

An Audit Report on

# **Selected Field Offices Of The Office Of The Attorney General's Child Support Division**



**Office of the State Auditor**  
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## Key Points Of Report

### An Audit Report On Selected Field Offices Of The Office Of The Attorney General's Child Support Division

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#### Key Facts and Findings

- There are no indications that inappropriate data is kept on clients or that clients are treated in an inappropriate manner by field office staff.
- Each unit adapts the statewide system for managing and processing its cases.
- The number of employees in Units 606 and 409 have remained fairly constant, and caseloads have decreased over the last four years.
- Case processing time frames vary according to the type of case and whether the case involved a non-custodial parent living out of state. However, we found inappropriate time delays occurring in 56 percent of the cases tested at Unit 606 and in 71 percent of the cases tested at Unit 409.
- Priorities for which cases will be worked first are applied at the discretion of the unit.
- Opportunities exist for the Attorney General to improve training of legal staff and to standardize practices among field offices.
- It does not appear that the child support program is receiving services from the counties equal to the value of federal dollars expended at the county level.
- There are approximately 740,000 active child support cases (active cases are those in which the child-parent relationship remains in force) in progress at the Office of the Attorney General. Approximately 10,500 of these are at Unit 606 in Houston and approximately 18,500 are at Unit 409 in Dallas.

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## Table of Contents

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<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	1
<b>Detailed Issues and Recommendations</b> .....	5
<b>Resolution Request Results</b> .....	5
A Report On The Data Kept On Clients, Including Employee Notations, And An Examination Of The N01 Notations On Clients .....	6
A Report On (a) Caseload Management, (b) Caseload And Employee Growth, (c) Timeliness In Addressing Client Needs (Including Client Notification), (d) Prioritization Of Caseload, And (e) The Number Of Pending Cases .....	6
A Breakdown Of The Number And Types Of Cases Pending, Filed, Or Disposed .....	11
Confidential Random Interviews With Employees .....	13
An Assessment Of The Ability Of Each Office To Do The Job They Are Charged To Do With The Current Level Of Staffing .....	14
<b>Opportunities Exist At The Unit And State Office Levels For Improvements In The Child Support Enforcement Program</b> .....	14
Strengthen Training Of Unit Legal Staff And Standardize The Unit Legal Support Function .....	14
Enhance Communications And Refine Voucher Processing .....	16
Communicate Intended Use Of Activity Measures To Field Offices .....	17
<b>Availability And Use Of Resources Have A Negative Impact On Case Processing</b> .....	18
Assess The Value Of Services Provided By The Counties .....	18
Examine Alternative Means For Service Of Process .....	20
Consider Effects Of New System Implementation .....	21
Monitor The Adequacy Of Telephone Access From Clients .....	22

## Table of Contents (concluded)

---

<b>External Parties And Factors Have A Negative Impact On Timely And Effective Processing Of Cases</b> .....	23
Court Master Procedures Should Be Streamlined And Made Uniform .....	23
Consider Administrative Processes As Opportunities For Efficiencies .....	24
Enhance Client Cooperation Through The Sanctioning Process .....	25
There Is A Lack Of Sufficient Access To Other State Agencies' Non-Custodial Parent Information .....	25
Establish Agreements With County Governments To Obtain Access To Non-Custodial Parent Information .....	27
Monitor Problem Cases In Other States .....	27
<b>Appendices:</b>	
1 - Objective, Scope, And Methodology .....	29
2 - Request From House Committee On Judicial Affairs .....	32
3 - Results Of Case File Testing .....	34
4 - Summary Of Survey Results .....	35
5 - Organization Charts .....	43
6 - Glossary Of Selected Key Terms .....	46

## Executive Summary

As a result of our audit of selected field offices of the Office of the Attorney General's Child Support Division we found the following:

- There are no indications that inappropriate data is kept on clients or that clients are treated in an inappropriate manner by field office staff.
- Each unit adapts the statewide system for managing and processing its cases.
- The number of employees in Units 606 and 409 have remained fairly constant and caseloads have decreased over the last four years.
- Case processing time frames varied according to type of case and whether the case involved a non-custodial parent living out of state. However, we found inappropriate time delays occurring in 56 percent of the cases tested at Unit 606 and 71 percent of the cases tested at Unit 409.
- Priorities for which cases will be worked first are applied at the discretion of the unit.

We have also reported on the breakdown of types of cases filed, pending, and disposed, as well as on the results of confidential interviews with employees. We did not report on the ability of each office to discharge its duties with current staffing levels.

This audit was performed as a result of a request from the House Committee on Judicial Affairs, 74th Legislature. The Committee requested the State Auditor's Office to review field office operations of the Office of the Attorney General's Child Support Enforcement Division in Harris and Dallas Counties. See Appendix 2 for a copy of the Committee's letter and resolution requesting this audit.

Given the time frame for completing the audit, the Committee agreed to have the State Auditor's Office audit one field office in

Harris County and one field office in Dallas County. Unit 606 in Harris County (27 employees/10,500 active cases) was selected by the Committee. Unit 409 in Dallas County (31 employees/18,500 active cases) was selected by consensus of the Office of the Attorney General and the State Auditor's Office.

### Resolution Request Results

#### **Resolution Item 1: A report on the data kept on clients, including employee notations, and an examination of the N01 notations on clients**

The data kept on clients in the case files and automated child support system appears to be appropriate. The N01 screen functions as a record of activities throughout the case process from inception to close. In recording interactions with clients, the case workers make occasional reference to a client's reaction to information. These were comments such as "the client was upset" or "the client understood." There was no indication that the notations impacted how the cases were handled.

Employees in both field offices we audited stated that there is an unwritten policy for terminating phone calls. The policy allows them to terminate phone calls if the client becomes abusive. "Abusive" is generally defined as using profanity. Clients are afforded a warning before the call is terminated. Terminated calls must be documented and explained on the N01 screen.

#### **Resolution Item 2: A report on (a) caseload management, (b) caseload and employee growth, (c) timeliness in addressing client needs (including client notification), (d) prioritization of caseload, and (e) the number of pending cases**

## Executive Summary

**2a) Caseflow management.** The two field offices have designed processes for managing the flow of cases to ensure that cases are handled as quickly and effectively as possible. However, in both offices, we noted instances where the processes were not working as intended.

**2b) Caseload and employee growth.** During the past four years, the number of active cases in both units has decreased while the number of employees has not changed significantly. There was a decrease of 15 percent in active cases for Unit 606 and a decrease of 20 percent in active cases for Unit 409 between fiscal years 1993 and 1994. A major cause for the change at this time had to do with cases identified for closure during the case purification process as cases were reviewed for conversion to a new automated system.

**2c) Timeliness in addressing client needs (including client notification).** Case processing time frames varied by type of action and between in-state cases and cases in which the non-custodial parent lives in another state. We investigated all instances of time frames in excess of 90 days for taking action. Based on explanations from management, we were unable to obtain an appropriate explanation for time delays in 28 cases out of 50 cases tested (56 percent) in one unit and 35 out of 49 cases tested (71 percent) in another unit.

We also noted that clients do not receive

regularly scheduled written notification on the status of their cases. Lack of routine client notification may cause an increase in phone calls by clients trying to get status information.

**2d) Prioritization of caseload.** Cases are processed according to priority in both units. However, the methods for determining priority are not consistent between the two units or between employees in each unit. Cases receive priority when:

- An event occurs that assists the case worker, such as the verification of employment for a non-custodial parent.
- Custodial parents take an active interest in their cases and/or provide information that assists the case worker.
- Federal regulations require a case to be processed within a certain time frame.
- The case was the earliest received (first in/first out).
- The case can be easily completed, such as when a non-custodial parent is easily located and is employed.

**2e) Number of pending cases.** Unit 606 had approximately 10,500 active cases as of March 31, 1995. Unit 409 had approximately 18,500 active cases as of the same date. (Active cases are those in which the child-parent relationship remains in force.) Of these, approximately 8,200 and 15,100, respectively, were not obligated. (Obligated cases are defined as those having enforceable support orders.)

Number of Legal Filings and Dispositions - 4/1/94 to 3/31/95			
	Number of Filings During Period	Number Filed and Disposed During Period	Number of Pending Filings Disposed During Period
Unit 409	2,504	2,195	222
Unit 606	3,726	3,096	533

## Executive Summary

### **Resolution Item 3: A breakdown of the number and types of cases pending, filed, or disposed**

The table on the previous page represents the number of filings and dispositions for the period from April 1, 1994 to March 31, 1995. The total dispositions for the period also include cases that were pending at April 1, 1994.

### **Resolution Item 4: Confidential random interviews with employees**

We conducted confidential interviews with all employees at the field offices we audited. The results of these interviews are discussed throughout this report. In addition, we distributed a random survey to all employees of the field offices audited. The results of these surveys are presented in Appendix 4.

Many issues relating to salary, workload, staffing, and management issues came out in the interviews and surveys. No evidence of fraud or abuse was noted from either source.

### **Resolution Item 5: An assessment of the ability of each office to do the job they are charged to do with the current level of staffing**

Many factors influence the ability of the field offices to do the job they are charged to do. Some of these factors can be managed by the Child Support Division Central Office (State Office) or field offices. Some factors relate to resource constraints. Other factors are not controllable by the Office of the Attorney General. A summary of some of these factors is presented in the sections that follow.

The time available to conduct this audit did not allow for audit work to support an assessment of current staffing level. Such an assessment would require more in-depth analysis of cause and effect relationships.

The personnel files for all Unit 606 and Unit 409 employees were reviewed to determine whether staff met the minimum qualifications for their positions as established by the Office of the Attorney General. There were no significant occurrences of failure to satisfy the qualifications.

### **Opportunities Exist At The Unit And State Office Levels For Improvements In The Child Support Program**

Enhanced training of legal support staff and attorneys as well as standardizing legal support functions in field offices would strengthen the legal function within the Child Support Division. Improving the communication between the State Office and the field staff would improve morale and make sure everyone understands the organizational goals. Improving the timeliness of processing purchase vouchers through the State Office would assist in timely completion of interstate service of process (see glossary for definition of "service of process") and obtaining certified copies of legal documents.

### **Availability And Use Of Resources Have A Negative Impact On Case Processing**

Resources are a major concern in the child support enforcement program. The value of services provided by the counties and constables must be maximized in order for the program to succeed. Currently, the return on investment from those sources does not appear to be optimal. In addition, internal factors such as the resource drain in implementing the new automated system and the condition of the phone system have impeded case processing.

## Executive Summary

### **External Parties And Factors Have A Negative Impact On Timely And Effective Case Processing**

External influences have an effect on the efficiency and effectiveness of child support enforcement efforts. Procedures that the IV-D court masters have required, the due process considerations inherent in a court-based enforcement system, and the lack of cooperation and coordination from other state agencies, the counties, and other states have hindered the Office of the Attorney General in discharging its duties.

### **Summary Of Management's Responses**

*Achieving program results and providing quality customer services to our clients has been and remains a top priority of the Morales administration. As the report indicates, the OAG has a system to manage and process cases. In addition, neither fraud nor abuse was noted by the auditors while conducting confidential interviews and compiling survey results. However, the OAG recognizes that improvements can always be made to case processing. It is extremely difficult to manage the ever-increasing demand for services coupled with limited*

*resources and external influences which are beyond our control. As stated by the OAG, automation will address some of the case processing issues identified in this report. However, other issues simply cannot be addressed through automation alone. In Texas, such issues will require a coordinated effort between the OAG and federal, other state, and county governmental entities, as well as the judiciary.*

*The OAG wants to thank the SAO for recognizing the constraints and outside factors that play a role in collecting and distributing Child Support. As well, the OAG appreciates the professionalism exhibited by the SAO staff in conducting this review.*

### **Summary Of Objectives, Scope, And Methodology**

The objectives and scope of this audit were determined by a direct request of the House Committee on Judicial Affairs. A copy of the Committee's request letter and resolution can be found in Appendix 2. The fieldwork for this audit was conducted from April 11, 1995, to May 5, 1995. This audit was conducted in accordance with government auditing standards.



