



CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT BRINGS HOPE TO TEXAS FAMILIES

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

IN THE STATE OF TEXAS, THE OFFICE OF THE Attorney General (OAG) is charged with administering the state's child support collection agency. As a result, the OAG is responsible for collecting child support for more than one million Texas families. Fortunately, the vast majority of Texas parents provide their children the financial resources and support they need to grow healthy and strong. Because some cases require additional work, however, we have a team of professionals who work to ensure parents fulfill their court-ordered child support obligations.

Thanks to the thousands of Texas parents who comply with their child support orders – and a lot of hard work by the dedicated folks in our child support division – we collected a record-breaking \$3.6 billion during the 2013 fiscal year. For the past six years, Texas has ranked first in the nation for total child support collections – despite the fact that we did not have the nation's highest caseload. The Texas child support program was also among the highest-ranking in the nation for efficiency and effectiveness.

Collecting child support is about more than providing young Texans the food, clothing and support they need

today. It's about laying the foundation for them to become successful adults. Research shows that children who receive support from their parents have fewer behavioral problems, make better grades and stay in school longer than children whose parents are uninvolved in their lives and fail to support them. In addition, studies show that children with two involved and caring parents are more self-confident, more likely to exercise self-control, and less likely to engage in risky behaviors as teenagers.

Unfortunately, some young Texans never benefit from steady child support payments. Many of their mothers and fathers have the ability to pay, but simply do not fulfill their legal obligations to support their children. After a parent repeatedly refuses to pay child support, law enforcement may have to get involved. When that happens, the OAG works closely with local authorities to ensure parents comply with the law.

Child Support Roundups

When all other enforcement efforts prove unsuccessful, the OAG can ask a court to impose jail time for delinquent parents who violate court orders to pay child support. In 2013, the OAG's Child Support Division partnered with

15 local law enforcement agencies to launch countywide sweeps that located and arrested parents who were wanted by authorities for failing to pay court-ordered child support. Because of these initiatives, local law enforcement officers arrested more than 270 parents who violated court orders requiring them to pay child support.

Criminal Nonsupport

Failure to pay child support is not just a civil violation. Under Texas law, parents who intentionally or knowingly fail to comply with a court's child support orders commit a state jail felony. Prosecuting violators for criminal nonsupport holds them accountable for breaking the law and discourages parents from refusing to make court-ordered child support payments.

In light of the ongoing national economic downturn, some delinquent parents may have lost their jobs or suffered salary reductions. In these cases, parents can ask the courts to modify their support obligations. This process helps ensure that parents who are actually incapable of fulfilling their child support obligations do not face prosecution because of changed financial circumstances.

Like most law enforcement efforts, collaboration among state, local and federal authorities is critical to achieving success. In November, for example, sheriffs from five South Texas counties coordinated and launched a joint operation that led to the arrest of 152 area parents who violated court orders requiring them to pay child support. All parents arrested in the roundup were the subjects of arrest warrants because of their failure to pay child support. Investigators with the OAG's Child Support Division assisted the local sheriffs' departments by providing logistical assistance to locate the missing parents.

Thanks to effective working relationships with local sheriffs, constables, police departments and district and county attorneys, the OAG operates the nation's top child support program. Our successes benefit not only Texas children, but also the taxpayers – because collecting child support helps ensure that children are supported by their parents, not by taxpayer-funded programs. By continuing to work to collect child support for Texas children, we have an opportunity to ensure they have a brighter future and the opportunity for success.

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