

NEWS

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State commends improvements in child support efforts

The state today recognized efforts by the county Department of Child Support Services to improve the collection and distribution of child support funds by removing the county from the state's child support program corrective action process.

"There are a lot of reasons to be proud of San Bernardino County," said Fourth District Supervisor Gary Ovitt. "One of the greatest sources of pride is in those who help our children."

The state began officially monitoring the county's child support program under the corrective action process in June 2003 when the program failed to meet state standards. The county responded by instituting a new management team led by current Director Connie Brunn, revamping the department's business practices, changing the department's management culture, and eventually registering a notable increase in collections and payments.

"People want to do a good job, and they have to be given an environment in which they can accomplish that," said Third District Supervisor Dennis Hansberger.

"Making sure that children and families receive the support they deserve has always been a key mission for the county. That's why solving this problem has been a high priority for the current Board of Supervisors," said County Administrative Officer Mark Uffer.

The department's performance has shown sharp improvement over the past several years:

- The percentage of open cases that the department shepherded through to eventual court orders, allowing for collections, rose from 59.6 percent in fiscal 2003 to 76 percent in fiscal 2007.
- During fiscal 2007, the department established paternity in 80.5 percent of the cases in which paternity was unknown or disputed, as opposed to 74.5 percent in fiscal 2003.
- The department collected funds in 55.7 percent of the cases in arrears in fiscal 2007, as opposed to 51.8 percent in fiscal 2003.

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- Total collections rose from \$134.6 million in fiscal 2003 to \$151.4 million in fiscal 2007, despite a 13 percent decline in the total number of cases.
- Customer complaints dropped from 411 during the 2004 calendar year to 138 during the 2007 calendar year.

"The improvements here in San Bernardino County have been extraordinary," California Department of Child Support Services Director David Maxwell-Jolly told the Board of Supervisors today. "You have raised the bar for large counties."

"The biggest improvement is to the quality of life for the children we serve," added Brunn, the director of Child Support Services for the county.

"The current Board of Supervisors inherited this problem, and it deserves credit for recognizing what needed to be done, changing the department's leadership, and supporting the department as it made the changes that brought the county back into compliance," Mr. Uffer said. "Families and children are now benefiting from the board's actions and leadership."

The County of San Bernardino Department of Child Support Services is California's second-largest child support agency with approximately 140,000 cases -- almost 9 percent of the state's total caseload of 1.6 million.

"Nothing is more important than ensuring the well being of our families and children," Brunn said. "The improvements made in the Department of Child Support Services' performance over the last three years have been accomplished because of the work of a team of dedicated staff. We will continue to work hard and take a proactive approach in seeking methods to continuously improve our performance in order to provide the best possible services to the citizens of San Bernardino County."