



2009

*Child Support Enforcement -
Denial of Driving Privileges*

State of Illinois

Category: Cross-Boundary Collaboration and Partnerships

NASCIO
Recognition
Award
Submission

Executive Summary

This project assists in the enforcement of child support obligations through the ability to suspend the driving privileges of those with seriously past-due accounts. The project was initiated in August, 2007 at the request of Pam Lowry, the Illinois Title IV-D Child Support Enforcement Director. The primary objective of the project was to improve outcomes for families involved in the program by recovering more delinquent child support. Success at this level would also provide visibility that would compound those improvements, and increase Federal performance incentive funding.

The Secretary of State, Jesse White, who administers drivers' licenses in Illinois, is an independent, elected Constitutional Officer. The Department of Healthcare and Family Services (DHFS), home to the Illinois Child Support Enforcement program, falls under the control of the Office of the Governor. In January, 2008 the two agencies collaborated to implement a successful project that currently collects more than \$4,000,000 per month to benefit families in Illinois and across the country.

The Key Information Delivery System (KIDS), Illinois' primary Child Support Enforcement (CSE) management system, filters and selects parents, sends a due process notice, exchanges files with the Secretary, and provides screens and reports which allow CSE staff to track and administer the process. The Secretary of State's system flags the delinquent parent's driver's license record, generates a second due process notice and, if no action is taken, automatically suspends the driver's license 60 days later.

Delinquent parents who respond to either notice, or to the suspension of their driver's license, are offered the opportunity to enter into a payment agreement. If an agreement is reached, suspension is held in abeyance. Failure to comply with the terms of the agreement will result in suspension. Payment agreements are offered only once to each individual. The process design reflects, at each turn, that the objective is to collect child support, not suspend driving privileges.

The Federal Government provides financial performance incentives to the states based on measurements, including the percentage of current support paid and the percentage of cases with arrearages on which a payment has been received. The project contributes directly to positive movement against these metrics. HFS requests for license suspensions increased from 125 in 1/2008 to 1209 in 5/2009.

Description of the Business Problem and Solution

The fundamental goal of the Illinois Child Support Enforcement program is to collect support owed for children. When support is not paid as it is due, the program must use innovative and effective methods to collect arrears.

Income withholding is the most effective method for collection of support as it is due, and the most effective tool for collection of past-due support is interception of federal and state tax refunds. However, these remedies are not always effective in collecting child support from those parents who do not receive income tax refunds, who are self-employed, work for cash, or who frequently change employment.

For those parents, finding the lever that precipitates payment can be challenging. For many a threat to his or her driving privileges provides the necessary leverage. The ability to drive is linked to employment, recreation and convenience.

Initial project meetings focused on resolution of legal and policy issues, including privacy and due process concerns. As these began to reach resolution, the technical plan began to take shape. Analysis determined that the new process could be based upon an existing demographic data exchange.

The Department of Human and Family Services (HFS) was already providing a file which the Secretary of State's Office matched against its driver's license file and returned with demographics, including the Illinois driver's license number. Upon its return, HFS began to identify those records associated with debts of more than \$2500, no recent payments and sufficient data to assure an accurate match. On the technical side, tasks were broken out in a structure that allowed, to the greatest extent feasible, for each agency to work independently. This was a key to timely implementation as it allowed each agency to work in a largely independent fashion and allowing much more flexibility in scheduling

In the first stages of the project these records were subjected to an intensive review by CSE staff. This achieved a confidence in the data and selection criteria at the expense of transaction volume. Verified cases were flagged by online entry. The batch system then generated notices to the parents based on those flags. As confidence grew, the review was gradually scaled back and now the notices go out automatically. Transaction volume has grown correspondingly.

Following a response period and absent flags indicating that a payment agreement has been reached, the system will include these parents on a daily exchange with the Secretary's Office. Their system, in turn, generates a second notice to the parent. After 60 days, the license is automatically suspended, again absent flags indicating that an agreement has been reached.

Significance to the Improvement of the Operation of Government

The significance of the project covers a broad range, but centers on the value of collaboration across organizational boundaries. HFS contributed court order, financial and demographic data from a large number of sources. The Secretary of State contributed a driver's license file and the power of enforcement. Although the agencies operate on separate platforms and have different organizational missions of public service, the project has been very successful.

This program gains collections for families where the non-custodial parent is not engaged in traditional wage or salary work and fails to make regular payments. The self-employed, those who work for cash and contractors are among those that may now be reached.

The ability to reach these parents provides a considerable morale boost for CSE and sustains a larger effort to improve performance and maximize federal performance incentive payments. Primary custodial parents now have more resources with which to feed and clothe their children. Studies have shown that parents who contribute to the financial support of their children tend to be more involved in other aspects of the children's lives. All of this was accomplished with the use of very limited incremental resources.

According to the Center for Law and Social Policy, child support makes up 16% of household income for those that receive it, and reduces the poverty gap by 8%. Children who receive child support obtain significantly more schooling, are more likely to finish high school, and are more likely to attend college than those who do not. Public policies related to child support are often directed at making avoidance of payment difficult, thus promoting a culture of compliance. This effort, aimed directly at a deeply non-compliant group of parents, utilized new technology to impact that population and by example to promote a culture of compliance among others in the population.

Benefit of the Project

This project was a low cost, and relatively easily implemented effort that significantly advanced a major human services public policy initiative and provided direct benefit to constituents and families. At the end of April, 2009, 80,145 HFS Notices were sent, resulting in direct contact with 28,991 parents and 8,259 formal payment agreements. Collections have exceeded \$38,599,918.59 from 26,167 different parents. These collections have benefited as many 16,733 different families in a single month. Over \$33,000,000 of this total has come since July, 2008 reflecting the advantages of confidence in the process and increased automation.

Incremental costs attributable to this project are extremely small largely due to utilization of a straight-forward technical approach. Initial development costs on the HFS side were covered within normal, ongoing maintenance expenditures and were less than \$500,000.

The project has improved the lives of thousands of families by collecting tens of millions of dollars through a collaborative effort between two Constitutional Officers. It was implemented in January of 2008 following an intensive four months of development. Keys to the success of the project were technical and project management approaches that allowed each agency to work independently and yet successfully join their efforts at project conclusion.