Section 1:

### Resolution Request Results

As a result of our audit of selected field offices of the Office of the Attorney General's Child Support Division we found the following:

- There are no indications that inappropriate data is kept on clients or that clients are treated in an inappropriate manner by field office staff.
- Each unit adapts the statewide system for managing and processing its cases.
- The number of employees in Units 606 and 409 have remained fairly constant and caseloads have decreased over the last four years.
- Case processing time frames varied according to type of case and whether the case involved a non-custodial parent living out of state. However, we found inappropriate time delays occurring in 56 percent of the cases tested at Unit 606 and in 71 percent of the cases tested at Unit 409.
- Priorities for which cases will be worked first are applied at the discretion of the unit.

We have also reported on the breakdown of types of cases filed, pending, and disposed, as well as on the results of confidential interviews with employees. We did not report on the ability of each office to discharge its duties with current staffing levels.

Reducing the length of time necessary to process cases and initiate payments is the main aim of child support employees and the main concern of clients. However, this objective is not always met. Environmental factors inherent to the nature of the program create some of the time delays. Others factors can be mitigated by the Office of the Attorney General. Policies and procedures have been established for the field offices to enhance customer service and case flow management. We found no indication of pervasive customer service problems.

This audit was performed as a result of a request from the House Committee on Judicial Affairs, 74th Legislature. The Committee requested the State Auditor's Office to review field office operations of the Office of the Attorney General's Child Support Enforcement Division in Harris and Dallas Counties. See Appendix 2 for a copy of the Committee's letter and resolution requesting this audit.

Given the time frame for completing the audit, the Committee agreed to have the State Auditor's Office audit one field office in Harris County and one field office in Dallas County. Unit 606 in Harris County (27 employees/10,400 active cases) was selected by the Committee. Unit 409 in Dallas County (33 employees/18,500 active cases) was selected by consensus of the Office of the Attorney General and the State Auditor's Office.

Resolution Item 1:

**A Report On The Data Kept On Clients, Including Employee Notations, And An Examination Of The N01 Notations On Clients**

The data kept on clients in the case files and automated child support system appears to be appropriate. Interactions with the clients are regularly documented as part of the case activity logs (N01 file in the automated system). As part of this documentation, occasional references to the clients' reactions to information provided in discussions with Office of the Attorney General employees were noted. These were comments such as "the client was upset" or "the client understood." There was no indication that the notations impacted how the case was handled.

Much of the contact with clients is by telephone. Employees of both field offices stated that there is an unwritten policy that allows them to terminate a phone call if a client becomes abusive. "Abusive" is generally explained as using profanity. According to the employees, they are required to give the client warning that the call will be terminated unless the abusive behavior stops. If a call is terminated, they are required to document it on the case activity log (N01 file) and provide an explanation. Out of 99 cases tested, we noted two instances of terminated phone calls.

The case activity log (N01 file) is used to document all actions related to a case. The notations related to clients are only a small part of this information. The purpose of the log is to maintain a record of what has occurred on the case from the time it was opened.

Resolution Item 2:

**A Report On (a) Caseload Management, (b) Caseload And Employee Growth, (c) Timeliness In Addressing Client Needs (Including Client Notification), (d) Prioritization Of Caseload, And (e) The Number Of Pending Cases**

Resolution Item 2 covers several different topics. We have divided these topics into Resolution Items 2a through 2e.

**Resolution Item 2a: Caseload management.** The two field offices we audited have designed processes for managing the flow of cases to ensure that cases are handled as quickly and effectively as possible. However, in both offices, we noted instances where the processes were not working as intended.

For example, in Unit 606, the child support officers are required to review each case in their caseload at least once every 90 days. This is the primary control to ensure that cases stay on track. The caseloads at the end of March 1995 ranged from 182 cases to 721 cases per child support officer. In our case file testing, we noted ten cases that had gaps of more than 90 days between actions in the past year. Of the ten, four appeared reasonable and six appeared unreasonable.

Unit 409 has a policy to check the status on cases involving non-custodial parents in other states every 120 days unless payments are being received regularly. We tested

nine of these cases. The range of days greater than 120 for which there was no action to check status was from 139 to 1,034 days. Two of the cases tested met the control parameters.

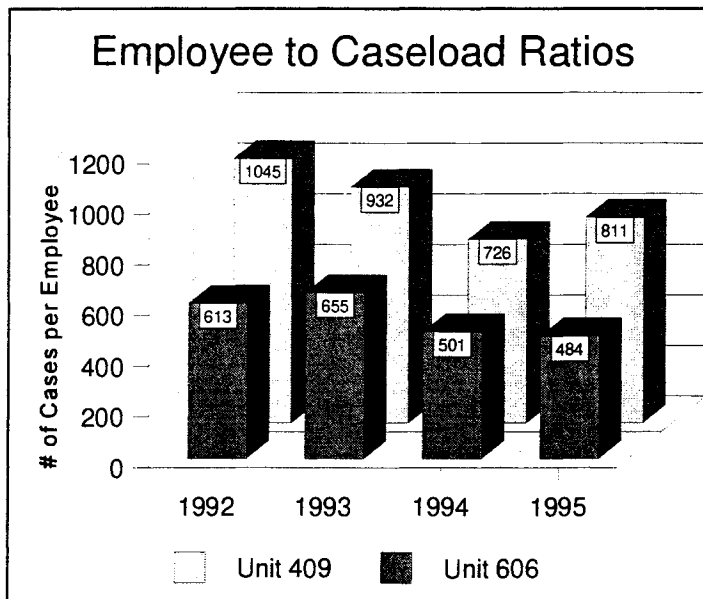
Resolution Item 2c below on “timeliness in addressing client needs” provides more information about the actual results of our case file testing. These results further indicate that the case flow management processes are not operating as intended in all cases.

**Recommendation:** The Office of the Attorney General should review the case flow management processes to ensure that the system designed is achievable. If caseloads are too large to allow review every 90 days or 120 days, this control cannot be relied upon to keep cases on track. Changes in assignments or other tracking measures should be considered.

**Management’s Response:** *The Office of the Attorney General agrees that case flow management should be, and is continually, reviewed. To ensure each case is handled quickly and effectively, child support officers must review all available pertinent case information and decide if the information obtained is legally sufficient to take the next appropriate action. This review is often very involved and may include an examination not only of information on the Child Support Divisions’s computerized database but of all legal documents associated with the case. Currently, the Office of the Attorney General is investigating ways to lower the effective caseload to staff ratio rather than sacrifice meeting our customers needs by changing case activity goals (such as reviewing cases every 90-120 days). Among the ideas for improvement, the Office of the Attorney General is considering some level of privatization of caseload activities, such*

*as referring additional delinquent cases to a private collection agency under our existing contract. We have also implemented a project in cooperation with the Medicaid agency to enforce medical insurance provisions of our orders through a centralized process. As these initiatives are refined and proven to be cost effective and successful, more cases may be shifted from the field office caseloads. However, such initiatives alone may prove insufficient to timely address all customer needs without the addition of more staff.*

Figure 1



Note: For 1992-1994, the ratios are as of August 31. The 1995 ratios are as of February 28, 1995.

**Resolution Item 2b: Caseload and employee growth.** The ratio of caseload to number of employees for Unit 409 and Unit 606 over a four-year period are presented in Figure 1. Over the period, active caseloads have decreased, and the number of employees have remained basically the same. Some of the decrease in caseload has

resulted from the large number of cases identified for closure as employees reviewed all cases for conversion to the new automated system.

Figure 2

<b>Caseload and Employee Growth</b>								
Source: Unaudited data from the Office of the Attorney General	1992		1993		1994		1995	
	Employees	Caseload	Employees	Caseload	Employees	Caseload	Employees	Caseload
Unit 606	22	13,488	20	13,092	22	11,031	21	10,163
Region 6	293	146,108	337	157,838	351	134,577	352	148,271
Unit 409	23	24,027	25	23,312	25.5	18,507	24.5	19,874
Region 4	242	159,082	294	163,028	300	141,334	304	154,445

Note: The number of employees shown for each unit does not include legal staff. From fiscal year 1992 to fiscal year 1994, Area 6 legal staff was consolidated into one office. To provide comparability of numbers, we chose to exclude the number of legal staff from both units. Unit 606 now has seven legal staff, and Unit 409 has nine legal staff. The region totals include legal staff.

Total caseloads and number of employees for Unit 409 and Unit 606, along with the totals for their respective regions, are presented above. For 1992-1994, the totals are as of August 31. The 1995 totals are as of February 28, 1995.

*Management's Response:* It is important to note that during fiscal years 1992 to 1994, all legal staff in Area 6 were consolidated in one centralized location close to the Harris County court house. This was done in part to accommodate the docket demands of the court master who, as noted in this report, refused to provide blocks of time to particular offices, and in part to accommodate district judges around the state who refused to refer Title IV-D cases to the master. The consolidation did in fact help to improve our relationship with the courts, but we subsequently determined that the over-all process was more effective when legal staff were assigned to, and available in, each field office.

**Resolution Item 2c: Timeliness in addressing client needs (including client notification).** We found that in 28 out of 50 cases tested (56 percent) at Unit 606 and in 35 out of 49 cases tested (71 percent) at Unit 409 that appropriate actions had not been taken for a period exceeding 90 days. We considered a case to be processed in a timely manner if appropriate actions were performed within 90 days from the time action could be taken.

We also noted that a routine method for updating clients on the status of their cases does not exist. Clients should be provided with information regarding their cases in a timely manner, whether through phone calls or written correspondence from the caseworker.

Processing of Cases

The results of testing case files indicated some significant time delays in processing the cases. During our examination of 99 case files, we reviewed the actions taken for each case and considered the time frames involved.

Figure 3

Number of Cases By Time Frame and Processing Phase								
Phases	Type Case	Combined Cases - Unit 409 and Unit 606						
		0-100 days	101-200 days	201-300 days	301-400 days	401-500 days	501-600 days	> 600 days
Start of Case to Location of Non-custodial Parent	Regular	36	12	5	6	4	1	14
	URESAs <sup>1</sup>	8	5	1	0	1	1	3
Location of Non-custodial Parent to Filing of Legal Documents	Regular	34	10	1	1	0	0	1
	URESAs <sup>1</sup>	2	3	1	0	1	0	11
Filing of Legal Documents to Final Court Disposition	Regular	19	11	3	1	0	0	1
	URESAs <sup>1</sup>	1	1	0	0	1	1	2

Note 1: Regular cases are those in which both parents currently reside in Texas. URESA cases are those in which the non-custodial parent is living in another state. Most of the case processing for URESA is performed by the other state.

Note 2: The child support enforcement program was legislatively transferred to the Office of the Attorney General from the Department of Human Services effective September 1, 1983. However, some cases were being processed by counties under contracts with the Department of Human Services and did not transfer to the Office of the Attorney General until January 1, 1987.

Figure 3 provides information about the time frames for cases in each phase of processing. The results are shown by the number of cases in a range of time frames. Since the cases tested were in various stages of case processing, the number of cases varies in each of the three phases represented on this figure.

<sup>1</sup> Uniform Reciprocal Enforcement of Support Act

A time delay was considered **appropriate and explainable** when the delay was beyond the control of the field office (i.e. court dates). The types of time delays considered appropriate and explainable include:

- Length of time court takes to set hearing
- Failure of a third party to act
- Lack of cooperation by custodial parent

A time delay was considered **inappropriate** when action on the case was required and within the control of the field office, but the action did not take place within the 90-day time frame. For Unit 606, 28 (56 percent ) of the cases reviewed had time delays which were considered inappropriate. For Unit 409, 35 (71 percent) of the cases reviewed had time delays which were considered inappropriate.

