



ACCESS AND VISITATION HOTLINE HELPS PARENTS ADDRESS CUSTODY CONCERNS

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

CHILDREN THRIVE on the security that comes from knowing both parents love and care for them. That is why I am committed to helping parents without custody stay involved in their children's lives.

My office often receives inquiries from frustrated parents wanting to know how to handle custody or visitation disputes. Most of the time, parents without custody say the other parent won't let them see their child. Sometimes the parent with custody tells me their child does not want to go for visits.

As a way to help families who find themselves in these painful situations, my office awarded a federal grant to Legal Aid of NorthWest Texas to operate the Attorney General's statewide Access and Visitation Hotline.

The hotline is staffed by attorneys who provide legal information and assistance about child custody and visitation matters. The toll-free number, 1-866-292-4636, is answered in English and Spanish, Monday through Friday from 1 to 5 p.m. Attorneys provide basic legal information and education about a

parent's rights pertaining to child access, visitation and custody; establishing paternity; and the child support process. Parents can also visit www.txaccess.org to obtain downloadable legal forms and examples for completing them. Also available are samples of parent letters to request compliance with orders, visitation logs, and other tools for resolving custody and visitation concerns.

Studies have found that parents without custody who stay involved with their children are more likely to make regular child support payments. Children of parents who pay their child support have fewer behavioral problems, make better grades, and stay in school longer than children who do not receive regular child support.

My office is directed by state and federal law to assist families who currently receive or have received public assistance and families who request child support services. Approved services include locating absent parents; establishing paternity for children born to unmarried parents; establishing, enforcing and modifying

child and medical support orders; and collecting and distributing child support payments.

My office does not handle custody or visitation disputes. The child support program receives a significant number of federal dollars for specific child support activities and cannot be used for custody and visitation.

However, my office is allowed to award federal funding to Legal Aid of NorthWest Texas and other groups that seek to increase contact between noncustodial parents and their children. Awarding funding to local organizations is one way my office can help children whose parents are engaged in custody or visitation disputes, since federal funding to run the child support program cannot be used to handle these problems.

I am thankful to all of the parents who work together to care for their children. It is critical to a child's well-being that they know and have a relationship with both parents.

For parents who are experiencing custody or visitation problems, my office's Access and Visitation Hotline is a great resource.

POINTS TO REMEMBER



ACCESS AND VISITATION HOTLINE

- The Access and Visitation Hotline's toll-free number, 1-866-292-4636, is answered in English and Spanish, Monday – Friday from 1 to 5 p.m.
- Visit www.txaccess.org to obtain downloadable legal forms and directions for completing them.
- The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) establishes court orders for the payment of child support that include provisions for child access and visitation. However, federal funding the OAG receives to run the child support program can't be used to intervene in custody or visitation disputes.

Information on this and other topics is available on the Attorney General's website at www.oag.state.tx.us



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT