



Introduction

In Cook County the primary child support service providers include HFS/DCSS Field Operations, the Office of the State's Attorney (SAO), the Office of the Chief Judge – Expedited Hearings, the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court and the Office of the Sheriff. These providers collectively agreed to participate in this Service Delivery Assessment in order to identify improvement opportunities in their operations that would lead to increased regularity of child support payments for more families, enhanced perceptions of the program, and reduced family conflict. Such program improvements were being sought in the wake of, and before executing, a previous study's recommendations to market child support services to a larger segment of citizens eligible for services. PSI was charged with identifying changes in policies, practices and/or processes that would produce a significant, positive impact on these target outcomes. PSI was required to conduct individual service delivery assessments and deliver preliminary recommendations for each of five child support service providers in Cook County. Upon completion of these individual assessments, PSI was asked to synthesize its findings and prepare a final report to include the most promising, overall recommendations for the Cook County Child Support program.

Each service delivery assessment report was delivered to and approved by the respective individual provider (only). These recommendations identified measures that the partners could take to improve the operational efficiency and outcomes largely within their respective scope of responsibility. These individual assessment reports were also shared with HFS/DCSS for contract monitoring purposes. During an early Steering Committee Meeting, the Cook County Child Support partners agreed that PSI should present an executive summary of the individual assessment findings and recommendations to the entire Steering Committee. These presentations were made to the Steering Committee after each report was approved by the individual provider.

The PSI project team has conducted follow up interviews and analyses and thoughtfully deliberated these final recommendations. This final set of recommendations is not intended to represent or incorporate all of the preliminary assessment recommendations that have been delivered. It is worth noting that efforts are already underway to implement a number of those individual provider recommendations. As directed, we have developed and have herein identified the policy and practice



recommendations that we believe hold the greatest promise for positively impacting service outcomes and perception of the program.

Executive Summary of Final Recommendations

The primary provisions of our final recommendations are summarized here:

- Improve the Child Support Customer Experience
 - Adopt principles and practices derived from customer education research
 - Reorient and align staff around today's program mission and responsibility for customer education
 - Inventory and improve customer information and standard communication materials
 - Utilize dedicated customer service specialists and establish accountability for inter-office referrals
 - Make proactive customer contacts
 - Incorporate customer education measures within Administrative and Judicial Processes
 - Improve customer-facing features of physical environment
 - Decentralize HFS/DCSS services
 - Reduce burdens associated with customers accessing services
 - Research the root cause(s) of low appearance rates
- Integrate Administrative and Judicial Processes
 - Fully integrate administrative process as a front end to judicial process for most cases
 - Provide early intervention for NCPs/alleged fathers
 - Authorize Child Support Specialists to impute income
 - Authorize Child Support Specialists to set temporary administrative orders
 - Provide for appeals of Child Support Specialist decisions to go directly to the courts



- File Administrative Orders with the courts to have the same force and effect as orders established through judicial process
- Provide specialized training for and certification of Administrative Process staff
- Authorize Administrative Hearing Officers (judicial process) to establish paternity and set final support orders, subject to appeal to a Judge.
- Improve customer education within administrative and judicial processes
- Make necessary statutory changes
- Use Data to Measure and Manage Performance
 - DCSS should take an active leadership role in support of Cook County performance management
 - Define outcome measures beyond the federal five and design a plan to collect and compile outcome data.
 - Regularly review performance data, performance gaps and develop action plans to close those gaps.
- Consider Technology Solutions
 - Phase in an imaging system
 - Build automated interfaces to pass case data between HFS and SAO
 - Make enhancements to KIDS that include data entry points for different service providers, forms templates and improved access
 - Provide or upgrade user hardware
- Continue Collaborating
 - Establish an ongoing forum for evaluating the feasibility of, prioritizing and overseeing the implementation of service delivery recommendations
 - Establish a standing subcommittee responsible for ongoing partner coordination and troubleshooting.
 - Utilize quarterly contractors meeting in Cook County to notify and update partners about forthcoming activities or initiatives
 - Participate in the State's annual strategic planning efforts