The time delays considered inappropriate can be categorized as:

- Failure to follow up on information or a previous action
- Inadequate documentation of what happened
- Time delay involving more than one field office

For further detail regarding the types of cases sampled and the associated time frames and problems noted, please refer to Appendix 3.

Recommendation: The Office of the Attorney General should evaluate the causes of inappropriate time delays and ensure that case flow management processes are designed to address the causes.

#### Status Information

Observations and discussions with field office employees indicated problems in providing clients with timely information regarding their cases. While some notification letters are sent to clients for certain specific actions, clients are not provided with regular written notification regarding the current status of their cases.

The lack of routine client notifications may result in increased phone calls from clients who are trying to get status information. Section 3-D of this report provides information about the telephone service at the field offices.

Recommendation: The Office of the Attorney General should consider providing periodic client notifications. The new automated system could generate standard letters to fit the circumstances. The notifications should occur when an action has been completed or a set amount of time has passed since the last notification.

Management's Response: *The Office of the Attorney General recognized that with the volume of cases on which actions need to be taken, there are some cases which have delays that are unacceptable. However, Office of the Attorney General management agrees with both recommendations and has taken action to ensure that delays are minimized even further by building tighter control mechanisms and routine case actions*

notices into its new automated Child Support Division computer system. On the other hand, our actions are limited by resource constraints and the increased demand for services.

**Resolution Item 2d: Prioritization of caseload.** Cases are processed by priority in both units, according to employee interviews and surveys. However, the methods for determining priority are not consistent between the two units or between the employees within each unit. Cases can receive priority when:

- An event occurs that assists the caseworker, such as the verification of employment for a non-custodial parent.
- Custodial parents take an active interest in their cases and/or provide information that assists the caseworker.
- Federal regulations require a case to be processed within a certain time frame.
- The case was the earliest received (first in, first out).
- The case can be easily completed, such as when non-custodial parent is easily located and is employed.

Recommendation: Review prioritization methods periodically to ensure that older, more difficult cases receive adequate attention to bring them to paying status.

Management's Response: *By far the most difficult management process in handling the volume of cases in the Child Support Division is how to provide for periodic review of inactive cases (e.g. those with inadequate locate information). Our new automated system will expand locate resources and will prompt periodic review of cases at specific time intervals even if no new information is found. One objective of this process is to reduce the caseload demands by closing cases which are truly unworkable after three years of diligent effort.*

**Resolution Item 2e: Number of pending cases.** Unit 606 had approximately 10,500 active cases as of March 31, 1995. (Active cases are those in which the child-parent relationship remains in force.) Unit 409 had approximately 18,500 active cases as of the same date. Of these cases, approximately 8,200 and 15,100, respectively, were not obligated. (Obligated cases are defined as those having enforceable support orders.)

Resolution Item 3:

### **A Breakdown Of The Number And Types Of Cases Pending, Filed, Or Disposed**

Figures 4 and 5 represent the number of filings and dispositions for the period from April 1, 1994, to March 31, 1995. The total dispositions for the period also include cases that were pending at April 1, 1994.

Figure 4

<b>Number and Type of Legal Filings and Dispositions - 4/1/94 to 3/31/95</b>					
<b>Unit 409</b>					
Type of Legal Action	# Filings During Period	# Filed and Disposed During Period	Total Disposed During Period	Range of Days to Dispose	Average Days to Dispose
Motion for Enforcement	141	88	93	10 - 242	105
Motion for Modifications	66	52	76	42 - 282	98
Notice of Assignment	228	228	228	0 - 19	0
Notice of Delinquency	556	548	603	0 - 72	17
Motion to Discontinue Collection	0	0	0	0	0
Original Petitions	136	112	136	8 - 224	75
Original Petition to Establish Paternity	859	650	761	30 - 335	95
Request for Issuance of Withholding Order	453	453	454	0 - 15	0
URESА-Incoming	4	3	5	30 - 70	57
URESА-Outgoing	61	61	61	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,504</b>	<b>2,195</b>	<b>2,417</b>		
Source: Unaudited data provided by the Office of the Attorney General					

Note: These totals represent only the active cases that had filings or dispositions with the court during the period.

Note: The two categories having the least proportion of cases disposed during the period were Motion for Enforcement (88 dispositions out of 141 filings), Motion for Modifications (27 dispositions out of 45 filings), and Original Petition to Establish Paternity (423 dispositions out of 741 filings).



Figure 5

<b>Number and Type of Legal Filings and Dispositions - 4/1/94 to 3/31/95</b>					
<b>Unit 606</b>					
Type of Legal Action	# Filings During Period	# Filed and Disposed During Period	Total Disposed During Period	Range of Days to Dispose	Average Days to Dispose
Motion for Enforcement	436	267	389	0 - 323	118
Motion for Modifications	45	27	50	20 - 323	132
Notice of Assignment	402	402	402	0 - 35	0
Notice of Delinquency	188	187	195	0 - 51	22
Motion to Discontinue Collection	0	0	31	0	0
Original Petition	295	171	253	2 - 308	105
Original Petition to Establish Paternity	741	423	690	1 - 363	107
Request for Issuance of Withholding Order	1,429	1,429	1,429	0 - 1	0
URESА-Incoming	2	2	2	0 - 96	48
URESА-Outgoing	188	188	188	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,726</b>	<b>3,096</b>	<b>3,629</b>		

Source: Unaudited data provided by the Office of the Attorney General

Note: These totals represent only the active cases that had filings or dispositions with the court during the period.

Note: The three areas with the least proportion of cases disposed during the period were Motion for Enforcement (267 dispositions out of 436 filings), Motion for Modifications (27 dispositions out of 45 filings), and Original Petition to Establish Paternity (423 dispositions out of 741 filings).

Resolution Item 4:

**Confidential Random Interviews With Employees**

We conducted confidential interviews with all employees on duty at the field offices we audited. (One employee was on leave and not available for interview.) The results of these interviews have been incorporated throughout this report as they relate to the issues being discussed. In addition to the interviews, a confidential survey was

distributed to all employees of the field offices audited. The results of this survey are presented in Appendix 4.

The interviews and the surveys addressed three main areas: policies and procedures, communication, and caseload. No evidence of fraud or abuse was noted in the interview or survey responses.

Resolution Item 5:

### **An Assessment Of The Ability Of Each Office To Do The Job They Are Charged To Do With The Current Level Of Staffing**

Many factors influence the ability of the field offices to do the job they are charged to do. Some of these factors can be managed by the Child Support Division Central Office (State Office) or field offices. Some factors relate to resource constraints. Other factors are not controllable by the Office of the Attorney General.

The time available to conduct this audit did not allow for audit work to support an assessment of current staffing level. Such an assessment would require more in-depth analysis of cause and effect relationships. However, we did observe certain factors that affect the program. These factors are presented in Sections 2, 3, and 4 of this report.

In addition, the personnel files for all Unit 606 and Unit 409 employees were reviewed to determine whether staff met the minimum qualifications for their positions established by the Office of the Attorney General. There were no significant occurrences of failure to satisfy the qualifications.

Section 2:

### **Opportunities Exist At The Unit And State Office Levels For Improvements In The Child Support Enforcement Program**

Our review indicated areas in which improvements can be made by unit management and the State Office that would refine the processing of child support cases. All of the improvements in this section are in areas within the Office of the Attorney General's control. These improvements involve the legal function, State Office and unit communications, and certain State Office responsibilities.

Section 2-A:

#### **Strengthen Training Of Unit Legal Staff And Standardize The Unit Legal Support Function**

We noted two areas in which improvements could be made in the legal sections of the unit field offices. They pertain to standardization of the unit legal support functions and procedures and training of legal support staff and attorneys.

**Standardize The Legal Support Functions And Procedures.** The legal support function does not have a set of common procedures based on "best practices." In addition, there are no guidelines to ensure that the appropriate procedure is performed when required. The State Office has developed standard procedures for processing case files prior to legal action. However, once a case enters the legal function, the procedures used to process the case vary from unit to unit. Some units may have developed more efficient processes than others. However, every unit cannot benefit from the more efficient processes unless they are shared.

One example of procedural variations is the way different units/areas compile court results. In Unit 409, a summary table of each day's court docket is prepared. The table contains the following information: number of orders obtained, number of cases reset, and number of cases dismissed. This summary functions as a "score card" for what happened to the cases that go before the court each day. It is used by area management to assess unit performance. By comparison, Unit 606 attorneys individually summarize the outcome of each case using the court sheet provided by the county system. Each day, a separate summary page is prepared for each case heard. Overall results are not accumulated.

It is not known whether each unit has developed procedures for the legal support functions, such as "before" and "after" court coordination, docket coordination, and word processing. For example, at Unit 409, four of the five legal support staff interviewed stated that formalized procedures for their specific job functions did not exist when they started the job. Therefore, they had to develop their own procedures, which have been incorporated into the Unit procedures manual. At Unit 606, only one of the three legal support staff stated that formalized procedures were in place for the position when they started the job.

Recommendation: The Office of the Attorney General should standardize procedures for the legal support staff to ensure that the most efficient procedures are used at every unit. Due to the variations in the way county courts operate, procedures may have to be standardized by area management.

**Provide Timely, Appropriate Training To Legal Support Staff.** Because of the lack of standardization of the legal support staff functions, there is little or no formal legal staff training. Legal support staff at both units, as well as attorneys at one unit, expressed concerns about the training of legal support staff in areas relating to their specific job duties. Comments from legal support staff at both units indicated that they received only on-the-job training, but had no formal training. Staff also indicated that the on-the-job training was not always provided in a timely manner. The lack of standardized procedures increases the need for more timely, formalized training. Without training, legal processing errors can occur, which can impact the efficiency of case processing.

Recommendation: The Office of the Attorney General should provide timely, sufficient training to legal support staff to enhance the efficiency of caseflow processing and reduce the likelihood of legal processing errors.

**Assess Training Needs Of New Attorneys.** Unit 409 has two staff attorneys in addition to the managing attorney. The two staff attorneys had less than two years of combined prior experience practicing law before joining the Office of the Attorney General. The court masters in the Dallas County IV-D court voiced their concern that attorneys representing the Child Support Division had not been thoroughly trained in family law. The masters expressed that this lack of training affects the attorneys' ability to handle complex support cases and argue effectively in the State's behalf when non-custodial parents contest support and are represented by private attorneys.

A review of training attended by Child Support Division attorneys was outside the scope of this audit. However, the concerns of the Dallas court masters, combined with the inexperience of the two attorneys at the time they were hired, provide reason for a review of the training needs of new attorneys by the Office of the Attorney General.

Recommendation: The Office of the Attorney General should assess the need to provide training for new attorneys who have less than one year of practice experience in family law.

*Management's Response: Management is fully committed to comprehensive and effective training in all program areas. The Office of the Attorney General's Child Support Division has had the majority of legal support functions standardized for several years. Local variations have been accommodated out of necessity, as noted in the report, because of difference in the courts, clerks, and physical environment settings. It will not be possible for the division to standardize by area, but the new automated system will provide opportunities to tailor the process according to best practices in each environment.*

Section 2-B:

### **Enhance Communications And Refine Voucher Processing**

**Enhance Communications Between State Office, Unit Management, And Unit Level Employees.** Based on survey results and interviews, there appears to be a widespread perception that State Office management lacks understanding of the reality of unit workload. Twenty-eight of the 54 unit employees that were asked responded that the units received little or no recognition from State Office for the contributions and efforts they put forth to achieve production goals.

At Unit 409, several staff commented that State Office management only focuses on the "numbers" the unit produces without regard to the caseload and outside obstacles the unit faces. At Unit 606, staff expressed that unit management is unresponsive to their needs, suggestions, and comments. These perceptions among staff can lower morale and cause friction between the unit staff, unit management, and State Office management. If these problems are not adequately addressed, productivity of unit operations could suffer.

