



A RECORD-BREAKING \$2 BILLION IN SUPPORT COLLECTED FOR TEXAS CHILDREN

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT JOBS my office performs is making sure Texas children get the support they need and deserve. For many children, child support means the difference between food on the table or going to bed hungry.

I am very proud to announce my office collected a record \$2 billion in child support in the last fiscal year. The \$2 billion collected during the year that ended August 31 surpassed the previous year's all-time record by \$226 million. Almost \$7 billion has been collected for the children of Texas since I became attorney general.

A court order is required to make a parent legally responsible to pay child support. Last year, the Child Support Division obtained court orders obligating 51,000 parents to pay child support.

My office uses every available tool to enforce a parent's legal obligation to pay child support. More than 74 percent of the \$2 billion collected in 2006 was made possible by withholding income from a parent's paycheck. Other enforcement measures include interception of federal income tax refunds; suspension of drivers, professional and recreational licenses; and seizure of assets held in financial institutions.

When all else fails, my office seeks jail time for parents who continue to ignore a court's order to pay child support. In the last fiscal year, more than 3,800 parents were incarcerated for failing to pay child support.

My office is recognized as one of the top child support enforcement agencies in the nation. Our collection growth of 18 percent between federal fiscal year 2004 and 2005 is the largest in the nation, and Texas is second in the amount of child support collected.

Families who receive child support attribute the successful outcome of their enforcement cases to the efforts of child support employees. As one El Paso mother wrote, "The payments have greatly improved the quality of my children's lives and relieved the enormous financial stress I endured all those years when there were no child support payments." She commended the help she received from Assistant Attorney General Judy Speer-Gamino, who works in an El Paso field office.

Another mother from Georgetown commended staff in an Austin field office for work they did to collect a \$15,000 past due payment on behalf of her 18-year-old daughter. That mother wrote, "My daughter has worked very hard and received several scholarships (athletic and academic) so that she may continue on with her college education and the child support money will be used to cover additional college expenses so that she can fulfill her dreams."

These are just two of the examples where I am privileged to touch the lives of so many children who rely on child support to give them a fair start in life.

My office also helps parents establish legal fatherhood for children born to unmarried parents. Under Texas law, a child born to a man

and woman who are not married has no legal father. More than half of the 1.1 million children served by the Child Support Division were born to unmarried parents. My office works with hospitals to help unmarried mothers and fathers voluntarily acknowledge paternity, so the father's name can appear on the birth certificate and the children can be eligible for child support, Social Security, veteran's survivor benefits, and health insurance. Last year, more than 100,000 couples voluntarily acknowledged paternity at the hospital when their children were born.

Of course, many parents who want to pay child support face obstacles to finding and keeping steady employment. Over the past 10 years, child support employees have referred thousands of needy parents to local workforce development boards for employment services. Last year, my office partnered with the Texas Workforce Commission and local workforce development boards to provide job training to unemployed parents from El Paso, Hidalgo, Brazoria, Galveston, Tarrant and Bexar counties who are in contempt of court for disobeying orders requiring the payment of child support.

My office strives to be accessible to all of our customers, who often need up-to-date information about their child support case. The Child Support Division provides 24-hour access to parents who are seeking information about their child support case, both by telephone and Internet. The agency's toll-free automated voice response system (800-252-8014) handled more than 25 million calls during the

last fiscal year. With one call, parents who pay child support or parents who receive child support can obtain a record of recent payments; dates and locations of pending court hearings; dates of service on current legal actions; availability of genetic test results; and amounts due for current and past-due support.

Child Support Interactive, accessed from the main Attorney General website at www.oag.state.tx.us, gives visitors another avenue for obtaining general information about the child support program and applying for services. Those with child support cases can obtain specific case information from a secure section of the site. Child Support Interactive received more than 13.7 million visits in the last fiscal year.

If you need help collecting child support, my office accepts applications from mothers, fathers and other individuals who are caring for a child. To request an application for services, call our toll-free telephone number at (800) 252-8014 or visit the website www.oag.state.tx.us.

Thanks to the efforts of our dedicated child support team, collections continue to grow, giving children across the state hope of a promising future. However, there are still many children going without a parent's financial support. I want the people of Texas to know that my office will not be satisfied until all children receive the support they are due.