

CONTRA COSTA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES

I. DEPARTMENT MANDATE MISSION

A. MANDATE

Established by legislative authority, the Child Support Enforcement Program is authorized under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act to provide services assisting parents to meet their mutual obligation to support their children. Established in 1975, the program is a joint Federal, State and local partnership involving separate state systems, each with its own unique laws and procedures.

In California, child support reform legislation signed in 1999 by Governor Davis created the Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) in 2000. The new department was directed to provide leadership and oversight to develop a statewide automation system, while ensuring uniformity of service for families throughout the State. Every county has a local child support agency providing child support services on behalf of the State of California. The Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) is the Contra Costa County agency responsible for providing child support services and enforcement.

Services to Contra Costa County residents include:

- Establishing paternity
- Locating absent parents
- Establishing court orders for paternity, child and medical support
- Enforcing court orders for child, family and medical support
- Collecting and distributing support payments
- Maintaining accounts of payments paid and payments due
- Modifying court orders when appropriate

B. OUR PURPOSE

We listen to, respect and support our customers so that children can receive the emotional and financial support they need to thrive.

II. MAJOR PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

Contra Costa County's Department of Child Support Services is committed to delivering outstanding service using state of the art technology, modern communications methods, and streamlined business processes. Each functional area of the department is composed of several teams of child support professionals that interface to deliver seamless customer service. Our annual budget for SFY 19/20 is \$20,383,000 and we currently have 144 FTEs.

The five department functional areas are responsible for a wide range of duties:

A. ADMINISTRATION/SUPPORT

Management

Business Administration

Systems Support

- Administration is responsible for the overall management of the department. The Management team provides leadership and direction to ensure program compliance.
- Business administration is responsible for fiscal management, including budgets, purchasing, accounts payable, contracts administration and payroll, human resources, including recruitment, personnel and labor relations.
- Systems Support provides information technology (I.T.) support for a complex networking environment with more than 25 different software applications. Systems Support also provides I.T. leadership to streamline work and increase work efficiencies through the use of technology.

B. PRE-ORDER/PUBLIC SERVICE

Intake

Establishment

Public Service Unit

- Intake is responsible for the initial processing of child support applications and service requests received from Employment and Human Services Department, including verifying the information that has been provided and conducting additional research to locate incomplete information.
- Establishment works to establish court orders, including locating income and asset information, calculating the amount of support to be collected and distributed and locating absent parents.
- Public Service Unit handles the in person contact with customers that visit our office. This unit handles requests for information; receives and processes child support payments; receives and tracks initial case referrals; receives and processes requests for

child support order modifications; collects, secures and confirms case information and provides direction to customers for the next appropriate action for their case.

C. LEGAL SERVICES /ATTORNEYS

Legal Resolution I & II

Legal Support

Attorneys

The Legal Services division works to establish or modify court orders through the legal process.

- Legal support is responsible for coordinating genetic testing to establish paternity and processing and serving summons and complaints, including processing responses and maintaining the proofs of service, and facilitating filing summons and complaints and other legal documents with the Court.
- During the court preparation process, the Legal Resolution I team works to establish court orders through the stipulation process, where the parties of the cases work to negotiate a mutually acceptable agreement for support, thereby avoiding the time and process of a court appearance. Legal Resolution I staff also attends court to work with customers and support the attorneys.
- Legal Resolution II is responsible for the department's Smith/Ostler program, which enables the enforcement of orders in cases where child and/or spousal support orders include a base support amount plus additional support from bonuses, commissions and income earned over a set amount; processing of special collections from employer pensions and 401k plans; processing and serving court documents to our customers, managing cases where a participant has filed for bankruptcy protection and providing legal clerical support in the court room.
- Attorneys handle all court appearances, provide legal opinions and/or legal interpretations for staff, provide attorney support and advice for certain enforcement functions and prepare court documents. The Attorneys Team legal assistant manages workers compensation lien cases.

D. CLIENT SERVICES POST ORDER

Operational Teams

- The Client Services Post Order division handles all enforcement actions on child support cases with established orders with the goal of collecting consistent support payments. Three Operational teams are collectively responsible for these duties. These duties include working with the parties of the case to ensure that payments are made in accordance with the court order, utilizing the case management tool to work cases to

optimize current collections, collecting payments on arrears balances, reviewing and adjusting accounts and if appropriate, facilitating stipulations, and taking appropriate steps to collect current and outstanding child support obligations. These teams provide ombudsperson services and manage compromise of arrears applications.