**Develop Alternative Procedures For Processing Out-of-state Fees.** Unit staff expressed dissatisfaction with State Office time frames for processing payment vouchers for fees

charged by other states. Other states charge fees for certified copies of legal documents and for service of court papers to non-custodial parents.

Out-of-state service costs result when law enforcement entities in another state are used to serve non-custodial parents with court papers. A review of purchase vouchers showed that State Office averages three weeks to approve and process the vouchers and issue warrants to pay the service costs. This delays service of court papers to non-custodial parents outside of Texas since out-of-state process servers typically require payment prior to service. As a result, non-custodial parents may move their residences within this time frame and have to be re-located before they can be served. Court dates must frequently be reset for these cases because the non-custodial parent was not served his or her court papers in time.

Other states also require pre-payment for certified copies of legal documents requested by Texas. Certified copies are necessary for processing interstate cases.

Recommendation: The Office of the Attorney General should develop alternative procedures for processing out-of-state service charges to enable more timely service of court papers to out-of-state non-custodial parents.

*Management's Response:* The Office of the Attorney General appreciates the information about field staff perceptions and will continue to work to improve communication. The problem of out-of-state service payments has been recognized and addressed, so that the average processing time will be much lower. Internal Audit reviewed voucher processing and has recommended improvements which will streamline procedures and expedite these payments.

Section 2-C:

### **Communicate Intended Use Of Activity Measures To Field Offices**

Personnel in the field offices believe that State Office uses the number of cases filed with the IV-D court as a measure of each field office's productivity. However, filing cases does not necessarily equate to establishing paternity or support orders, the primary outcome goals for the legal function. Cases may be reset, dismissed, or non-suited for various reasons although they have been filed. These delays in obtaining outcomes are common. For example, during the four-month period from January 1995 to April 1995, 27.5 percent of the cases filed by Unit 606 and 47.4 percent of the cases filed by Unit 409 were reset.

Each month, a report of the increases and decreases in the number of filings for each unit is produced. This report tracks both public assistance and non-public assistance case filings. Each legal filing category is tracked (i.e. original petitions, motions to enforce, paternity, etc.). Several of these filings are routine and do not directly lead to the two primary outcomes. For example, a "notice of assignment filing" is simply the custodial parent's assignment to the Office of the Attorney General of the right to receive child support payments directly from the non-custodial parent. The disposition

of this type of filing never results in paternity establishment or support orders. It is simply a necessary legal step in processing a case.

State Office uses this information to ensure that every office is conducting a sufficient level of the preliminary legal processes that will lead to intended outcomes. However, since many of these filings represent activities, as opposed to results, the field offices may tend to shift resources and priorities toward workloads versus outcomes. Enhanced communication of goals and priorities from State Office would help mitigate this effect.

Recommendation: State Office should make clear to field office personnel that legal filing reports are not the basis for evaluating productivity, but are mere activity measures.

*Management's Response: Based on experience, the Child Support Division believes that tracking of filings and notices of assignment is important to help ensure that custodial parents receive timely child support payments. All Child Support Division goals are results oriented: AFDC collections, Non-AFDC collections and paternity establishments. The Child Support Division's primary management report, the Goals & Production Report, is results-oriented. It reports collections and paternity establishments, the goals for each, and the percent met of each goal. It is a high-level summary of the Division's workload and performance. Although the 1993 General Appropriations Act provided as "output measure" goals for actions filed to establish paternity and to establish or modify child support, these measures were never included in the unit production goals.*

Section 3:

## **Availability And Use Of Resources Have A Negative Impact On Case Processing**

Resources are a major concern in the child support enforcement program. The value of services provided by the counties and constables must be maximized in order for the program to succeed. Currently, the return on investment from those sources does not appear to be optimal. In addition, internal factors such as the resource drain in implementing the new automated system and the condition of the phone system have impeded case processing.

Section 3-A:

### **Assess The Value Of Services Provided By The Counties**

The state and the Federal Government may not be getting services from the counties that equal in value the number of federal pass-through dollars spent by the Child Support Division on court costs, filing fees, and service of process. During fiscal year 1994, the State passed-through over \$335,000 to Dallas County and over \$700,000 to Harris County in the form of these fees. This money was deposited by the counties into their

general revenue funds. In return for these revenues, the counties provided service of process as well as the following:

Figure 6

Harris County	Dallas County
Two negotiation rooms	One negotiation room
One court room	Two court rooms
Two file rooms	One file room
Four full-time clerks	Three full-time clerks

The cost of providing four to five rooms and three to four clerks by these counties does not appear comparable to the value of pass-through dollars received from the State. At \$37,500 per clerk, the salaries and benefits for up to four clerks would not

exceed \$150,000 per year. At \$7,000 per room, the cost of maintaining and providing utilities for five rooms would not exceed \$35,000 per year. Even adding in additional time spent by other members of the district clerk's staff, photocopying services, and allowing for indirect costs, it is difficult to envision a total annual expenditure by either county in excess of \$285,000. Note: These dollar amounts represent estimates compiled by the State Auditor's Office and are not based on actual audited figures.

To support the activities of the courts and district clerks offices, the counties also rely on the Child Support Division to provide the following additional resources:

Harris County

- Two employees (one estimated 90 percent of time/one estimated 80 percent of time) to assign court numbers and cause numbers to all new suits, coordinate electronic filings, sort mail received relating to child support cases, and walk through problem cases to the appropriate individuals for action.
- One employee (100 percent of time) to provide crowd control over access to and from the courtroom and to file documents in the court files.
- Two to three employees estimated as spending two to three days per week filing documents in the court files.
- Support of volunteers to file documents in the court files (occurs weekly but number and hours of volunteers is not tracked).

Dallas County

- Copying all orders of the court for the Child Support Division's files.
- Providing a copy machine and paper to make copies of orders.

- Looking up the addresses of all parties for whom service is being requested from the county system and providing the precinct number for every service.
- Supplying pre-addressed envelopes and completed U.S. Postal Service certified mail forms for each out-of-state legal document sent by the district clerk on behalf of the Interstate Unit.

This added support being provided to the county courts and district clerks are functions or resources that area offices of the Child Support Division claim are the responsibility of the counties.

Recommendation: The IV-D Program Monitors and the Attorney General's internal audit staff should perform a cost-benefit analysis of the expenditures made by the counties over the last three years to determine if federal pass-through dollars have been used economically.

Management's Response: *The OAG will consider performing such an analysis. A cost benefit analysis assessing the value of services provided by the counties would entail assessing whether cost of the services billed and reimbursed by the OAG are appropriate, given the services provided. The cost of these services are allowable expenditures under state and federal regulations and are set by state statute. Under current state and federal statutes, counties have autonomy in choosing how to budget and expend reimbursements received.*

Section 3-B:

### **Examine Alternative Means For Service Of Process**

Funds passed on to Harris and Dallas County constables for service of process of legal papers may not be an efficient or effective use of funds. In both counties, constables are the primary source for delivery or attempted delivery of legal papers (such as citations, notices, and orders) to parties in legal actions initiated by the Child Support Division. Private (commercial) process servers are used only in exceptional cases, such as when these parties live out of the county or out of state or more than two previous attempts have been unsuccessful.

During a four-month period from January 1995 to April 1995, 13.85 percent of all cases filed by Unit 606 with the court in Harris County and 20.1 percent of all cases filed by Unit 409 with the court in Dallas County had to be reset due to lack of service (i.e. a failed attempt at service). The State passes-through \$30 to the constables for each attempt of service. Based on 86 resets from Unit 606 in Harris and 235 resets from Unit 409 in Dallas, this represents \$2,580 and \$7,050 expended, in each county by the respective units during the period with no result. There are eight other units in Harris County and four other units in Dallas County. Thus, the total dollars expended on failed service attempts in these two counties over the period would be much higher.

Contracts with private process servers can be negotiated such that fees are paid only when service is actually made. This provides an incentive to aggressively pursue the



objective of the service attempt. In addition, county constables have other duties besides performing service of legal papers. Private process servers are in business solely to discharge this function.

Federal officials at the Administration for Children and Families (Region VI) report that in other states, child support offices in populous counties hire full-time servers on their staff. These officials report that for populous counties with a sufficiently high workload of cases to be served, having full-time process servers on staff can be efficient.

Recommendation: The Office of the Attorney General should perform a cost-benefit and legal analysis of alternative means for providing service of legal papers, such as contracting with private process servers or hiring full-time process servers instead of the present method of almost exclusively using constables.

*Management's Response:* The OAG is always interested in exploring different options that make the program more efficient and effective. The OAG will consider performing such analysis to determine if alternative means for service of process can introduce efficiencies for the program.

Section 3-C:

### **Consider Effects Of New System Implementation**

The Attorney General's Office is currently in the process of developing and implementing a new automated system (New System) for the child support program. The Federal Government requires every state to implement such a system by October 1, 1995. New System has been under development for several years. For the past two years, employees have been preparing data for New System conversion and implementation. It has taken a significant number of staff hours at the unit level to perform these tasks.

For example, at Unit 409, the office manager reported that from July 1, 1993, to September 1, 1993, all unit staff devoted 40 to 60 percent of their time to New System implementation tasks. From September 1, 1993, to March 31, 1994, 9 of the 13<sup>1</sup> child support officers in the unit worked full time and one additional officer worked part-time completing the tasks. Two of Unit 409's child support officers were loaned to other Area 4 units for an additional five weeks to assist with implementation processes.

At Unit 606, the office manager reported that from July 1, 1993, to March 31, 1994, 12 staff members, including 8 of 11<sup>2</sup> Child Support Officers, spent 40 percent of every week doing implementation tasks.

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<sup>1</sup> Includes assistant office manager

<sup>2</sup> Includes office supervisor

Preparing data for New System has used time that is necessary to process ongoing child support cases. Therefore, when these New System implementation tasks were completed, a backlog of cases awaiting processing existed. While the staff time spent performing these tasks may be a justifiable cost of implementing a new system, it has had an adverse impact on case processing time frames. The field offices will continue to spend time related to New System implementation until the system is brought on line in October 1995.

The impact of a learning curve by employees using the New System once it is brought on line may further impact case processing for some period of time. Conversely, efficiencies provided by New System will not be measurable until after system implementation.

Section 3-D:

#### **Monitor The Adequacy Of Telephone Access From Clients**

Information provided over the phone by the Office of the Attorney General helps reduce the number of office visits from clients and facilitates the communication of case status information to clients, which is an important aspect of customer service. However, if the phone system is not capable of handling the volume of calls received, customer service suffers.

**Equipment.** Limitations in the phone system equipment appear to exist. In our attempts to contact the two units by phone, we observed that the main numbers for each unit were difficult to reach without receiving a busy signal. In addition, we made several attempts to contact the automated phone information designed to answer phone payment status for custodial parents and were unable to get through. This may indicate that the telephone system is not adequate to handle the volume of phone calls received by each unit.

Adequacy of telephone access has a direct impact on Unit 409. The unit is located in downtown Dallas, seven miles from the nearest of seven Department of Human Services (DHS) offices for which it handles Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) referrals. This encourages a higher percentage of business conducted over the phone, which makes easy phone access critical.

**Personnel.** We noted during our office visits that the receptionists in each unit are responsible for responding to walk-in clients, for responding to call-in clients, and for routing telephone calls to the customer service representatives. The first two duties may impede the time it takes for a call to the main number to be answered.

#### **Recommendation:**

The Office of the Attorney General should continue with plans to upgrade the telephone systems so that it can handle the volume of calls received. Analyze the responsibilities of receptionists to ensure that their time is spent efficiently without jeopardizing customer service.

