



BUILDING STRONG FAMILIES TO BUILD A STRONGER TEXAS

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

TEXAS CHILDREN ARE THE FUTURE OF THIS state. When Texas children and families are strong, Texas is strong. The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) is committed to making sure Texas children have the support and resources needed to lead happy, healthy lives.

To build on the strong foundation created by the Child Support Division — a record-breaking \$3.196 billion was collected last year — the OAG oversees family-centered child support programs that work to strengthen families, encourage responsible fatherhood and promote parental cooperation and involvement with children. Studies show that parents without custody who stay involved with their children are more likely to make regular child support payments.

By partnering with federal, state and community-based organizations, the OAG helps strengthen families and reduce the need for child support. The OAG encourages strong family formation, responsible parenthood and parental involvement through initiatives including:

The Shared Parenting program promotes noncustodial parents' access to and parenting time with their children, when appropriate, through a variety of shared parenting projects. Awarding grant funding to local organizations is one way the OAG can help children whose parents are engaged in custody or visitation disputes, since federal funding for the child support program cannot be used to handle these

issues. Services provided under this grant include early intervention, co-parenting education, mediation and enforcement.

The Access and Visitation Hotline is the only service of its kind in the nation that provides parents with free phone access to attorneys who offer information and assistance related to child custody and parenting time issues, as well as paternity and child support. Hotline attorneys do not represent parents. Rather, they provide tools and guidance and answer parents' questions. The statewide toll-free number, (866) 292-4636, is answered in English and Spanish, Monday – Friday from 1 to 7 p.m. The Hotline has a companion website, www.txaccess.org.

The Parenting and Paternity Awareness (p.a.p.a.) program is an innovative educational curriculum designed for secondary school students and young adults that teaches the "rights, responsibilities and realities of parenting." Key themes focus on the importance of responsible fatherhood, the value of paternity establishment, the legal realities of child support, the financial and emotional challenges of single parenting, the benefits of both parents being involved in a child's life, healthy relationship skills and relationship violence prevention.

The Noncustodial Parent (NCP) Choices project aims to increase child support collections by providing employment and training services for NCPs, and tight-

ening sanctions for non-cooperation with these services. A judicial order requires un- or under-employed NCPs currently not paying child support to participate in employment services with strict sanctions for non-compliance, which could include jail time. Local workforce development boards provide intensive employment services designed to meet the needs of NCPs and facilitate their entry into stable employment. The project is a collaboration between the OAG, the Texas Workforce Commission and child support judges.

HEROES for Children in Military Families is a federal demonstration project designed to provide service members, veterans and their dependents with enhanced, personalized assistance with paternity establishment, child support and parenting time matters. HEROES project staff and attorneys take a comprehensive, family-centered approach when working with military parents so that service members and veterans can address issues impeding their ability to provide the emotional and financial support their children need and deserve. The project team works closely with the Judge Advocate General Corps (JAG), military Family Readiness Group staff, the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN), the Texas Veterans Leadership Program (TVLP), Texas Yellow Ribbon, and with child support and legal services programs across the United States and internationally.

POINTS TO REMEMBER



STRONG TEXAS FAMILIES

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
- Noncustodial Parent Choices program
- HEROES for Children in Military Families

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.texasattorneygeneral.gov.

Information on this and other topics is available on the Attorney General's website at www.texasattorneygeneral.gov.



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