E. INTERNAL SUPPORT

Document Processing

Fiscal

Training and Special Projects

The Internal Support division is responsible for activities that support the other divisions.

- Document Processing is responsible for processing all incoming mail by scanning, indexing, and working certain items and electronically routing others to the appropriate person or team to be worked.
- Fiscal is responsible for handling all of the child support accounts. These duties include activating new court orders and establishing the appropriate accounts, performing account adjustments and audits, and closing accounts when necessary. Fiscal operates the department’s drive-up payment window and manages cash deposits sent to the State Disbursement Unit. Fiscal also serves as a liaison with the State Disbursement Unit, processing payments at the local level, handling stop payments, researching and resolving funds held in suspense and resolving customer service concerns regarding payments.
- Training and Special Projects is responsible for providing training support for all staff members, including an intensive multi-week classroom training for all newly hired child support specialists and assistants and the creation and delivery of new training programs as needed. This team is also responsible for making sure that staff use the case management system correctly by working state created reports, conducting data reliability audits, manages inter-county transfers of cases and represents the department in the complaint resolution and State Hearing processes.

III. ACCOMPLISHMENTS

A. DEPARTMENT EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

Caseload 25,798

Total Collections \$69,871,497

Although the department’s caseload size decreased 1.7% from the prior year, the department’s total distributed collections of \$69,817,746 represented an increase of 0.54% over the prior year, delivering more money to families.

The department also received the Child Support Directors Association Positive Collaboration Award for collaborating with the other San Francisco Bay Area counties on holding a Bay Area Employer Forum event.

In 2018, 8,258 customers came into the department. 15.14% were Spanish speaking. The average wait time for a customer to be seen without an appointment was 5 minutes. A total of \$404,476.88 in child support payments was collected at the reception counter and drive-up window. These payments were in the form of cash, cashier's checks, and money orders. Further, reception payments decreased as more customers are now using the TouchPay Kiosk. In addition to serving those customers who came into the Department, our Public Service Drop-In staff successfully handled 1,903 email inquiries through the statewide customer connect self-service website.

A part-time Family Law Facilitator continues to be available in the lobby to assist child support customers with responding to or preparing court documents involving child and/or spousal support. The Facilitator saw an average of 83 customers per month with an average wait time of 8 minutes.

The shared services agreement with Butte County Department of Child Support Services to handle the incoming phone calls for Contra Costa continued to be a successful customer service partnership. Our Public Service Drop-In staff also answered an average of 37 calls per month direct from employers who had questions about the Income Withholding process. During this Federal Fiscal Year, 60,037 calls were successfully handled, an average of 5,003 calls per month.

Continuing the shared services project with Sonoma County DCSS for management of our 1,799 Intergovernmental cases. The second year of services resulted in total distributed collections on these cases of \$3,853,298. Sonoma is currently able to provide more focused attention on these cases, which has improved customer service and collections.

Focusing on establishing child support orders that are fair, accurate, and consistent with a parent's ability to pay. The overall percentage of cases with support orders reached 95.4%. Compared against all other large counties, Contra Costa County ranked third in this performance measure.

Handling an estimated 3,484 cases in court. The Department's continued efforts to contact parties to discuss reaching an agreement prior to going to court resulted in 876 stipulated agreements department-wide.

Receiving, routing, and delivering 67,386 pieces of mail within 24 hours of receipt. The Document Processing Team (DPT) staff also recorded 917 real property liens and generated 1,560 Release of Liens.

Processing liens through the Fiscal team's demand desk, resulting in collection of \$1,245,215. The team also handles all the payments at the drive-up payment window.

Enabling the enforcement of orders through the Smith-Ostler program on cases where child and/or spousal support orders include a base support amount plus additional support from bonuses, commissions and income earned over a set amount. This program had tremendous success with collections of \$5,251,796.21 (7% increase over last year).

Expanding the use of the Qualified Domestic Relations Order (QDRO) to collect past due child support from pensions and 401k plans. This collection method had a 5.75% increase over last year with collections of \$938,880.41.

Implementing a special collection project called "The Final Push," the goal of which was to obtain a payment from obligor parents who had not paid during the last year. During this two-month special project, the Department collected an additional 681 payments.

Continuing Operational Team One's themed collection, Grand Prix II, which enhanced our case collection efforts. An additional \$136,165.92 was collected through this challenge for the first quarter of the FFY 2017-2018.

