staff noted that another county successfully adopted the boilerplate portions of Dade's orders and uses them without detailed specific findings of fact. Adopting simplified child support orders that are based on boilerplate language has the potential to speed up court action in Dade County and enhance the child support enforcement process.
- Cases in Dade County are more likely to be contested than in other counties. Dade staff estimated that approximately 30% to 40% of the non-custodial parents that go to court are represented by counsel compared to approximately 10% around the rest of the state.⁶ Cases typically take longer to litigate and require more coordination efforts on the part of staff if parties use counsel.
- Courts in Dade County routinely give non-custodial parents credit for direct payments made to the custodial parent. In other counties courts may treat such payments as gifts rather than a support payment. Typically, support orders require payment be made to the clerk's depository. Payments made directly to custodial parents contrary to court orders are often not credited toward satisfaction of the support. Since custodial parents often do not keep track of these direct payments, disputes often arise that require court adjudication. The amount of the arrearages owed are sometimes delayed for months as checks and money orders are traced and differences in amounts received are reconciled. Staff indicated that treating direct payments as gifts would cut months off the process for a substantial number of cases. In addition, these payments are not credited toward performance.
- Circuit and appellate courts in Dade County take an exceptionally conservative position regarding the due process rights of non-custodial parents. Project attorneys are held to very high standards in proving

⁶ These amounts are staff estimates that were not validated.

the non-custodial parents' ability-to-pay. Routinely public defenders file writs of habeas corpus in those few cases in which the non-custodial parents are incarcerated. Accordingly, staff estimated less than 5 parents per month are incarcerated in Dade while many other counties typically incarcerate 25-50 non-custodial parents for contempt. Dade staff indicated that this low rate of incarceration for non-payment of support hurts their collection efforts.

Dade staff and the courts are working together to resolve issues that affect their performance. For example, staff and the hearing officers have agreed to limit the number of child support guidelines worksheets that have to be completed on a case. Separate child support guidelines worksheets are required for all income changes, even if the changes in income are insignificant. Staff said that it is time consuming and inefficient to develop multiple guidelines worksheets.

Caseload Per Staff. A final factor that affect Dade's performance is high caseloads per staff. During Fiscal Year 1997-98, Dade averaged approximately 388 cases per staff compared to the peer department-administered county offices, which ranged from 259 cases per staff in Orange County to 384 cases per staff in Palm Beach County. Dade historically employed the "one case, one caseworker" concept of processing child support cases. The one case, one caseworker process in Dade did not work efficiently to handle the volume of cases processed. As a result, Dade County reported that approximately 42,000 cases were needing attention as of January 1998. The volume of cases caused staff morale problems as well. This angered and frustrated many custodial parents whose cases were not processed timely. Staffing problems also decreased collections and slowed case processing, since it takes time to fill positions and new hires are generally less productive than experienced staff.⁷

The "one case, one caseworker" system of processing child support cases was historically used by the Department of Revenue. As was the situation in Dade, the department did not have enough staff to adequately handle the caseload using the traditional caseworker system in many counties. However, between April and June 1997 the department changed to a "process management" system. The "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, etc. The department reports that there are many advantages to this system including skill development, improving quality of service, and cost savings. Department staff also reported that some of the department-administered counties initially experienced a downturn in performance during the implementation of the new system. However, most of these counties are now showing positive results from prior years. Dade started

⁷ An independent study in 1994 showed that it took 40 months for case analysts to become fully proficient in their jobs.

implementing the process management system in November 1997. Project staff also indicated that they have experienced a similar downturn in performance, but they expect to soon be seeing positive results.

Question 3

Should the projects be continued?

The Legislature should continue funding both child support enforcement projects in Manatee and Dade counties. However, the Legislature should tie future funding to the demonstration project's attainment of specified performance levels. If performance does not meet or exceed specific levels of performance, the department should consider either taking over administering the day-to-day activities or contracting these services to another entity such as a private vendor.

Reasons for Continuing Funding of the Two Demonstration Projects Vary

We concluded that the Legislature should continue funding the Manatee demonstration project because this project has generally performed well in comparison to the Department of Revenue. Due to this good performance level, continuing the Manatee demonstration project is cost beneficial to Florida's taxpayers.

We concluded that the Legislature should also continue funding the Dade demonstration project. This determination is not based on Dade's past performance, but rather on three considerations.

Due to the inherent and unique characteristics of the families that Dade serves and present court practices, it is unrealistic to expect child support to perform as well in Dade as the rest of the state, no matter who administers the program. Additionally, there is no significant likelihood that the program would perform better in Dade County if administered by any other entity.

The 1997 Legislature provided a 43% increase in funding to improve statewide child support performance, which is beginning to improve performance in the Dade project. The Legislature authorized the department to spend \$33 million on privatization initiatives statewide. In November 1997, the department entered into contracts with two private vendors to process backlogged cases. Over one-third (49,979 cases) of Dade's average monthly active caseload was transferred to a private vendor to process. In addition, the Legislature also provided funding to hire 395 new employees, of which Dade received 64 positions. The subsequent reduction in backlogged cases and increased staff should enable Dade to improve its performance. The full effects of which are still being determined.

