

Child Support and Criminal Justice Issue Brief

Delara Aharpour, Lindsay Ochoa, Jillian Stein, Marykate Zukiewicz

State Strategies for Improving Child Support Outcomes for Incarcerated Parents

The 2016 child support modernization rule is designed to ensure that child support orders align with parents' ability to pay. The rule requires that states notify parents who will be incarcerated for more than 180 days of their right to request a modification of their child support order. To improve outcomes for families and comply with the modernization rule, state child support agencies across the country have partnered with justice and social service agencies to share data and connect with incarcerated parents. This brief describes four key strategies states use to identify and connect with incarcerated parents with child support orders:

[Strategy 1: Establish data exchanges with state and local criminal justice agencies](#)

[Strategy 2: Collect information from other sources to identify incarcerated parents](#)

[Strategy 3: Leverage partnerships with justice agencies to connect with incarcerated parents](#)

[Strategy 4: Partner with workforce and employment programs to encourage child support payments among recently incarcerated parents](#)

BACKGROUND

Approximately 50 percent of individuals housed in prisons and jails in the United States are parents and approximately 20 percent of inmates have child support orders that were established before their incarceration (Hager 2015). Because most incarcerated parents are not able to earn an income while incarcerated, they are not able to make child support payments and often accumulate large amounts of child support debt. According to the

National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), the average parent enters prison with approximately \$10,000 in child support debt and leaves with twice that amount (NCSL 2019). Research shows that modifying child support orders for incarcerated parents based on their ability to pay results in less debt accrual and more consistent child support payments upon release (Bannon et al. 2012).

In line with this research, the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) updated federal child support rules under the 2016 "Flexibility, Efficiency, and Modernization in Child Support Enforcement Programs" rule, also known as "the modernization rule" (DHHS OCSE 2019). The goal of the modernization rule is to ensure that child support orders align with parents' ability to pay based on their current earnings, income, or other assets. The modernization rule also prohibits

The Child Support and Criminal Justice Study is funded by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation to learn about states' approaches to meeting the modernization rule. This study examines how states are leveraging data and forming partnerships to identify and work with incarcerated parents with child support orders. The information in this brief comes from searches of publicly available information and conversations with the following states and territories that are implementing promising strategies: California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin.

states from classifying incarceration as “voluntary unemployment,” making incarcerated parents ineligible to have their order modified. As of July 2019, at least 9 U.S. states and territories considered incarceration as voluntary unemployment.¹ Following state compliance with the modernization rule, parents who are incarcerated will be eligible to have their support order reviewed and potentially

modified (DHHS OCSE 2016). See Exhibit 1 for more information about the modernization rule. This issue brief discusses promising practices that some states are using to access data on the incarceration status of parents with child support orders, and the partnerships they are leveraging to identify and work with parents who are eligible for a modification while incarcerated.

Exhibit 1. State approaches to modernization rule implementation

Across the country, states use a variety of approaches to comply with the modernization rule guidelines, which require states to notify parents who will be incarcerated more than 180 days of their right to request a review for modification of their child support order or to automatically conduct a review for modification of the order. The approach to implementing the modernization rule may influence the ways in which child support agencies collect data on incarcerated parents and the types of data they need to collect. Our findings reveal that states’ implementation vary in the following areas:



Length of incarceration before modification eligibility. In most states complying with the modernization rule, parents become eligible to seek a modification after 180 days of incarceration, though some states allow for modifications much sooner. For example, incarcerated parents in the District of Columbia become eligible to seek a modification if they are incarcerated for more than 30 days. However, the period of incarceration counting toward the modification eligibility varies. Among the 10 states interviewed, 7 states only consider the period that a parent is incarcerated after sentencing, whereas 3 states count time served before sentencing in the number of days required for eligibility.



Approach to initiating modifications for incarcerated parents. States have different approaches to initiating modifications for incarcerated parents: (1) notify incarcerated parents of their eligibility and require that they submit a modification request to initiate review, (2) automatically initiate a review of the support order upon learning a parent is incarcerated, or (3) immediately suspend the order when a parent is incarcerated for the minimum number of days required to receive a modification (for example, 180 days).