The Systems Support Team (SST) developed custom court case tools to aid attorneys preparing court appearances, retired obsolete employee directory and password-keeping program - modernizing and streamlining applications, hardware, and licensing, piloted, facilitated training on, and rolled out the Desktop Alert system, including end-user adoption of email and mobile application alerts to personal devices, Initiated, and plan to complete by year's end, office wide implementation of two-factor authentication, implemented and facilitated overview training of a new caseload management tool, the Banding Database, upgraded Department's Microsoft offering to M365 licensing for greater security and capability, improved system user provisioning with PowerShell scripting, provided initial datasets to federal grant oversight team for 5-year study to complete in 2020, upgraded departmental computing assets with a more effective anti-malware system, and published a quarterly electronic newsletter, "In the Loop," as a means to strengthen office-wide communication and celebrate successes.

Contra Costa continues to be seen as a leader in the child support business. The management and attorney staff spoke at numerous conference sessions at training

conferences and legal college and wrote articles for professional publications throughout the year.

To educate the public about child support services, the Department teamed up with other Bay Area local child support agencies on several advertising campaigns during the summer. The first was a Comcast video campaign where child support payment ads were played on networks such as TBS, Paramount (formerly Spike), Comedy Central, AMC, ESPN, ESPN2 and MLB Network. Our ads played during several Oakland A's games, on Sunday night ESPN Giants games and Cavaliers/Celtics NBA playoff games. Our ads were also on Video-on-Demand and Xfinity Stream. For Child Support Awareness Month, we had a radio campaign on radio stations KNBR, 107.7 The Bone, KFOG and KGO. The stations ran live ads delivered by radio personalities, and played recorded ads on the radio and their station websites. We also had a full-page ad in the 49ers Preview Guide Magazine. Over three million impressions were delivered from these campaigns.

The Department also increased public exposure by advertising in DMV offices, BART stations and trains, bus shelters, on AC Transit and County Connection buses and in the East Bay editions of Bay Area Families and Active Families Magazines.

The Department recognizes that economic barriers impede a parent's ability to consistently pay child support. Therefore, we emphasize partnerships with agencies assisting families to achieve financial independence. Partners and outreach events included:

Bay Area Rescue Mission, BARCS Employer Workshop, Contra Costa Homeless Court, Community Resource Fair, Convoy of Hope, County Services Block Party, East Bay Works America's Job Center, East County Resource Fair, East County WIN meetings, Fair Chance Employer Summit, Goodwill Bridges to Work, PACT, Project Stand Down, Restoring Hope, and Rubicon.

The department has given particular emphasis to strengthening relationships with the below partners:

- East County WIN (Workforce Integration Network). The Department attended WIN meetings held at Job Center locations, thereby increasing awareness of child support services among WIN community partners, many of whom share clients with DCSS.
- East Bay Works America's Job Center. The Department provided child support materials and presentations to center staff and customers. Child support caseworkers also routinely shared information about the center's programs with job seekers.
- Goodwill Bridges to Work. Through its partnership with WIN, the Department connected with Goodwill Bridges and sent caseworkers to educate staff and assist clients re-entering the job force after incarceration.

- Rubicon. Staff work with participants to reduce child support barriers that may prevent them from succeeding in the program.
- Contra Costa Homeless Court. Staff attend court monthly to assist homeless customers with child support issues.

To promote Child Support Awareness Month, the Department conducted its second annual Backpacks for Kids drive. While generous DCSS staff contributed the bulk of backpacks and supplies, community members, local vendors and the county library also collaborated. The event was a great success, with more than sixty backpacks provided to children. Partnering with other County departments, the Department chaired the 2018 Combined Charities Campaign, which netted pledges totaling \$97,001 for local charities.

B. RECOGNITION

Director's Acknowledgment Award. In March 2018, the California DCSS Acting Director, Michael Wilkening, acknowledged Contra Costa employees for:

- Their hard work and commitment to enhancing the Child Support Program in California during FFY 2016-2017
- Exceeding annual performance over FFY 2015-2016 by decreasing the average number of days from opening cases, obtaining an order for support, and receiving the first payment by 15 days.
- Helping families receive support in a timelier manner and impacting our community.

Director's Excellence Bronze Award. In March 2018, the California DCSS Acting Director, Michael Wilkening, acknowledged Contra Costa employees for:

- Their excellent customer service as measured by collecting and distributing current support to families each month for the FFY 2016-2017.