*Management's Response: The Office of the Attorney General has recognized the problems identified in this recommendation and will complete the upgrade to telephone systems in Dallas and Houston by August 1, 1995. In addition, we have studied receptionists' job duties, but don't currently have the resources to hire additional switchboard operators.*

Section 4:

## **External Parties And Factors Have A Negative Impact On Timely And Effective Processing Of Cases**

External influences have a real effect on the efficiency and effectiveness of child support enforcement efforts. Procedures that the IV-D masters have required, the due process considerations inherent in a court based enforcement system, as well as the lack of cooperation and coordination from other state agencies, the counties, and other states have hindered the Office of the Attorney General in discharging its duties.

Section 4-A:

### **Court Master Procedures Should Be Streamlined And Made Uniform**

Court masters in Harris and Dallas Counties require procedures that make the court process less efficient and more burdensome than necessary. For example, one of the court masters in Dallas requires the attorneys in his court to read the terms of all support orders into the record even when both parents have signed the legal agreement to these terms. The master further requires that the parents be sworn in and testify that they understand and agree to the terms in the support order. It is legally permissible for the masters to waive this reading of the orders [Texas Family Code, Section 11.14 (d)]. To read each order into the record is time consuming and, because the non-custodial and custodial parents have to wait in court for their case to be read, it wastes the time of the parents involved. We directly observed one set of parents wait in court from 8:30 a.m. until after 1:00 p.m. to have their case read into the court record.

The court master in Harris County requires the district clerk to give all of the cases filed by the area units each day to his coordinator. The coordinator then assigns dates to each case and returns them to the district clerk for entry into the official automated docket. District clerk personnel report that sometimes this process takes the coordinator several days. In other counties, the court masters simply set a limit on the number of cases to be heard on any given day and allow the district clerk to set the docket.

In Harris County, the court master will not assign specific days of the week to the units to have their cases heard. This means that all of the attorneys and negotiators in this area must be in court virtually every working day. Thus, the attorneys have less time to prepare and review their cases prior to the court appearance. Furthermore, these attorneys' time is not being efficiently used since there may be as few as six cases on the docket from any particular unit on a given day. There are nine units in Harris County,

each having two to four attorneys, adding to the crowded physical condition of the courtroom.

In both counties, the court masters will not allow the district clerks to split the docket into morning and afternoon settings. All cases are set to be heard continuously throughout the day. This results in clients having to sit through several hours of court before their cases can be heard. It also adds to the crowded condition of the courts.

**Recommendation:** The Office of the Attorney General should continue to work with the presiding judges in each county to obtain reasonable work rules for the IV-D courts under their jurisdiction.

**Management's Response:** *We agree with the recommendation and the OAG is constantly working with the presiding judges to address child support issues. The OAG will forward this report to the presiding judges and will jointly address the issues in the report. The OAG has regular meetings with the presiding judges and court masters to discuss related issues.*

Section 4-B:

#### **Consider Administrative Processes As Opportunities For Efficiencies**

Texas uses a court-based process for enforcing child support. Thus, establishing paternity, support orders, and enforcement actions, such as wage garnishing, all have to be ordered through the courts and signed by a judge. The May 1994 State Plan Characteristics book indicated that 19 states have adopted administrative processes for implementing some of these actions. Administrative process systems involve a branch of an executive department rather than the court system for certain actions. The administrative processes are required to meet due process requirements and have the same force and effect as orders established through the courts. Parties to the orders still have recourse through the court system to contest the outcomes of administrative results.

Various states are using administrative processes for actions such as establishing paternity, initiating income withholding, modifying administratively and judicially established support orders, and adding arrearage amounts to judicial orders. The processes potentially can free the court system to more efficiently address cases for which agreements cannot be made without judicial involvement. States currently using administrative processes have credited them with increasing the number of established paternities, reducing overall case processing time, providing quick access to hearings, freeing court time, and eliminating the need for parties to appear in court.

**Management's Response:** *We agree that processes for resolving cases in the IV-D system need to be streamlined. We have supported legislation in the 74th Legislature which will improve the present administrative process for establishing and enforcing orders. This legislation was included in Senate Bill 793 which has passed both houses.*

Section 4-C:

**Enhance Client Cooperation Through The Sanctioning Process**

Lack of cooperation from the custodial parent impacts the timely processing of cases. For example, custodial parents who receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) have a disincentive to cooperate because the AFDC funds are set in amount, are received on a schedule, and will not be interrupted. Conversely, the amount of financial assistance these same parents would receive directly from the non-custodial parent would be subject to change, could be late to arrive, or could be interrupted due to the non-custodial parent's lack of employment or delinquency in paying.

As a result, the custodial parent may be unwilling to provide valid information that could lead to the location of the absent parent. Also, the custodial parent may fail to appear at scheduled court or out-of-court appointments. We noted during our examination of court hearing records that the failure of the custodial parent to appear at court hearings resulted in a significant number of hearings being reset, thereby delaying the disposition of the cases.

When custodial parents receiving AFDC benefits fail to cooperate, sanctions may be imposed by the Department of Human Services. These sanctions reduce the benefits by disqualifying the custodial parents' needs from the AFDC grant determination. Although procedures are in place that can impose sanctions three months after referral by the Office of the Attorney General, interviews with unit personnel indicated that the process usually takes six to eight months.

Recommendation: The Office of the Attorney General should work with the Department of Human Services to enhance client cooperation through the sanctioning process and enforce procedures in a timely manner.

Management's Response: *The OAG continually works with the Department of Human Services to enhance client cooperation and enforcement in a timely manner.*

Section 4-D:

**There Is A Lack Of Sufficient Access To Other State Agencies' Non-Custodial Parent Information<sup>3</sup>**

Coordination among state agencies that assist in child support establishment and enforcement appears to be inadequate and untimely. Other state agencies that impact the ability of the Office of the Attorney General to provide enforcement services include the Department of Human Services, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Texas Employment Commission, and Department of Public Safety.

We learned from interviews with Child Support Division unit personnel that the Department of Human Services often does not obtain adequate information about the

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<sup>3</sup> Note: We did not contact any of these agencies to gain their perspectives.

identity, location, or employer of the non-custodial parents for cases referred to the Office of the Attorney General. As a result, these cases do not have good locate information and cannot be processed in a timely manner. Consequently, the Office of the Attorney General has established a pilot program to place child support enforcement officers in AFDC offices to obtain more complete information. In Houston, the Office of the Attorney General is testing a practice in which the AFDC applicant is sent by the Department of Human Services to the Office of the Attorney General's office across the parking lot to complete the information forms that usually have to be mailed to the applicant.

Employees also stated that information from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice relating to the location of incarcerated non-custodial parents or from parole and probation officers on the employment status of paroled non-custodial parents is difficult to obtain.

Information at the Texas Employment Commission that is used in non-custodial parent locate efforts can be several months old, since it is reported by employers quarterly. This is often not timely for non-custodial parents who frequently change employment. In addition, Unit 409 personnel expressed a desire for additional "access permits" to the Texas Employment Commission system so that more staff can access the system. This would help decrease case file processing time.

The information that the Texas Employment Commission provides includes names and addresses of employers, wages reported by employers, and unemployment benefits. Employer information is important since wage withholding from the non-custodial parent is an effective tool for obtaining child support payments.

Useful locate information from the Department of Public Safety relating to driver's license applications or issued drivers license's by name of non-custodial parent is not available. The Office of the Attorney General must furnish at least the date of birth of the non-custodial parent in order to obtain information. Also, information about arrests of non-custodial parents by state troopers is not available.

Recommendation: The Office of the Attorney General should improve coordination with other state agencies to obtain sufficient access to non-custodial parent information.

*Management's Response: As acknowledged by the auditors earlier in this report, the OAG works within the confines of the law to obtain pertinent information on noncustodial parent. The OAG also agrees that cooperation with agencies can be improved to obtain information that is currently not available, and will seek ways to improve access to other state agencies' NCP information.*

Section 4-E:

**Establish Agreements With County Governments To Obtain Access To Non-Custodial Parent Information**

County jails and probation officers do not provide caseworkers with access to inmate population or probation information. Unit 409 formerly had access to Dallas County criminal history data on the county's automated judicial system. However, the current contract does not allow that access. Additionally, both Unit 409 and Unit 606 report they have difficulty in obtaining copies of official court orders from the district court clerks in a timely manner. Interviews indicated it can take several weeks to obtain the records.

Recommendation: The Office of the Attorney General should establish agreements with county governments to obtain the necessary access to inmate population and probation records.

Management's Responses: *The OAG agrees with the auditor's recommendation and will work with counties to improve access to noncustodial parent information.*

Section 4-F:

**Monitor Problem Cases In Other States**

Interstate support and enforcement services can affect case flow when the non-custodial parent lives in another state. Each state agency that handles child support enforcement is required to establish a central registry that receives, distributes, and has oversight responsibility for cases coming from other states. Services must be provided in interstate cases as they would be in similar intrastate cases to ensure equal treatment. Processing of interstate cases requires the use of standardized forms and procedures designed to provide the responding state with sufficient and accurate information to work the case.

Careful coordination, communication, and monitoring of interstate cases is critical to successful child support establishment and enforcement against non-custodial parents in other states. Delays in case flow could result if the following conditions exist:

- The case lacks sufficient and accurate information for further processing in the responding state. For example, the locate information on the non-custodial parent is out-of-date or incomplete.
- The responding state may require additional copies of documentation that the initiating state was not aware of, or may disagree with the manner in which a petition was submitted to the responding state. For example, the responding state may not be satisfied with the original petition and request that an additional petition be filed.

- The responding state cannot determine the status of the interstate case or loses pertinent documents, and the initiating state is not made aware that this has occurred in a timely manner.
- The custodial parent does not provide adequate information and complete the documents required for transmittal to the responding states in a timely manner. For example, the initiating state is unable to send the case to the responding state because the custodial parent has not completed the general testimony of the interstate package.
- The initiating state cannot send the interstate case to the responding state because the certificate and order has not been received from the district clerk's office.

Recommendation: The Office of the Attorney General should consider more frequent monitoring and communication with the responding state for cases in which status is unknown.

*Management's Response: The Office of the Attorney General agrees with the State Auditors that effective interstate case monitoring is critical when the noncustodial parent lives in another state. By far the largest number of complaints directed against the Child Support Division from custodial parents relate to outgoing interstate cases, where the services must be delivered by agencies in those other states. The design of the new automated system includes additional monitoring and follow-up capabilities for interstate cases.*



## Objective, Scope, And Methodology

### Objective

Our audit objective was to perform a special audit of the Child Support Enforcement units in Dallas and Harris Counties in response to a request by the House Committee on Judicial Affairs, 74th Legislature, with the results to provide the following:

- a report on the data kept on clients, including employee notations, and an examination of the N01 notations on clients
- a report on caseload management, caseload and employee growth, timeliness in addressing client needs (including client notification), prioritization of caseload, and the number of pending cases
- a breakdown of the number and types of cases pending, filed, or disposed
- confidential random interviews with employees with the intent that information given by an employee will be protected under the Whistleblowers Act
- an assessment of the ability of each office to do the job they are charged to do with the current level of staffing

### Scope

The scope of this audit included the consideration of client data, caseload processes in place, caseload and employee growth, timeliness, prioritization, and data relating to current cases as of March 31, 1995, at Unit 606 in Houston and Unit 409 in Dallas.

The consideration of client data included a review of physical case files as well as the N01 notations documented on the automated system.

The consideration of caseload processes included gaining an understanding of the controls in place over child support cases from start date to disposition and monitoring.

The consideration of caseload and employee growth included a review of statistical information provided by the Office of the Attorney General as well as the results from confidential employee interviews and surveys.

The consideration of timeliness involved reviewing case files and determining whether appropriate actions were taken within appropriate time frames as well as observations during fieldwork concerning employee response to client inquiries.

The consideration of prioritization of cases was made during employee interviews.

