

Building Strong Families to Build a Stronger Texas



Strong families are the bedrock of Texas. When Texas families are strong, Texas is strong. I am committed to making sure Texas children have the support

and resources they need to lead productive lives. To do this, my staff and I are always searching for ways to better support Texas families.

My office is responsible for the child support program in Texas and I am proud of our record-breaking collections that ensure Texas children and families get the support they need and deserve. Building on this strong foundation, I created the Office of Family and Legal Policy (OFLP) to work alongside the Child Support Division (CSD) to better serve Texas children, families and communities.

Child Support Division

In 2004, the CSD collected a record \$1.67 billion in child support. We also established legal paternity for almost 60,000 children and obtained court orders obligating more than 56,000 parents to pay child support.

We strive to provide families with the best services possible, but we can always do more. My office has implemented several programs to enhance child support enforcement, including:

The Integrated Child Support System

(ICSS) is a way my office works with local counties to monitor child support cases as soon as the court order is established. Under current law, most parents must apply for child support services in order to receive them. By the time they apply, large arrears often have accrued. However, counties with ICSS programs pass local rules to allow my office's involvement as soon as a payment is missed. This, in turn, enables us to prevent arrears from accumulating in the first place.

The Evader Program targets parents who have gone underground to avoid paying court-ordered child support. At least once a year, I announce a Top Ten List of Child Support Evaders and meet with parents who are owed the money. My public appeals generate tips that have led to arresting or locating 60 evaders.

The Child Support Review Process (CSRP) is a non-adversarial way parents can resolve legal issues on their child support without going to court, thereby supporting positive family relationships. Last fiscal year, more than 44,000 legal actions were resolved through CSRP.

Office of Family and Legal Policy

There is no better child support than healthy, married families. By building partnerships with federal, state and community-based organizations, OFLP initiatives help strengthen families and reduce the need for child support. OFLP encourages healthy marriage, family formation and responsible parenthood

through initiatives including:

Access and Visitation programs help parents without custody develop and maintain meaningful relationships with their children. This year, my office awarded federally funded grants to 11 organizations that will help unmarried parents work together to parent their children.

The Parenting and Paternity Awareness (p.a.p.a.) program is a collaborative effort between my office and Texas schools to teach middle and high school students about the realities of parenting and the importance of both parents in raising healthy children. Students are encouraged to postpone having children until they are older and in a stable relationship such as marriage.

The Paternity Opportunity Program (POP) is a partnership with Texas hospitals to help unmarried parents establish legal paternity at their child's birth. Under Texas law, a child born to a man and a woman who are not married has no legal father. Voluntary acknowledgment of paternity establishes legal fatherhood so children are eligible for child support and benefits such as Social Security and health insurance.

Thanks to the efforts of devoted employees, my office has made enormous strides, but there is more work to do. As your Attorney General, I will not be satisfied until all Texas families are solid and strong.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

When Texas families are strong,
Texas is strong

The Attorney General's Office strives to provide emotional and financial stability to Texas children and families through initiatives including:

- Access and Visitation programs
- Parenting and Paternity Awareness (p.a.p.a.) program
- Paternity Opportunity Program (POP)
- Integrated Child Support System (ICSS)
- Child Support Review Process (CSRP)

For more information on these programs, or to apply for child support services, call (800) 252-8014 or visit the Attorney General's Website, www.oag.state.tx.us.



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
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Information on this and other topics is available on the Attorney General's Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us.