V. CHALLENGES

A. INTERNAL TO DEPARTMENT

The department will be focusing efforts to achieve locally established goals under the California Department of Child Support Services strategic plan goals:

- Increase support for California's children
- Deliver excellent and consistent customer services statewide
- Enhance program performance and sustainability
- Develop and strengthen collaborative partnerships
- Be innovative in meeting the needs of families

FFY 2017-2018 PRIORITY RESULTS

The Department achieved its locally established goals under the state strategic plan goals:

- Contra Costa continues to be above the statewide average in all categories.
- Total distributed collections exceeded \$69 million dollars.
- With a focus on establishing child support orders that are fair, accurate, and consistent with a parent's ability to pay, the overall percentage of cases with support orders was 95.4%.

The Department achieved state strategic plan goals:

- Successfully completed a pilot project to test text messaging as a method of communication with our customers. The pilot proved to be successful and the California Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) will be rolling out texting licenses to all workers and local Child Support agencies throughout California.
- Finalized automation of the Smith-Ostler Program for more effective management and expansion of the program to other local Child Support agencies. This program had tremendous success with all-time-high annual collections of \$5,251,796.21.
- Created automated processes to speed up preparing cases for court and created an electronic calendar to check in parties at court, which makes work more efficient and saves paper.
- Worked with the community-based organization, Rubicon, to refer participants from our caseload to the new Fathers Advancing Communities Together (FACT) program.
- To operate more efficiently and cost-effectively, the Department reorganized its Intake Team to have Child Support Assistants open new cases referred through the electronic interface with Employment and Human Services Department. The Child Support Specialists that previously performed this work were able to move to other functions that have a greater impact on customer service and collections of child support.
- To reduce costs and increase efficiency for a critical business component, the Department trained a team of Child Support Assistants to administer buccal swab tests for establishing parentage.
- Implemented new methods of advertising to make the public aware of child support services.

These efforts resulted in families receiving support in a timelier manner and had a meaningful impact on our local community.

FFY 2018-2019 PRIORITIES

The Department is taking an innovative approach to achieving its goals by making staff buy-in and participation a priority. In the past, the management team was solely responsible for planning strategies and tactics for goal-achievement. This year, all staff members had the opportunity to contribute project ideas aimed at meeting our objectives. Staff have the option to participate in project workgroups to see their own ideas come to fruition in the coming year, resulting in an unprecedented level of investment in our collective goals.

Project priorities include:

- **Automated tool analysis:**
Analyzing available tools, training staff on their functionality and implementing a plan of action to increase collections through the strategic use of technology and data.
- **Enforcement model review:**
Forming a tactical team to analyze and recommend enforcement strategies for implementation. Focuses include caseload stratification based on behavioral economics, as well as campaigns to bring our delinquent cases into compliance.
- **Expanding text messaging:**
Exploring expanded use of text messaging as a tool to increase collections and improve the customer service experience.
- **Partnership expansion with Workforce Development:**
Actively assisting unemployed and under-employed participants with job recruitment opportunities through an expanded partnership with Workforce Development.
- **Performance management model review:**
Developing and implementing new methods for gauging and supporting staff performance. Focuses include production and quality metrics, as well as goal setting and accountability.

B. INTERNAL TO THE COUNTY

Although salary increases for staff are a welcome tool in retaining existing staff but presents challenges to the department as funding from the state remains flat. Vacant, unfunded positions have been cancelled and the department will be focusing on filling all funded, vacant positions and identifying methods to increase operational efficiency within its current staffing levels without reducing performance and customer service.

C. EXTERNAL TO COUNTY OPERATIONS

Advocate at the state level for increased department funding to cover increased costs of doing business.

Increase child support services to families by promoting services through partnerships, outreach, marketing, and social media. Explore new methods of advertising to make the public aware of child support services.

VI. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The federal department of child support has established performance measures for each state in the country. Each state then establishes goals for each individual county. The table below reflects Contra Costa’s actual performance over five years and below that, are charts showing a side-by-side comparison of Contra Costa’s performance with that of the State of California.

Contra Costa County	FFY 2014	FFY 2015	FFY 2016	FFY 2017	FFY 2018
Cases with Support Orders Established	93.7%	94.8%	95.1%	95.5%	95.4%
Collections of Current Support Due	66.9%	69.3%	71.6%	71.8%	72.5%
Collections on Cases with Arrears	68.5%	69.9%	70.9%	70.7%	70.6%
Cost Effectiveness	\$3.56	\$3.75	\$3.85	\$3.82	\$3.79
Declared Paternity	102.7%	104.7%	98.5%	102.1%	102.0%