The consideration of caseload data involved a review of:

- Number and types of cases pending
- Number and types of cases filed
- Number and types of cases disposed

### **Methodology**

The methodology used on this audit consisted of collecting information, performing audit tests, analyzing the information, and evaluating the information.

Information collected to accomplish our objectives included:

- Interviews with all employees of Units 606 and 409
- Documentary evidence such as:
  - Client case files, including N01 printouts
  - Various State Office reports relating to caseload and staffing
  - Unit reports regarding legal actions
- Interviews with legislative staff and OAG State Office management
- Interviews with federal officials from the Child Support Enforcement program
- Interviews with district court and IV-D master's court officials

Procedures and tests conducted:

- Comparison of case file time frames to pre-established time frames

Analysis techniques used:

- Review of the controls over case processing
- Review of N01 notations
- Review of caseflow time delays for reasonableness
- Comparison of controls between the two units, as well as testing results

### **Other Information**

Fieldwork was conducted from April 11, 1995, through May 5, 1995. We did not verify or review the accuracy of data provided by the Office of the Attorney General. The audit was conducted in accordance with government auditing standards. There were no significant instances of noncompliance with these standards.

The audit work was performed by the following members of the State Auditor's staff:

- William Hirsch, CPA (Project Manager)
- Susan Allen, CPA
- Helen S. Baker, MBA
- Whitney Hutson-Kutz, CPA
- Hector Gonzales, CPA

- Randall Ray
- Leo J. Paterra, CPA (Audit Manager)
- Craig D. Kinton, CPA (Audit Director)

The team included the following members from the Office of the Attorney General's Internal Audit department:

- Kim Odom, CPA
- Hector Lozano, CPA

Appendix 2:

## Request From House Committee On Judicial Affairs



**COMMITTEE ON JUDICIAL AFFAIRS**  
**TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

P.O. BOX 2910 • AUSTIN, TEXAS 78768-2910 • 512-463-0770

CAPITOL EXTENSION, ROOM 12.120

April 3, 1995

Lawrence F. Alwin, CPA  
State Auditor  
State Auditor's Office  
P.O. Box 12067  
Austin, TX 78711-2067

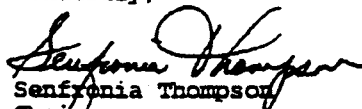
**BY FAX TO (512) 479-4884**

Dear Mr. Alwin:

On March 29, 1995 the Committee On Judicial Affairs voted to formally request the State Auditor's Office perform a special audit of all the Harris County and Dallas County-based Child Support Enforcement (CSE) of the Attorney General's Office. Attached is the resolution voted on by the Committee. The resolution addresses the specific areas the audit is to include.

The Committee's resolution states that the audit is to be concluded by May 25, 1995. It is the Committee's understanding that an audit of all field offices in the two counties cannot be completed by May 25, 1995. As such, we request that Unit 606 in Harris County and at least one CSE Unit from Dallas County be audited by May 25, 1995 and subsequent audits of the other offices be completed as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

  
Senfronia Thompson  
Chair  
Judicial Affairs Committee

attachment

ATA

SENFRONIA THOMPSON, CHAIR      PETE GALLEGOS, VICE CHAIR

LEO ALVARADO, HENRY CUELLAR, TOSY GOODMAN, WILL HARTNETT, PAUL HILBERT, ROBERT FUENTE, PAUL SAGLER, SUE SCHECHTER, ZEB ZERANEX

MICHA MAERS, Chief Clerk

Patrick M.W. Johnson, Committee Counsel

**RESOLVED** that the Committee on Judicial Affairs formally request the State Auditor to perform a special audit of the Child Support Enforcement units in Dallas and Harris County and that such an audit include

- a report on the data kept on clients, including employee notations, and an examination of the NO-1 notations on clients;

- a report on caseload management, caseload and employee growth, timeliness in addressing client needs (including client notification), prioritization of caseload, and the number of pending cases;

- a breakdown of the number and types of cases pending, filed or disposed;

- confidential random interviews with employees with the intent that information given by an employee will be protected under the Whistleblowers Act; and,

- an assessment of the ability of each office to do the job they are charged to do with the current level of staffing.

## Results Of Case File Testing

This appendix presents a summary of minimum, maximum, and average time frames for the case files tested. The sample of 99 cases were selected randomly from five functional areas. We tested 10 cases at each unit from the five functional areas, with one exception. One of the cases selected from the URESA function at Unit 409 had been closed.

The notation "n/a" means that the case has not reached that phase of processing yet. Average days were not calculated for the monitoring phase, because this information would not be meaningful. Once support payments have begun, cases stay in monitoring until the child reaches 18 as long as payments are received regularly.

<b>Unit 409 (In Days)</b>											
Function	Start Date to Locate Verification			Locate Verification to Filing Date			Filing Date to Disposition Date			Monitoring	
	Min	Max	Avg.	Min	Max	Avg.	Min	Max	Avg.	Min	Max
Locate-Hold	129	1,737	720	26	26	26	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Assessment Pending	67	403	195	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
URESAs-Outgoing	14	514	160	139	2,198	1,058	31	31	31	650	650
Legal	23	484	163	14	132	71	56	364	132	1,292	4,254
Monitoring*	7	1,365	242	21	194	67	0	115	48	229	2,864
* For one case started in 1977, excludes the number of days prior to program transfer to the OAG.											
<b>Unit 606 (In Days)</b>											
Function	Start Date to Locate Verification			Locate Verification to Filing Date			Filing Date to Disposition Date			Monitoring	
	Min	Max	Avg.	Min	Max	Avg.	Min	Max	Avg.	Min	Max
Locate-Hold	39	1,440	722	31	35	33	69	132	106	249	1,489
Assessment Pending	12	379	104	16	3,466	610	105	993	339	100	426
URESAs-Outgoing	0	1,254	375	58	918	453	120	1,363	634	355	724
Legal	3	977	149	13	313	89	21	292	131	6	1,859
Monitoring	1	1,030	265	8	1,059	205	54	223	123	62	2,209

## Summary Of Survey Results

As part of this audit, a survey was developed and given to each employee at Unit 409 and Unit 606. Twenty-six of the 31 Unit 409 employees submitted survey responses. Twenty-two of 27 Unit 606 employees responded. The table below illustrates responses to the survey questions. Following the table is a summary of employee comments regarding how the Office of the Attorney General can improve the Child Support Enforcement program.

EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESULTS UNIT 409 AND UNIT 606								
SURVEY QUESTIONS	RESPONSES TO SURVEY QUESTIONS D = Dallas Unit 409 H = Houston Unit 606 Responses are presented as a percentage.							
	N/R	0-6 mos.	6 mo-1yr	1-3 yrs.	3yrs. +			
How long have you worked for the Child Support Enforcement Division?	D - 0 H - 0	7.7 4.5	3.8 4.5	26.9 22.7	61.5 68.2			
	N/R	Yes	No	Don't Know				
Are there goals and objectives for your unit?	D - 0 H - 0	100 100	0 0	0 0				
Are there specific goals and objectives for your job function?	D - 0 H - 0	76.9 86.4	15.4 9.1	7.7 4.5				
Is your job description accurate?	D - 3.8 H - 4.5	61.5 40.9	15.4 45.5	19.2 9.1				
Is the work you perform reviewed by another person?	D - 0 H - 0	76.9 81.8	15.4 18.2	7.7 0				
Do written procedures exist for your job?	D - 0 H - 4.5	69.2 72.7	15.4 13.6	15.4 9.1				
Do you believe that unit management has a positive attitude toward the contribution your function makes in achieving agency goals?	D - 0 H - 0	84.6 77.3	11.5 13.6	3.8 9.1				
Is there an entity, special interest group, or outside agency which has a major influence over the policies of your department?	D - 0 H - 0	46.2 27.3	23.1 31.8	30.8 40.9				

**EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESULTS  
UNIT 409 AND UNIT 606**

SURVEY QUESTIONS	RESPONSES TO SURVEY QUESTIONS						
	D - Dallas Unit 409 H - Houston Unit 606 Responses are presented as a percentage.						
	N/R	Yes	No	Doesn't help/hurt			
Do you feel that the organizational structure of the unit helps you to perform your job functions?	D - 0 H - 4.5	73.1 45.5	3.8 9.1	23.1 40.9			
	N/R	Yes	No	Don't use			
Are written procedures clear and easy to follow?	D - 3.8 H - 4.5	69.2 63.6	3.8 13.6	23.1 18.2			
	N/R	Yes	No	None Req'd.			
Is there open, two-way communication between the managing and assistant attorneys and yourself?	D - 0 H - 4.5	80.8 81.8	3.8 9.1	15.4 4.5			
	N/R	Yes	No				
Are you aware of an organization chart for your unit?	D - 7.7 H - 0	84.6 90.9	7.7 9.1				
Is there open, two-way communication between the office manager and yourself?	D - 0 H - 0	92.3 95.5	7.7 4.5				
Have you had training in customer contact and responding to customer inquiries?	D - 0 H - 0	76.9 86.4	23.1 13.6				
	N/R	Weekly	Monthly	Qtrly.	Yearly	Never	
How often do you receive oral feedback on your job performance? (Circle all that apply.)	D - 7.7 H - 0	19.2 9.1	34.6 68.2	26.9 22.7	30.8 4.5	23.1 0	
How often do you receive written feedback on your job performance? (Circle all that apply.)	D - 3.8 H - 0	7.7 0	15.4 59.1	26.9 27.3	53.8 18.2	30.8 0	



**EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESULTS  
UNIT 409 AND UNIT 606**

SURVEY QUESTIONS	RESPONSES TO SURVEY QUESTIONS D = Dallas Unit 409 H = Houston Unit 606 Responses are presented as a percentage.						
	N/R	> 80%	50-79%	25-49%	< 25%	N/A	
If you rely on information from other persons in your unit, do you get the information you need when you need it?	D - 3.8 H - 0	61.5 59.1	15.4 31.8	7.7 0	7.7 4.5	3.8 4.5	
If you rely on information from other persons in other states, do you get the information you need when you need it?	D - 0 H - 0	3.8 4.5	15.4 9.1	15.4 9.1	3.8 22.7	61.5 54.5	
If you rely on information from other persons in local government offices/agencies, do you get the information you need when you need it?	D - 0 H - 4.5	11.5 4.5	38.5 31.8	23.1 27.3	7.7 9.1	19.2 22.7	
If you rely on information from other persons in other Texas state agencies, do you get the information you need when you need it?	D - 0 H - 0	11.5 4.5	34.6 45.5	15.4 9.1	15.4 9.1	23.1 31.8	
How complete is the information you receive on AFDC referrals from DHS?	D - 0 H - 0	3.8 9.1	23.1 27.3	19.2 27.3	15.4 0	38.5 36.4	
What percentage of your time do you spend answering client's questions regarding their cases?	D - 0 H - 0	7.7 13.6	11.5 18.2	34.6 18.2	30.8 27.3	15.4 22.7	

**EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESULTS  
UNIT 409 AND UNIT 606**

SURVEY QUESTIONS	RESPONSES TO SURVEY QUESTIONS						
	D = Dallas Unit 409 H = Houston Unit 606 Responses are presented as a percentage.						
	N/R	Always	Most of the time	Seldom	Never	N/A	
Are the attorneys/legal staff's expectations for processing legal documents clearly communicated?	D - 0 H - 0	15.4 22.7	30.8 50.0	23.1 13.6	7.7 4.5	23.1 9.1	
For your current job function, do instructions from your unit's different management levels agree?	D - 0 H - 0	23.1 18.2	53.8 50.0	7.7 18.2	0 4.5	15.4 9.1	
In general, do you have adequate resources (e.g., time, automation, staff support) to perform your job?	D - 0 H - 0	3.8 0	65.4 31.8	23.1 59.1	7.7 9.1		
	N/R	Always	Most of the time	Seldom	Never		
For your current job function, have job goals and objectives been communicated to you?	D - 0 H - 0	50.0 40.9	26.9 36.4	11.5 18.2	11.5 4.5		
	N/R	Oral	Written				
If you answered "always," "most of the time," or "seldom" to the above question, were the goals and objectives communicated to you (can circle both):	D - 7.7 H - 4.5	61.5 50.0	65.4 68.2				
	N/R	Always	Most of the time	Seldom	Never		
For your current job function, have standards and expectations been communicated to you?	D - 0 H - 0	46.2 50.0	34.6 45.5	7.7 4.5	11.5 0		

**EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESULTS  
UNIT 409 AND UNIT 606**

SURVEY QUESTIONS	RESPONSES TO SURVEY QUESTIONS D = Dallas Unit 409 H = Houston Unit 606 Responses are presented as a percentage.							
	N/R	Oral	Written					
If you answered "always," "most of the time," or "seldom" to the above question, were the standards and expectations communicated to you (can circle both):	D - 11.5 H - 0	57.7 59.1	69.2 72.7					
	N/R	Most of the time	Some-times	Seldom	Never			
How often do customers call back on a request before there has been time to act on that request?	D - 7.7 H - 18.2	46.2 50.0	46.2 22.7	0 4.5	0 4.5			
	N/R	<5 minutes	5-15 minutes	15-30 minutes	>30 minutes			
What is the average length of time spent per client phone call?	D - 7.7 H - 13.6	34.6 36.4	53.8 40.9	3.8 9.1				
	N/R	Cooper-ative	Not Coop-erative	Indiff-erent	Hostile	Appre-ciative	Rude	Polite
In your opinion, how would you describe most of the customers you deal with? (Circle all that apply)	D - 3.8 H - 13.6	69.2 54.5	50.0 50.0	73.1 31.8	50.0 40.9	53.8 50.0	42.3 45.5	50.0 36.4
	N/R	Too frequent	Reason-able #	Seldom	Too little			
In general, do your customers call:	D - 3.8 H - 27.3	34.6 36.4	50.0 22.7	11.5 9.1	0 4.5			

**EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESULTS  
UNIT 409 AND UNIT 606**

SURVEY QUESTIONS	RESPONSES TO SURVEY QUESTIONS								
	D = Dallas Unit 409 H = Houston Unit 606 Responses are presented as a percentage.								
	N/R	Too much work	Right amount of work	Too little work	Sometimes too much/too little				
In your function area, is there:	D - 0 H - 0	50.0 72.7	23.1 13.6	0 0	26.9 13.6				
	N/R	> than theirs	Same as theirs	< than theirs	Don't know				
How would you rate your workload in relation to your coworkers?	D - 0 H - 0	38.5 54.5	38.5 36.4	7.7 4.5	15.4 4.5				
	N/R	Very responsive	Generally	Some-what	Un-responsive				
How responsive is the office manager to your questions, concerns, and requests?	D - 0 H - 0	76.9 31.8	7.7 36.4	11.5 27.3	3.8 4.5				
	N/R	Help	Hinder	Neither	Don't use				
How do applicable procedures affect the performance of your job duties?	D - 7.7 H - 0	50.0 68.2	15.4 4.5	19.2 13.6	7.7 13.6				
	N/R	35+ hrs	20-34 hrs	5-19 hrs	0-4 hrs				
How many hours of agency-sponsored training, including unit and Area Office training, have you received in the last 12 months?	D - 0 H - 0	26.9 22.7	26.9 22.7	42.3 22.7	3.8 31.8				

EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESULTS UNIT 409 AND UNIT 606									
SURVEY QUESTIONS	RESPONSES TO SURVEY QUESTIONS D = Dallas Unit 409 H = Houston Unit 606 Responses are presented as a percentage.								
	N/R	Very useful	Occasionally	Rarely useful	Not at all	None received			
How useful is the training you receive in relation to your specific job duties?	D - 0 H - 0	46.2 45.5	34.6 27.3	19.2 18.2	0 0	0 9.1			
	N/R	0-4 hrs.	5-39 hrs.	40 hours	41-45	> 45 hrs			
On average, how many hours do you work per week?	D - 0 H - 0	3.8 4.5	0 4.5	73.1 68.2	19.2 4.5	3.8 18.2			
	N/R	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Dissatisfied				
How do you rate your present level of job satisfaction?	D - 0 H - 0	57.7 31.8	15.4 40.9	23.1 18.2	3.8 9.1				

N/R - No response  
N/A - Not applicable

### Summary Of Employee Comments

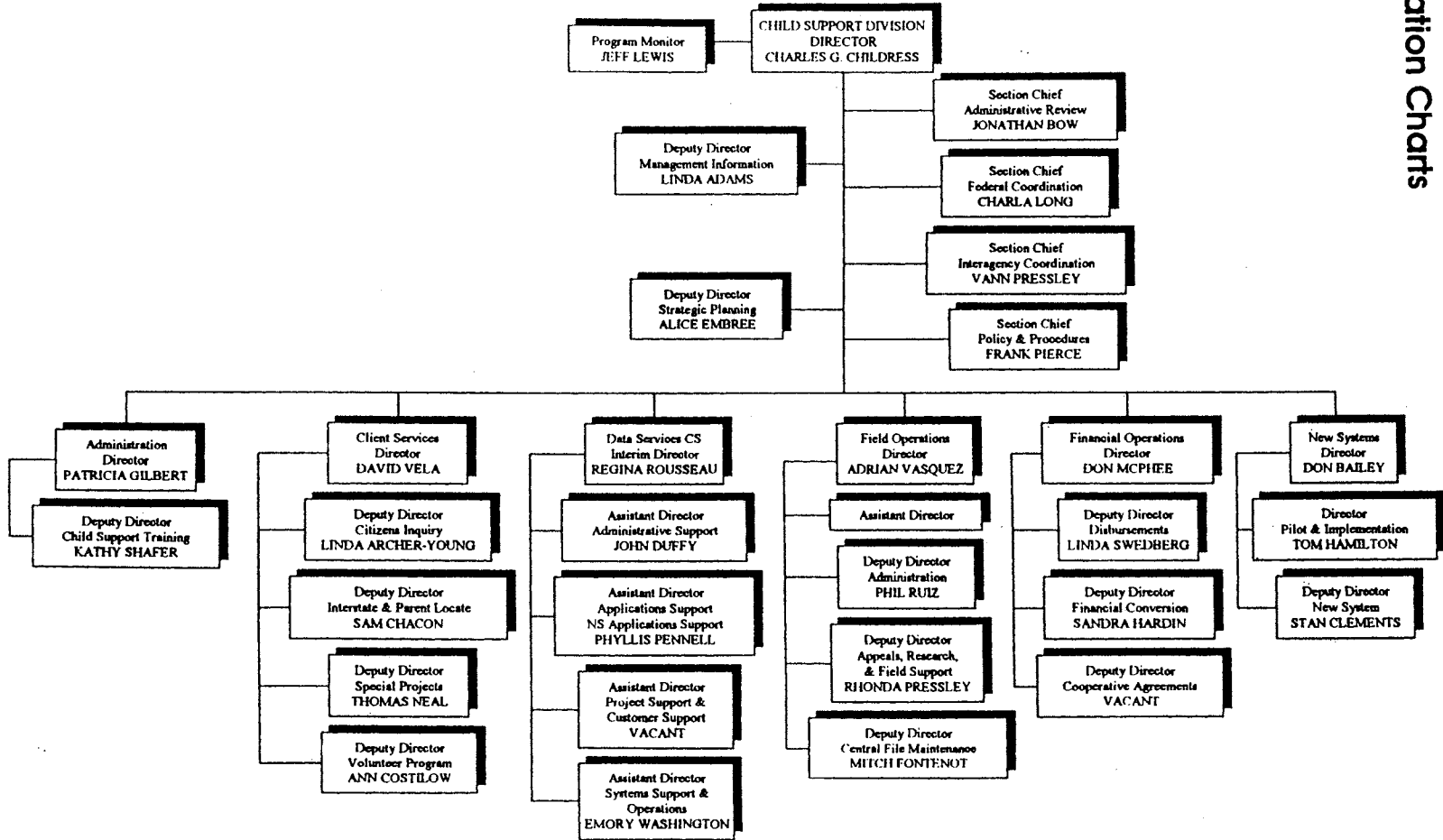
Following is a summary of comments made by employees regarding improving the Child Support Enforcement program:

- Seventeen comments were made on 10 surveys relating to management issues, such as being top heavy, excessive turnover in management, need for better communication and attention to employee suggestions, and a need for increased management involvement. Four of the surveys were from Unit 409 and six were from Unit 606.
- Comments from 14 surveys, 3 from Unit 409 and 11 from Unit 606, addressed the following staff needs:
  - higher pay (17 comments)
  - more employee recognition and greater work incentives (6 comments; 5 from Unit 606)
  - increased security for staff (3 Unit 409 surveys)

- less favoritism among employees (5 Unit 606 surveys)
  - more advancement opportunities and promotions from within (3 Unit 606 surveys)
- Thirteen comments representing 11 surveys focused on the need for additional staff. Four surveys were from Unit 409 and 7 from Unit 606. The comments mentioned a need for more staff to handle an excessive workload. Individual comments mentioned the need for another Client Information Representative and an additional attorney. Others mentioned the need for additional staff to answer customer calls, do administrative work, and handle Spanish-speaking customers.
  - Eight surveys, 7 from Unit 606 and 1 from Unit 409, contained comments on the need for additional equipment and equipment that works better. Three of these surveys mentioned the need for more office space.
  - Two comments from Unit 409 and two from Unit 606 addressed the need to use private process servers rather than constables. The comments stated that constables have no incentive to serve since they get paid regardless of whether service is successful.
  - Three Unit 409 surveys and one Unit 606 survey contained comments about court orders. Two addressed the lack of power to enforce orders. One expressed the need for administrative orders without going to court.
  - Three Unit 606 surveys contained the following court-related issues:
    - the IV-D court room is "a disgrace"; it is too small
    - the length of time it takes for judges to sign orders and other documents
    - the need for hearing dates within 45 days of filing
    - the need for an additional IV-D master
  - Three Unit 409 surveys addressed attorney-related issues. The main theme was that there needs to be more structured procedures. Two surveys commented on the need for better cooperation from the Department of Human Services and the county.
  - Nine other surveys contained the following needs:
    - acceptance of credit card payments for child support
    - bank drafts to be court ordered for self-employed obligors
    - more discretion on medical enforcement
    - a dispute resolution center
    - simpler letters to clients
    - regulation of certified copies