Groups exempt from modification. States may allow local jurisdictions to exempt incarcerated parents from being eligible to receive or seek a modification to their child support order if they meet certain criteria. Findings from interviews with four states that allow for exemptions reveal that incarcerated parents may be exempt from a modification if they committed a crime against the custodial parent, committed a crime against the child(ren) who are the subject of the child support order, or are incarcerated for a failure to pay child support.



Required minimum amounts of child support. Most states do not require incarcerated parents to pay any amount of child support and set the order amount to \$0 if the parent receives a modification and is not able to maintain an income (for example, through a work-release or other employment program he or she engages in while incarcerated). However, some states may require that incarcerated parents pay a minimum amount of child support each month. Among interviewed states, the minimum amounts range from \$10 to \$50 per child.



Method of implementing the modernization rule. Some states have formally adopted statewide legislation, whereas others have revised the administrative policies and procedures of their child support agencies and courts in order to comply. For example, North Dakota implements modernization rule requirements through a state statute. This statute sets all child support orders to expire upon incarceration under a sentence of 180 days or longer. Among states that have not adopted formal legislation, many have attempted to pass or are currently pursuing state legislation that satisfies the requirements of the modernization rule.

For more information about the modernization rule or incarcerated parents with child support orders, see <https://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/child-support-and-incarceration.aspx>.

COLLECTING DATA TO IDENTIFY INCARCERATED PARENTS WITH CHILD SUPPORT ORDERS

In order to comply with the modernization rule, states must reliably identify incarcerated parents with child support orders. OCSE has encouraged state child support agencies to partner with local, state, private, and federal prisons to establish processes to maximize the identification of incarcerated parents (DHHS OCSE 2017). Interviewed states rely on multiple sources of data to collect the key data elements necessary to identify eligible parents and to modify their child support orders (Exhibit 2). The most critical data elements child support offices use to determine eligibility for a modification include personally identifying information such as name and date of birth, incarceration status, and release date. All or most states use these data elements to identify parents who become incarcerated and to determine if they will be incarcerated for long enough to make them eligible for a modification.

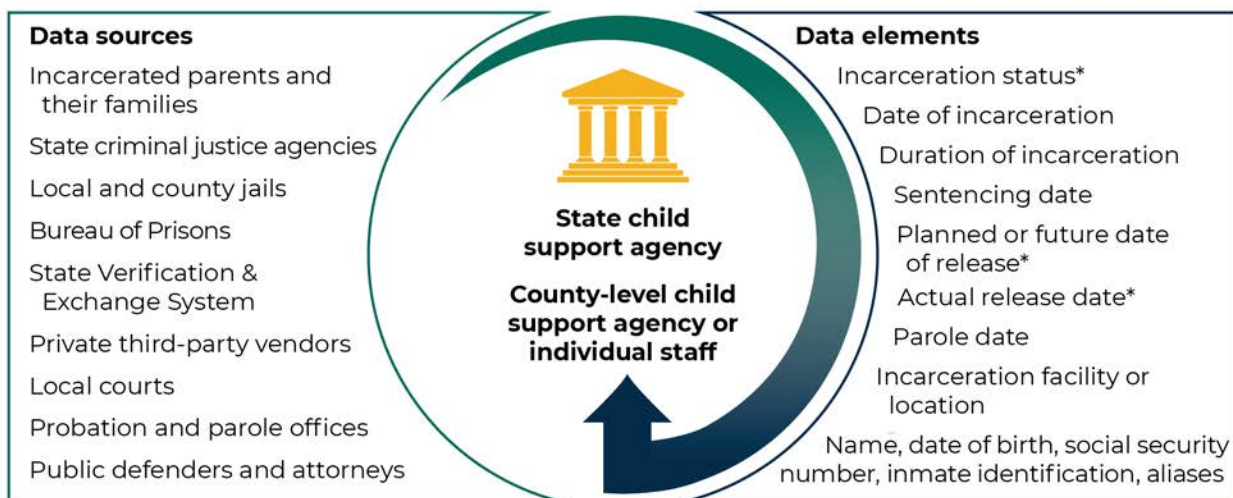
According to interviews, state child support agencies use two key strategies to identify and collect data on incarcerated parents.



STRATEGY 1: Establish data exchanges with state and local criminal justice agencies

Child support agencies rely on state-level exchanges with criminal justice agencies to obtain information on incarcerated parents housed in state jails and prisons. All 10 states interviewed for this study indicated that they rely upon data exchanges with the state department of corrections as a primary data source for identifying incarcerated parents, often established through formal data sharing agreements. Many state data exchanges predate the modernization rule; for example, in Wisconsin the data exchange between the child support agency and the state department of corrections has been in place since the early 2000s. In addition to data from state departments of corrections, some states also receive incarceration information from other criminal justice agencies, such as local or county jails, court systems, probation and parole offices, and public defenders' offices. Methods of exchanging incarceration data vary by state and entity, but they generally include either automated data matches or other methods for electronically sharing information.

Exhibit 2. Common data sources and data elements



*Denotes data elements that all interviewed states reported collecting

Automated data matches between child support and state department of corrections.

Several of the state child support agencies we interviewed conduct automated data matching with state corrections agencies. States have established data linkages that allow them to use identifiers in the child support caseload, such as name, social security number, and date of birth, to match to data from state corrections agencies. If an individual with a child support order is matched with a record in the justice agency database, the incarceration data are automatically updated into the child support agency database. These data matches occur at a variety of intervals, with some states reporting having daily matches, whereas others receive data imports at weekly or monthly intervals. In some interviewed states, case managers receive a notification that alerts them to the change. For example, in Texas, there is an automated data match between the Office of the Attorney General (the state child support agency) and the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), which oversees all the state jails and prisons. TDCJ provides data on a weekly basis that automatically populates incarceration-related fields in the Texas Child Support Enforcement System if an individual is incarcerated. When the incarceration field is populated in the Texas Child Support Enforcement System, case managers receive an email alert to review the case and assess eligibility for a modification.

States indicated that directly interfacing data systems often requires close coordination between information technology departments at both agencies to ensure data elements and data systems are compatible. It is also important to understand

State-level department of corrections data

State-level department of corrections data allow child support staff to collect information on individuals incarcerated in state jails and prisons. However, state corrections data do not provide information for incarcerated individuals housed in federal prisons, local/county jails, or jails and prisons in other states.

the definitions of all data elements as well as the processes corrections agencies use to collect and track data so child support agencies can appropriately interpret the data they receive.

Manual updates by child support agencies staff based on data received electronically from criminal justice agencies through file transfers or access to agency websites, or in lists and reports.

Some states that do not have automated data exchanges with the state department of corrections receive incarceration information through other means, including lists or reports generated by the department of corrections on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. Other states described accessing state corrections data through a non-public website or portal. In these approaches, case managers review the data file manually or conduct searches for individual parents and then manually update the child support management system with the new incarceration information they encounter. For example, in California, child support staff have access to the Department of Corrections Strategic Offender Management System, which contains data for incarcerated individuals housed in California state correctional facilities. Through a manual search, case managers can obtain information on incarceration status, date of incarceration, and release dates (planned and actual). When new information is identified, case managers make manual updates to the state Child Support Enforcement System to document the new information.

Non-automated approaches to data-sharing, such as lists or reports, are also commonly used by states to collect data from other criminal justice agencies at the local or county levels. Some states and counties supplement their state-level department of corrections data through similar data partnerships with local and county criminal justice agencies, because state departments of corrections data only include individuals housed in state jails and prisons. Local partnerships allow child support staff to identify and support parents who are incarcerated in county jails and other facilities. In the District of Columbia, the child support agency receives a daily sentencing

Exhibit 3. Successes and challenges related to data sharing

Data received through exchanges **do not always include all preferred data elements** such as projected release date.



Data exchanges allow child support staff to **efficiently obtain key data elements** on incarcerated parents.

Data entry errors and/or discrepancies in the data across systems can make matching individuals using exchanges difficult (e.g. when individuals have multiple aliases, social security numbers, or birth dates).



Data exchanges in which incarceration data automatically populate within the child support management system **reduce burden on child support staff** as they do not require manual searches and data entry.