Dade's management staff reengineered the way it processes cases, which should improve its future

performance. In late 1997, the "one case, one caseworker" concept was replaced by a new system in which teams specialize in handling separate tasks for each case. Because Dade started implementing the new process almost six months after the other department-administered county offices, significant positive results will probably trail the state.

The results of these initiatives will not be fully realized until sometime in the future. However, a recent department report of Dade's case processing timeliness found significant improvement in its compliance with federal time standards over prior years. The department's report noted that Dade historically had performed at levels below most other department offices.

Future Funding Should Be Based on Performance

We believe that the Legislature should consider adopting a policy of making future funding of the two projects contingent upon them meeting specific, realistic, and agreed upon performance targets. Targets need to be set for each project taking into account those factors that impact collections. The department has lacked the data needed to fully implement a performance funding system in the past due to problems with the FLORIDA system.⁸ However, the department now has an in-house capability to produce reports that allow analysis of performance.

We believe that the department should continue to use this data to establish performance targets for the two projects. The Child Support Enforcement Program came under performance-based program budgeting in Fiscal Year 1998-99. The Legislature established statewide performance standards for the child support program, and the department created statewide performance targets for the Manatee and Dade projects as well as all of its county offices. These targets are based on variables including past performance, projections of future caseloads, staffing levels, and population demographics. The department plans on providing Manatee and Dade with monthly reports on their status in meeting the performance targets as well as the performance of its own county child support offices throughout the state.

We believe that the department should annually report, as part of its Legislative Budget Request, the performance of the two projects. The department should provide an explanation for attaining and/or not attaining the targets for the two projects in its budget request as well as the department as a whole.

If the two demonstration projects do not meet the specified performance levels, we believe that the department should require each project to isolate the cause(s) and develop corrective action plans. If the corrective action plans do not result in improvement, the department should consider

⁸ The FLORIDA system is a mainframe computer system that is maintained by the Department of Children and Families. The computer system stores case activity information.

taking over the day-to-day operations of the demonstration projects or contract with another entity for these services.⁹ If it is determined that local court practices contribute to a project's unfavorable performance, the affected project should work with the courts to identify specific causes. If these issues cannot be resolved locally, we believe that the department should work with the Office of State Courts Administration to resolve the issues.

Recommendations

Florida's Child Support Enforcement Program should operate with the goal of being as effective and efficient as possible. The Manatee demonstration project has operated well, but the Dade demonstration project has underperformed compared to the rest of the state. In the short term, the Department of Revenue should work with the demonstration projects and the courts to resolve issues that have impeded program performance. The department needs to view Dade and Manatee counties as partners, and should continue and improve cooperative efforts to share information and enforcement tools with Dade and Manatee that will assist them in optimizing resources and increasing program effectiveness. We believe that the infusion of funds by the 1997 Florida Legislature and the changes implemented in Dade management need to be allowed time to show positive results. Continued funding, however, should be based on improving both the effectiveness and efficiency of services.

We recommend that the Legislature continue to authorize the Department of Revenue to contract with Manatee County Clerk of the Circuit Court and the State Attorney for the Eleventh Judicial Circuit for child support enforcement activities.

⁹ In 1997 the Department of Revenue entered into contracts with two private vendors to provide child support enforcement services. The two private vendors provided the department notice of their intent to terminate their contracts on January 20, 1999.

In addition, we recommend that the Department of Revenue

- continue contracting with the Manatee County Clerk of the Circuit Court and State Attorney for the Eleventh Judicial Circuit and
- continue establishing agreed upon performance targets for Manatee and Dade and make these targets part of its contracts with these entities. In the future, if the demonstration projects do not meet or exceed the specified performance levels, the department should require Manatee or Dade to evaluate and identify problems adversely impacting performance and develop corrective action plans. Then the department should review and provide comments to Manatee or Dade on action plans. If corrective actions do not result in improved efficiency and effectiveness, the department should consider recommending that the Legislature direct it to terminate the contract and take over the day-to-day program activities or contract with another entity for such services.

We also recommend that the Legislature amend Ch. 85-178, Laws of Florida, to show Dade and Manatee counties are not demonstration projects. These projects are no longer serving the purpose of demonstration projects, instead they offer local solutions to providing child support enforcement services.

Agency Response

The Manatee County Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller and the State Attorney for the Eleventh Judicial Circuit concurred with OPPAGA's findings. The Executive Director of the Department of Revenue did not agree with the recommendation that "If corrective actions do not result in improved efficiency and effectiveness, the department should consider recommending that the Legislature direct it to terminate the contract. . . ." In lieu of this, the department recommended that the department report Dade and Manatee annual performance, with evaluative comments, to the Legislature. After review of the performance report the Legislature would determine how to proceed with the projects.

OPPAGA provides objective, independent, professional analyses of state policies and services to assist the Florida Legislature in decision-making, to ensure government accountability, and to recommend the best use of public resources. This project was conducted in accordance with applicable evaluation standards. Copies of this report in print or alternate accessible format may be obtained by telephone (850/488-0021 or 800/531-2477), by FAX (850/487-3804), in person (Claude Pepper Building, Room 312, 111 W. Madison St.), or by mail (OPPAGA Report Production, P.O. Box 1735, Tallahassee, FL 32302).

The Florida Monitor: <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/>

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