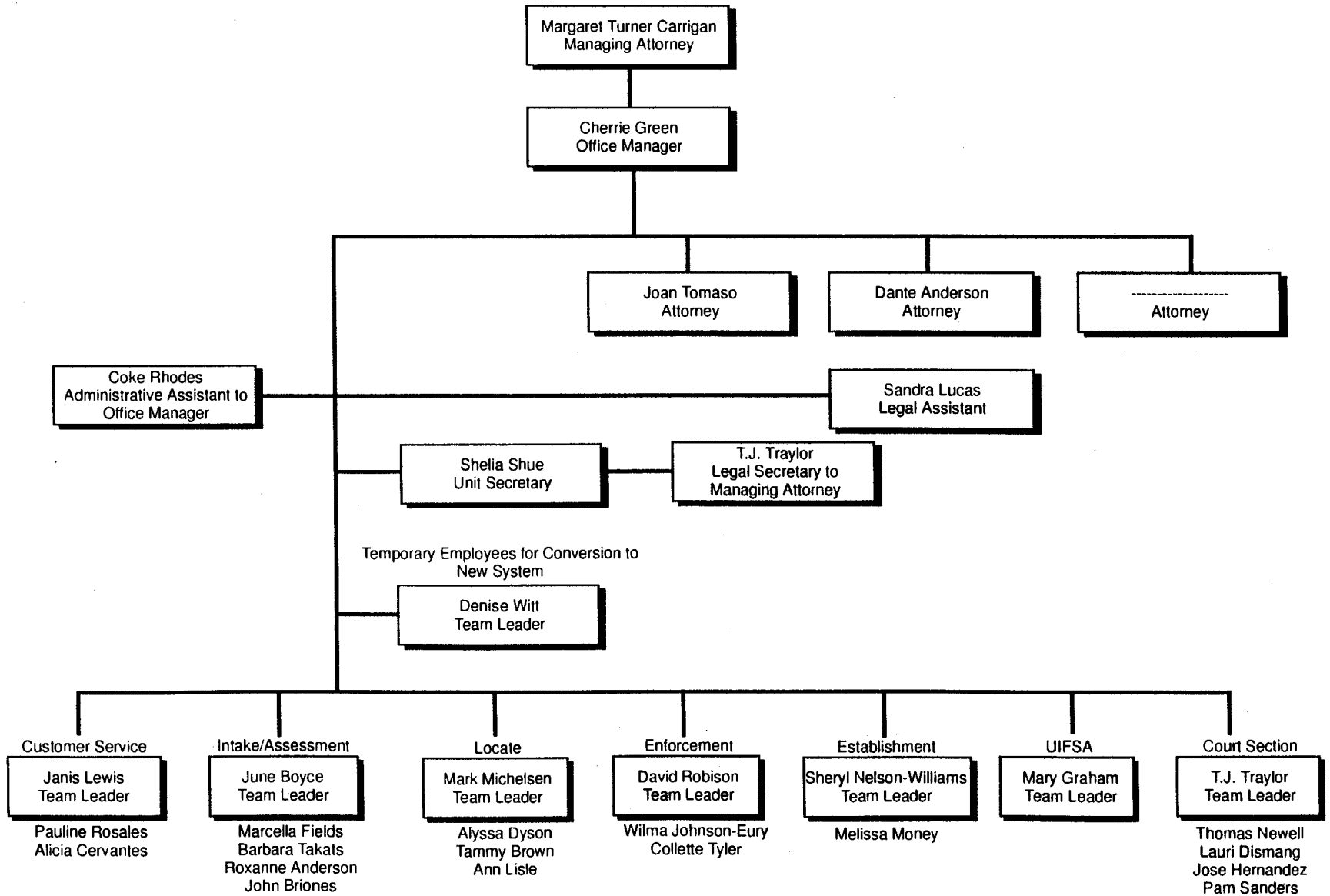
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL  
CHILD SUPPORT DIVISION

Revised May 15, 1995



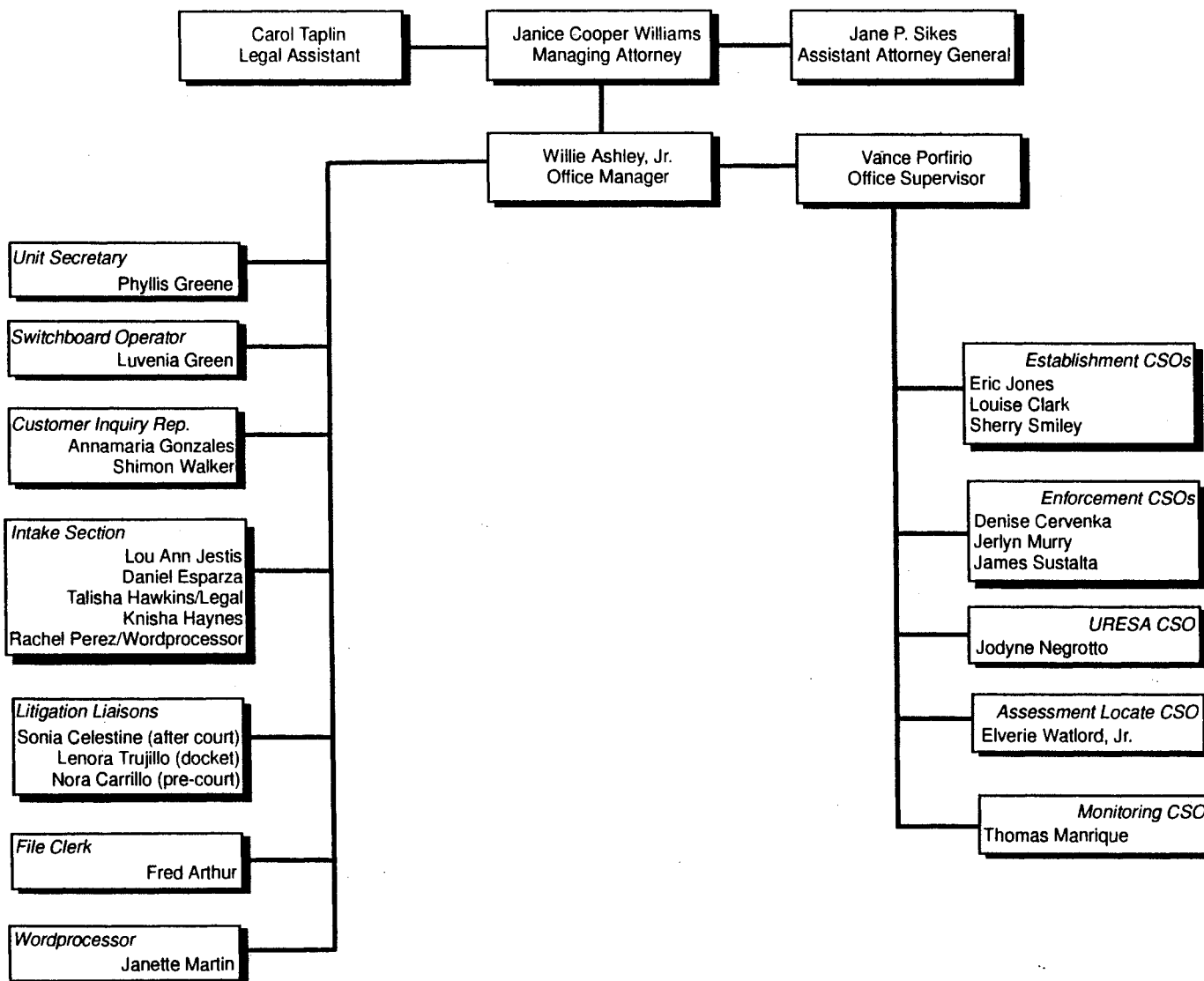


ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE  
DALLAS SOUTHEAST UNIT 409





ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE  
HOUSTON UNIT 606



## Glossary Of Selected Key Terms

**AFDC** - Aid to Families with Dependent Children. The program administered by the State which provides a money grant to families in need of financial support due to the absence or incapacity of one or both parents.

**AFDC Case** - A case in which the custodial parent receives AFDC payments from the State. This type of case is automatically referred to the Child Support Division of the Office of the Attorney General.

**IV-D** - Title IV-D. Under the Social Security Act of 1974, a separate federal office for overseeing child support required each state to establish a program for establishing and enforcing child support. In Texas, the IV-D agency is the Office of the Attorney General.

**Administrative Process** - Use of administrative hearing officers or equivalent decision-makers to process cases. The process remains within the executive branch of government.

**Area/Region** - A collection of several Child Support Enforcement Offices that cover a particular geographical section of the State. Region 4, which serves Dallas/Ft. Worth, consists of 10 offices (units). Region 6, which serves the Houston area, consists of 12 units.

**Assessment Pending** - A stage (function) in case file processing where waiting for information from the custodial parent to determine what steps are necessary to process the case.

**Caseload** - The number of cases being processed or awaiting processing during a particular time frame.

**Central Registry** - A component of the state IV-D agency that receives, distributes, and has oversight responsibility for cases coming from other states.

**Child Support Officer** - Handles the non-legal part of the establishment of enforcement of child support cases.

**Client Information Representative** - Person(s) in a Child Support Enforcement unit designated to handle client requests for information by telephone.

**Court/Docket Coordinator** - Monitors the scheduling of court hearings.

**Court Master** - Handles all Title IV-D referrals from the court to which the master is appointed.

**Custodial parent** - The parent with legal custody and with whom the child lives. In some cases the custodial parent may be a relative or other person designated by a court.

**Dispositions/Dismissals** - The outcome of the legal action.

**Docket** - The schedule of hearings to be heard by the court.

**Enforcement** - Monitoring compliance with the support obligation and taking appropriate legal action when the non-custodial parent fails to make payments.

**Establishment** - Use of appropriate state laws and legal processes to establish a support obligation.

**Filing** - The recording of a legal action with the district clerk.

**Initiating State** - Requests the provision of child support establishment and enforcement services by another state.

**Legal function** - Includes those unit activities necessary to process a case through the judicial system.

**Legal Support staff** - Assist the attorneys with preparations for the legal aspects of a case.

**Locate** - The process of locating and verifying the location of the absent parent through various information processes.

**Locate Hold** - The status of a case when there is insufficient locate information to proceed further with the case.

**Long-Arm Process** - Allows the Texas IV-D agency to pursue legal action against an absent parent in another state under special circumstances.

**Master's Court** - Specifically designated to hear Title IV-D cases.

**"New System"** - The term for the new automated child support system expected to be implemented in October 1995. It is equipped with enhancements that the Office of Attorney General expects will improve case flow processing.

**N01 Screen**- A case history or log maintained in the current automated system. One of many features in the automated system intended to assist caseworkers to process cases.

**Non-custodial parent** - The parent who does not live with the child or have custody of the child. This is the parent from whom the Office of Attorney General collects child support.

**Nonsuit** - A decision by the court to dismiss a case for a variety of cases.

**Obligated Case** - A case having signed support orders from the court.

**Pending Case** - A case either in process between functions pending information or a case that has been filed with the district clerk's office that has had a hearing date scheduled for some time in the future.

**Private Process Server** - A commercial deliverer of orders from the court to an individual or other entity to appear in court.

**Production Goals** - Targets such as amount of child support collections, paternity establishments, and support obligations.

**Resets** - Rescheduling of a court hearing date, often due to the failure of one or more of the parties to appear.

**Responding State** - In child support cases involving more than one state, the state that is accepting the case. Normally, it is the state in which the non-custodial parent (or alleged non-custodial parent) resides.

**Sanctions** - A process whereby Aid to Families with Dependent Children benefits to the custodial parent are reduced due to the custodial parent's lack of cooperation in providing information that would help the Office of the Attorney General establish child support from the non-custodial parent.

**Service-of-Process** - The delivery of a court order or summons to appear in court.

**State Office** - Term for the central administrative office of the Child Support Enforcement Division of the Office of the Attorney General. Also referred to as the Child Support Division Central Office.

**Unit/Field Office** - A Child Support Enforcement office established to serve a designated geographical region. Unit offices are organized into Area/Region Offices.

**URESA** - The federal Uniform Reciprocal Enforcement of Support Act, which provides for interstate cooperation in child support enforcement cases.

Copies of this report have been distributed to the following:

## **Legislative Audit Committee**

Honorable James E. "Pete" Laney, Speaker of the House, Chair  
Honorable Bob Bullock, Lieutenant Governor, Vice Chair  
Senator John Montford, Chair, Senate Finance Committee  
Senator Kenneth Armbrister, Chair, Senate State Affairs Committee  
Representative Robert Junell, Chair, House Appropriations Committee  
Representative Tom Craddick, Chair, House Ways and Means Committee

## **Governor of Texas**

Honorable George W. Bush

## **Legislative Budget Board**

## **Sunset Advisory Commission**

## **Office of the Attorney General**

Honorable Dan Morales, Attorney General  
Mr. Jorge Vega, First Assistant Attorney General  
Mr. Charles Childress, Director of the Child Support Division  
Mr. Deepak Chawla, Director of Internal Audit

## **House Committee on Judicial Affairs**

Representative Senfronia Thompson, Chair