Incarceration data are **not always timely or accurate**. For example, child support staff may attempt to contact a parent at the facility identified in the data but the individual has already moved to another facility.



State processes and data exchanges that enable automatic modifications or suspensions for incarcerated parents **reduce the likelihood that parents will accrue arrears**.

Data exchanges **do not always contain information on the most recent incarceration** for individuals who have multiple spells of incarceration.



Effective partnerships between child support and criminal justice agencies at the local level allow child support agencies to **identify parents incarcerated in county jails**.

report from the DC Superior Court that includes anyone who was sentenced that day. Child support staff review the report to determine if anyone on the list has a child support case. If they identify an incarcerated parent with a child support order on the list, they will assess eligibility for a modification and draft the motion to suspend for incarceration.



STRATEGY 2: Collect information from other sources to identify incarcerated parents





Currently, state child support offices do not have access to a single, comprehensive source of data on incarcerated parents across federal, state, and local incarceration facilities. In addition to partnering with state and local justice agencies child support workers collect information from a variety of other sources, including the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) database, the State Verification and

Exchange System (SVES), and sometimes third-party commercial systems. Exhibit 4 lists the most common data sources states used to identify parents with child support orders who become incarcerated including the state and local sources described above.

BOP database

The Federal Bureau of Prisons maintains the “Find an Inmate” database, a searchable, publicly available tool that provides data on both current and prior prisoners within federal prison systems for the period 1982 to the present (BOP 2019). Three states interviewed—Colorado, California, and Minnesota—reported that they sometimes use the publicly available BOP search tool as an additional source of information on parents in federal prisons. Using a parent’s full name and other background information (like age, race, and sex), child support

Exhibit 4. Data sources for obtaining incarceration information on parents with child support orders

	 State and local data exchanges	 Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP)	 State Verification and Exchange System (SVES)	 Private third-party vendors
Description	Formal data exchanges established between child support offices and state and local corrections or justice agencies to obtain incarceration information	Searchable database of federal inmates maintained by BOP	Batch query system that includes information on incarcerated individuals from select local, state, and federal facilities	Third-party vendors (such as Appriss, VINELink, and CLEAR) compile incarceration data from across multiple sources and states
Correctional facility population	State prisons (and sometimes local facilities)	Federal prisons	Federal, state and local prisons participating in SSA's incentive program	Varies by source; can include individuals in federal, state, or local facilities
How data are obtained	Varies by state; often obtained through data file transfers or directly linking data systems	"Find an Inmate" public look-up; some states have direct exchanges with BOP	States access SVES data through the Federal Parent Locator Service portal	Varies by source; may include use of a look-up function or creating watchlists
Requirements for obtaining data	Typically established through a formal MOU	Look-up is publicly available; some states have MOUs with BOP	OCSE provides to states through Federal Case Registry	Child support offices enroll in access through vendor
Available data elements	Varies depending upon formal agreement with corrections agency	Prisoner identification number, age, race, gender, prison location, prospective release date, facility	Prisoner identification number, date of birth, facility, confinement date, past release date	Varies depending upon vendor but often contains information on incarceration across state lines
Limitations	Specific to state or locality. See Exhibit 3 for a list of potential limitations in some states and localities.	Does not include individual's date of sentence/confinement Release dates are often not current	Only available for facilities participating in SSA incentive program Does not include prospective release date or expected length of stay Delays in available data	Services based on each "watch" for an individual parent can be costly to the agency Data from sources that are already available to child support agencies

workers can obtain information on the prison facility where an individual has been housed.

Information provided through the BOP contains a prospective release date for individuals currently in prison, but it does not provide the original date of sentence for purposes of calculating the duration of imprisonment—a consideration for many states in determining eligibility. Also, according to the BOP website, the populated release date for an individual inmate may not be current (BOP 2019) because the passage of the First Step Act in 2018 required sentences be reviewed and recalculated to address pending Good Time changes, and these revised release dates may not be shown in the BOP database. Thus, child support case managers may supplement BOP information with other data sources, such as contacting the federal facility itself for more information. Some states and territories, such as DC, have developed formal data sharing agreements directly with the BOP through which the BOP conducts quarterly matches on DC's full caseload of parents with support orders. When the BOP identifies an individual in federal prison, the BOP informs DC child support where the individual is located. This data matching process allows DC to efficiently identify incarcerated parents, as it eliminates the need to manually enter information for each parent into the "Find an Inmate" look-up function.

