

# **2001-2002 GRAND JURY REPORT**

## **Riverside County Department of Child Support Services**

### **Background**

The Child Support Enforcement Program under Title IV-D of the Federal Social Services Act, provides assistance to parents in collecting child support and securing health insurance coverage for children residing with a custodial parent. Children who are placed in protective custody or foster care are also covered under Title IV-D.

The Governor of the State of California signed AB-196 on September 24, 1999, transferring the Family Support Division of the District Attorney's office to its present status as the Riverside County Department of Child Support Services (DCSS). The Department's main office is located in Riverside, with branch offices in San Jacinto, Indio, and Blythe.

Section 17800-17804 of the State's "Family Code" includes a system for dispute resolution that provides for an ombudsman program. California Department of Child Support Services letter No. 00-07, date 11/07/00, states, "The primary role of the Ombudsman Program is to provide a designated local official within the LCSA (Local Child Support Agency) to receive and resolve complaints in the child support program. The Ombudsperson Program is considered an additional service that complements and supports all other administrative and legal procedures available to the customer (client)." State guidelines mandate that the Ombudsman Program "By assisting, custodial parties and noncustodial parents in navigating the local complaint resolution, and the state hearing processes."

### **Findings**

1. The DCSS Ombudsman Program is largely involved in dispute resolutions only after problems have occurred. The client must first contact a case worker when there are problems regarding support payments or custodial rights. If the dispute is not resolved, it is turned over to the case worker's supervisor. If resolution is still not achieved, the case goes to the Department's Ombudsman team.
2. Long delays have been encountered between the completion of a child support obligation by a parent, and the cessation of wage garnishment. This results in a hardship on one or both parents and ultimately the need for the county to reimburse the client for overpaid funds.

3. Clients that read the DCSS handout material or visit the Department's web site receive all the information needed to make knowledgeable choices. However, many clients do not possess sufficient reading, language, or computer skills to make informed decisions.

## **Recommendations**

### **Riverside County Board of Supervisors Director, County Department of Child Support Services Director, County Department of Child Protective Services**

1. The DCSS caseworkers identify serious complaints and immediately refer these complaints to the Ombudsman Program.
2. Case workers and ombudsmen be proactive in assisting the client through the responsibilities and liabilities of the child support process.
3. Departments of Child Support Services and Child Protective Services coordinate efforts to immediately develop and implement a workable system to inform parents of expenses they face should their children be placed in protective custody.
4. Rewrite all information materials, to take into consideration those clients who have limited reading and language skills.