



# BUILDING STRONG FAMILIES TO BUILD A STRONGER TEXAS

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

MY OFFICE IS RESPONSIBLE for the child support program in Texas and I am proud of our record-breaking collections that ensure Texas children and families get the financial support they need and deserve. Building on this strong foundation, I created the **Office of Family Initiatives (OFI)** and the **Office of Medical Support Initiatives (OMSI)** to work alongside the **Child Support Division (CSD)** to better serve Texas children, families and communities.

## CHILD SUPPORT DIVISION

In 2005, the CSD collected a record \$1.86 billion in child support and obtained court orders obligating more than 56,000 parents to pay. We strive to provide families with the best services possible, but we can always do more. My office has implemented several programs to enhance child support enforcement, including:

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

The Evader Program targets parents who have gone underground to avoid paying court-ordered child support. At least once a year, I announce a *Top Ten List of Child Support Evaders* and meet with parents who are owed the money. My public appeals generate tips that have led to arresting or locating 68 evaders so far.

The Child Support Review Process (CSRP) is a non-adversarial way parents can resolve legal issues on their child support without going to court, thereby supporting positive family relationships. Last fiscal year, more than 50,000 legal actions were resolved through CSRP.

The Paternity Opportunity Program (POP) is an extremely successful undertaking by my office that gives unmarried fathers the opportunity to acknowledge their children's paternity at the time of birth. We train hospital staff and midwives to educate parents on signing an Acknowledgement of Paternity so that the child will have a legal father. Last year, POP gave more than 108,000 Texas children a good start in life by helping their fathers establish legal paternity.

## OFFICE OF FAMILY INITIATIVES

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

Access and Visitation programs help parents without custody develop and maintain meaningful relationships with their children. This year, my office awarded federally funded grants to 12 organizations that will help unmarried parents work together to raise their children.

The toll-free Access and Visitation Hotline is staffed by attorneys who provide legal information and assistance about child custody and visitation matters. Call 1-866-292-4636 or visit [www.txaccess.org](http://www.txaccess.org) to obtain downloadable legal forms, samples of parent letters to request

compliance with orders, visitation logs, and other tools for resolving custody issues. The statewide, toll free number is answered in English and Spanish, Monday – Friday from 1 to 5 p.m.

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

## OFFICE OF MEDICAL SUPPORT INITIATIVES

My office works hard to ensure that Texas children receive the financial support they deserve. A key component of that support is health care coverage. That is why I created the new **OMSI**. Health care coverage is important not only because it encourages parental responsibility, but also because it protects the health of Texas children.

The **OMSI** focuses attention on issues and policies that improve medical and dental support for children. Initiatives emphasize working with partners including the court system to ensure appropriate court orders for access to medical care; the United States Department of Health and Human Services and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission as the federal and state providers of medical insurance for children; and state and federal legislators to obtain necessary tools to further these objectives.

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

## POINTS TO REMEMBER



WHEN TEXAS FAMILIES ARE STRONG, TEXAS IS STRONG

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

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

For more information on these programs, or to apply for child support services,

call **(800) 252-8014** or visit the

Attorney General's website,

[www.oag.state.tx.us](http://www.oag.state.tx.us).



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