State Verification and Exchange System (SVES) prisoner responses

The SVES database houses data on incarcerated individuals from select federal, state, and local facilities, making it an additional resource for child support agencies in their search for incarceration data. The SVES database is a batch query system established by the Social Security Administration (SSA) to provide state and federal agencies with social security number verification and benefit information. In addition to providing social security information, SVES provides identification information for individuals housed in local, state, and federal correctional facilities that participate in the SSA's incentive program that provides payments for data submitted on newly incarcerated individuals

Factors that inform data collection on incarcerated parents with child support orders



State vs. county administered

Programs that are county administered vary more across the state because they rely upon local exchanges and relationships established and maintained by counties. Programs that are state administered tend to be more uniform across the state.



Size of state/program

Larger programs make individual look-up functions cumbersome.



Age and functionality of reporting systems

Older systems may be more difficult to directly link with other data systems, such as direct data exchanges between data sources



State modification requirements for parents

States that determine modification eligibility based upon length of sentence need data sources that confirm a parent's incarceration and provide a prospective date of release/length of sentence.

(SSA n.d.). To access SVES information, personnel can conduct individual queries, as well as opt for automated matches through the Federal Parent Locator Service Federal Case Registry, a national computer matching system operated by the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (DHHS OCSE 2018). SVES incarceration data include an individual's initial date of confinement, facility location and, in cases where the individual has been released, the date that the facility subsequently released them. SVES does not include incarcerated individuals' projected release date or expected length of stay, data elements that are essential metrics for many states to determine when a parent with a child support order is eligible to seek modification (DHHS OCSE 2016).² In addition, some states interviewed indicated that there can be an information lag between when individuals are incarcerated and when this information is available through SVES.

Third-party vendors

Private vendors serve as an additional source of information on incarcerated parents for some child support agencies, either as a stand-alone data resource or as an integrated component of a state case management system. Third party vendors such as Appriss, VINELink, and CLEAR compile data from multiple sources, such as the BOP look-up site, public websites for state and local incarceration facilities, and sometimes their own data exchanges with facilities. Accessing this information varies by source; on several sites, case managers may set up “watchlists” to track new information across available sources for a set of parents or can use a look-up function. Available data elements also vary based on third-party vendor.

States report that a primary limitation in the use of third-party vendors is the associated cost. Contracts with some vendors are based on watchlists and price is based upon the number of individual parents on the watchlist, which can become expensive, particularly for larger states. Some states also report that, because data are obtained from upstream vendors, there can be a lag in timeliness.

DEVELOPING CROSS-AGENCY PARTNERSHIPS TO CONNECT WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS

Cross-agency partnerships are critical not only for data sharing, but also in facilitating opportunities for child support agencies to directly connect and work with parents to modify their support order. Many states have established partnerships focused on a variety of topics, including collecting information from inmates, disseminating information to inmates and staff, supporting employment of parents following release, and connecting parents to other vital services through fatherhood programs or other services. This section reviews two key strategies states have used to leverage cross-agency partnerships.



STRATEGY 3: Leverage partnerships with justice agencies to connect with incarcerated parents

Partnerships between child support agencies and justice agencies build a bridge between parents who are incarcerated and the child support agencies that oversee their support orders. In most states, child support agencies need to connect with parents in order to inform them about their right to file for a modification or to collect information from them to initiate a modification. For example, in a pilot program in Washington, caseworkers who identify that a parent on their caseload is incarcerated, visit with the incarcerated parent to confirm their information and help them complete the paperwork necessary for a modification. The partnerships between child support agencies and justice agencies are central for enabling this communication and the successful modification of support orders for millions of parents who are incarcerated. All states featured in this brief spoke of partnerships with criminal justice agencies, including with state, local, and federal agencies. More than two-thirds of state child support agencies (42 states and territories) have established formal partnerships with justice agencies including local and state-level corrections departments, and sometimes with state courts.³

Child support agencies partner with jails and prisons to share information and communicate in a number of ways. They:

- **Share information with justice agencies about child support, including why it is important and how child support and justice agencies have a shared goal.** Child support agencies find it helpful to provide justice agencies information about child support generally and to “put a face to child support.” In Michigan, for example, child support staff emphasize to their justice partners the benefits of working together toward a shared goal of family engagement while incarcerated and how it can increase the likelihood of cooperation and payment of child support in the future. Similarly, some child support agencies find it useful to emphasize that justice agencies and child support offices often

serve the same population of people, and they can get better results when they work together.

- **Share information with parents who may be eligible for a modification.** Child support agencies can leverage partnerships with local corrections facilities to inform parents that they may be eligible to modify their child support order. Despite the availability of incarceration information through data sources such as exchanges and federal agency websites, the limitations described above mean that child support agencies often still learn about parents' involvement in the justice system directly from the parents themselves. This method is especially common for incarcerated parents in local jails, where automated data exchanges are rare. For example, in Minnesota, child support has staff co-positioned in the Department of Corrections who focus on outreach and education for incarcerated parents. They conduct presentations, such as "Child Support 101" and will share information on the steps associated with modifications. In Colorado, all incarcerated individuals receive a postcard during the intake process, which asks them if they have a child support order, the length of their sentence, and whether they would like to seek a modification. These postcards are then sent back to the child support office in batches every two weeks.
- **Communicate directly with parents in order to initiate a modification.** Several states we spoke with have established methods for child support offices to communicate directly with parents to provide information and collect information to initiate a modification. For example, in Colorado, child support received permission to bring a laptop and phone into the facility and meet with incarcerated parents individually to answer questions about their cases as part of their pre-release planning. The Department of Corrections coordinates the meetings and ensures that the parents are appropriate candidates for modification. The child support agency has an MOU with the DOC that outlines the purpose of these meetings and the respective roles each agency plays. In Washington state's pilot program with the Washington Corrections Center (WCC),

Common justice partners for state child support agencies

- Jails and prisons
- Federal Bureau of Prisons
- State Department of Corrections
- Corrections staff at local and county jails
- State and county probation and parole
- State judiciary
- Public defenders

a child support enforcement officer meets with eligible individuals to help them complete the required modification paperwork. According to the state child support office, staff are meeting with about 97 percent of incarcerated fathers who are eligible for a modification within two weeks of their incarceration at WCC. They believe this has resulted in greater modifications of support orders.



STRATEGY 4: Partner with workforce and employment programs to encourage child support payments among recently incarcerated parents

Formerly incarcerated parents with child support orders often struggle to secure stable employment and in turn make child support payments following incarceration. According to a 2018 analysis of national justice data, in the year following release, only 55 percent of formerly incarcerated individuals reported any earnings (Looney and Turner 2018). To connect parents with child support orders to employment opportunities, some child support agencies have built strategic partnerships with local and state workforce and employment programs. Some states, such as Maryland, have dedicated employment programs to serve parents with child support orders (both incarcerated and nonincarcerated parents). Maryland's Department of Human Services, for example, oversees the state's Noncustodial Parent Employment Program. However, in Maryland, the services and partnerships offered through this program vary at the county

level. One of Maryland's most notable and largest programs is Baltimore City's "Step Up" program, which collaborates with the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to ensure reentering parents are referred to the program. The three-year program provides parents with support orders with education and employment services, job training programs in a variety of industries, and other services to address potential barriers to employment. In addition, parents who successfully complete the program are eligible to earn forgiveness on child support arrears owed to the state of Maryland.⁴

Minnesota's state child support office leverages their state-level Department of Corrections to refer reentering parents with child support orders to workforce and employment programming within the Department of Employment and Economic Development. This referral provides interview and resumé assistance to reentering parents with child support orders, as well as other supports to facilitate connections to employment opportunities.

One state child support office described how employment and workforce partnerships not only *remove barriers* for reentering parents to resume child support payments, but also *reconnect* parents to their local community to help ensure long-term payments and financial stability. However, the challenges faced in operating these programs vary at the state and county level. For example, at the state level, some child support agencies describe challenges associated with coordinating and tailoring programming and service delivery at the local level. Other challenges include securing funding to expand programming, encouraging and tracking program participation, and maintaining the infrastructure and leadership needed to execute and continually refine program offerings.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This brief has described the innovative strategies states are using to improve outcomes for families and comply with the modernization rule. Specifically, state child support agencies across the country have partnered with justice and social service agencies to share data and connect with

Tips for building and maintaining cross-agency partnerships

Three strategies states found helpful in fostering partnerships between child support and other agencies:

- **Find shared goals.** Many social service agencies are serving the same population of people—identify common goals. Find ways to work together to get better results for both agencies. As one child support agency put it, "Whatever we have in common, I am willing to work with you on."
- **Teach your partners about what you do.** Upon embarking on a new partnership with an agency with a different focus, try to learn about them and their agency. Provide a mini presentation to new partners (or even old ones) to help them understand what you do and bridge the gap between organizations.
- **Hold regular gatherings and keep the dialogue open.** For example, the District of Columbia hosts "partner mixers" for partners across agencies and sectors. "It's a good way to facilitate collaboration." Another way to convene partners is by offering trainings. As one interviewee put it, "people love trainings! ...If you can offer something that they need, they eat it up."

incarcerated parents. The following provides three suggestions for additional exploration in the future:

Explore opportunities for a central data source for federal, state, and local jails and prisons. Many state child support agencies report that their greatest success in collecting data on incarcerated parents has been the establishment of data exchanges with state corrections departments. However, the scope of these exchanges tends to be limited to incarcerated parents within an individual state's correctional facilities. To identify incarcerated parents across federal, state, and local facilities, states rely upon a broad network of sources to gather data, including parental self-report or petition. In interviews, several child support administrators suggested that a central, single-stop source of information across federal, state, and local prisons would be ideal and allow them to collect incarceration information in an

efficient, streamlined process. Importantly, creating a central data source would require the identification/development of a central site for reporting, and potentially may require formal agreements focused on data sharing in order to ensure the protection of individuals' identities while increasing the amount of information that is centrally available.

Foster cross-agency collaboration to identify and work with incarcerated parents with support orders. All states interviewed for this brief have invested substantial time and effort into cultivating collaborative partnerships with other state agencies. Through these partnerships, child support agencies have been both *recipients* of important information, obtaining incarceration data from other agencies, and *disseminators* of child support program information, educating staff from other agencies and incarcerated parents alike. Child support agencies have also collaborated with other agencies to support programs that may directly or indirectly improve child support outcomes, such as employment and reentry programs. States have undertaken many strategies for fostering these

partnerships, from establishing office liaisons with other agencies to presenting training and informational sessions to build a bridge across agencies. Increased focus on cross-agency topic initiatives, such as employment, two-generation, or fatherhood programs may further encourage collaborations across state agencies.

Promote exchange of incarceration data across state lines. In addition to obtaining data from parents housed in federal, state, and local facilities in their state, child support agencies also face challenges in obtaining data on parents who are incarcerated in correctional facilities in other states. Most commonly, state data exchanges provide incarceration information only on facilities *within* their state. Several states have requested opportunities to collaborate with corrections offices and child support agencies from other states in improving information exchanges. Additional opportunities and venues for state agencies to connect and collaborate on core data topics may help to support cross-state data exchanges.

Methods and overview of study data sources

The information in this brief was collected between June 2019 and February 2020 through

- **A scan of publicly available information** for all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the five U.S. territories describing (1) state child support office procedures related to modernization rule implementation, (2) partnerships focused on identifying and serving incarcerated parents with child support orders, or (3) data collection strategies to identify incarcerated parents with child support orders.
- **Semi-structured discussions with 10 state child support agencies** focused on understanding state-level data collection efforts to identify and support incarcerated parents with child support orders, partnerships formed to address the needs of incarcerated parents with support orders, and real-time implementation of the modernization rule.

State child support agencies interviewed include California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. We selected states that are geographically and politically diverse, of various sizes, and administered at the state and county levels, to provide a well-rounded understanding of approaches to modernization rule implementation. Each of the selected states demonstrates promising or innovative approaches to modernization rule implementation, data collection, or partnerships.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Aharpour, Delara, Lindsay Ochoa, Jill Stein, and Marykate Zukiewicz (2020). "State Strategies for Improving Child Support Outcomes for Incarcerated Parents." ASPE Research Brief. Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to express their appreciation to those who contributed to this work, including the state and local child support administrators who took the time to share their perspectives with us and the Office of Child Support Enforcement for their review of this brief. We also thank the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for its support of the Criminal Justice and Child Support project and we are especially grateful for the thoughtful guidance provided by Sofi Martinez, our Federal Project Officer. This brief was prepared under contract #HHSP233201500035I/HHSP23337015T. The opinions and views expressed in this report are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Health and Human Services, Mathematica, or any other funding organization.

REFERENCES

Bannon, A., M. Nagrecha, and R. Diller. "Criminal Justice Debt: A Barrier to Reentry." New York, NY: Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law, 2010. Available at https://www.criminallegalnews.org/media/publications/brennan_center_for_justice_reentry_report_2010.pdf. Accessed March 30, 2020.

Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP). "Find an Inmate." Available at <https://www.bop.gov/inmateloc/#>. Accessed March 30, 2020.

Government Accountability Office (GAO). "Social Security Administration's Data Exchanges Support Current Programs, but Better Planning Is Needed to Meet Future Demands." Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, September 2009. Available at <https://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09966.pdf>. Accessed March 30, 2020.

Hager, Eli. "For Men in Prison, Child Support Becomes a Crushing Debt." The Marshall Project. October 18, 2015. Available at <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2015/10/18/for-men-in-prison-child-support-becomes-a-crushing-debt>. Accessed March 30, 2020.

Looney, Adam, and Nicholas Turner. "Work and Opportunity Before and After Incarceration." Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, March 2018. Available at https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/es_20180314_looneyincarceration_final.pdf. Accessed April 2, 2020.

Maryland Department of Human Services. "Step Up: Supporting, Training, and Employing Parents." Available at <http://dhs.maryland.gov/child-support-services/paying-support/noncustodial-parent-employment-programs/step-up/>. Accessed April 3, 2020.

National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). "Child Support and Incarceration." March 4, 2019. Available at <http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/child-support-and-incarceration.aspx>. Accessed March 30, 2020.

Social Security Administration (SSA). "Data Exchange Applications," n.d. Available at <https://www.ssa.gov/data-exchange/applications.html>. Accessed April 14, 2020.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement (DHHS OCSE). "Child Support Portal; State Plans for Final Rule Implementation." Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement, 2019. Available at <https://fpls.acf.hhs.gov/stateplan/reports.html>. Accessed April 07, 2019.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "Federal Case Registry Interface Guidance Document, Version 12.0." Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement, January 2018. Available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/css/resource/federal-case-registry-interface-guidance-document>. Accessed March 30, 2020.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "Final Rule: Modification for Incarcerated Parents." Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement, Division of Policy and Training, December 2016. Available at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/programs/css/fem_final_rule_incarceration.pdf. Accessed March 30, 2020.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "Changing a Child Support Order." Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement, August 2017. Available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/css/state-by-state-how-to-change-a-child-support-order>. Accessed July 14, 2019.

ENDNOTES

¹ This finding comes from a July 2019 review of publicly available documents on the partnerships state and county child support offices have with justice or corrections agencies.

² Similarly, the Prison Update Processing System (PUPS) Data Exchange, an additional database hosted by the SSA that is often included under SVES agreements with states, provides information on date of confinement, facility location, and the historical date of release, but does not provide prospective date of future release (GAO 2009).

³ This finding comes from a review of publicly available documents on the partnerships state and county child support offices have with a justice or corrections agency.

⁴ See “Step Up: Supporting, Training, and Employing Parents” landing page. Available at <http://dhs.maryland.gov/child-support-services/paying-support/noncustodial-parent-employment-programs/step-up/>. Accessed April 3, 2020.