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WORK AND RESPONSIBILITY ACT
OF 1994

LEGISLATIVE SPECIFICATIONS - PART A

-- June 14, 1994 --

WORK AND RESPONSIBILITY ACT

OF 1994

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CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

In spite of the concerted efforts of Federal, State and local governments to establish and enforce child support orders, the current system fails to ensure that children receive adequate support from both parents. Recent analyses by The Urban Institute suggest that the potential for child support collections exceeds \$47 billion per year. Yet only \$20 billion in awards are currently in place, and only \$14 billion is actually paid. Thus we have a potential collection gap of about \$34 billion.

The signals the system sends are unmistakable: all too often noncustodial parents are not held responsible for the children they bring into the world. Less than half of all custodial parents receive any child support, and only about one-third of single mothers (mothers who are divorced, separated, or never married as opposed to remarried) receive any child support. Among never-married mothers, only 15 percent receive any support. The average amount paid is just over \$2,000 for those due support. Further, paternity is currently being established in only one-third of cases where a child is born out-of-wedlock.

The problem is primarily threefold: First, for many children born out-of-wedlock, a child support order is never established. Roughly 57 percent of the potential collection gap of \$34 billion can be traced to cases where no award is in place. Paternity, a prerequisite to establishing a support award, has not been established in about half of these cases.

Second, when awards are established, they are often too low, the value is eroded by inflation over time, and are not sufficiently correlated to the earnings of the noncustodial parent. Fully 22 percent of the potential collection gap can be traced to awards that were either set very low initially or never adjusted as incomes changed.

Third, of awards that are established, the full amount of child support is collected in only about half the cases. The remaining 21 percent in the potential collection gap is due to failure to collect on awards in place.

The typical child born in the U.S. today will spend time in a single parent home. The evidence is clear that children benefit from the financial support and interaction with two parents—single parents cannot be expected to do the entire job of two parents. If we cannot solve the problem of child support, we cannot possibly adequately provide for our children.

The Strategy: Build a child support system for the 21st century.

The proposal has three major elements:

- Establish Awards In Every Case
- Ensure Fair Award Levels
- Collect Awards That Are Owed

In addition, two other elements are proposed:

- Guarantee Some Level of Child Support—Child Support Assurance Demonstrations
- Supports and Nonfinancial Expectations for Noncustodial Parents

I. ESTABLISH AWARDS IN EVERY CASE

Current System

States currently establish paternity for only about one-third of the out-of-wedlock births every year and typically try to establish paternity only for women who apply for welfare, which sometimes occurs years after the birth of the child. Time is of the essence in paternity establishment; the longer the delay after the birth, the harder it is to ever establish paternity. Research indicates that between 65 percent and 80 percent of the fathers of children born out-of-wedlock are present at birth or visit the child shortly after birth. So beginning the paternity establishment process at birth or shortly thereafter is critical. Research also demonstrates that paternity establishment is cost effective. Even men who have low incomes initially often have quite significant earnings several years later, so the financial benefits to the children within a few years are significant. States are also hampered by a lack of incentives and cumbersome procedures for establishing paternities. Scientific testing for paternity has now become extremely accurate, yet many state systems fail to take full advantage of this scientific advancement.

Proposal

Under the proposal:

- *States will receive Federal funding to implement a paternity establishment program that expands the scope and improves the effectiveness of current State paternity establishment procedures. Under new Federal requirements, States must ensure that paternity is established for as many children born out-of-wedlock as possible, regardless of the welfare or income status of the mother or father, and as soon as possible following the child's birth. Each State's performance will be measured based not only upon cases within the State's current IV-D (child support) system, but upon all cases where children are born to an unmarried mother.*
- *States will be encouraged to improve their paternity establishment records through a combination of performance standards and performance-based incentives. To facilitate the process, States will be required to streamline paternity establishment processes and implement procedures that build on the successes of other States.*
- *Outreach efforts at the State and Federal levels will promote the importance of paternity establishment both as a parental responsibility and a right of the child.*
- *The responsibility for paternity establishment will be made clear for both the parents and the agencies. AFDC mothers must cooperate fully with paternity establishment procedures prior to the receipt of benefits under a new stricter definition of cooperation. "Cooperation" will be determined by the IV-D (child support) worker, not the IV-A (welfare) worker, through an expedited process. Those who refuse to cooperate will be denied AFDC benefits. Good cause exceptions will continue to be provided in appropriate circumstances. When an AFDC mother has cooperated, States will have one year to establish paternity or face financial penalties.*
- *Agencies will be given authority to administratively establish child support orders following appropriate guidelines.*

II. ENSURE FAIR AWARD LEVELS

Current System

Much of the gap between what is currently paid in child support in this country and what could potentially be collected can be traced to awards that were either set very low initially or are never adjusted as incomes change. All States are required to have guidelines, but the resulting award levels vary considerably. Awards are not updated for every case on a routine basis to reflect changed circumstances and AFDC and non-AFDC families do not receive similar treatment. Distribution and payment rules often place families' needs second.

Proposal

Under the proposal:

- *A National Commission will be set up to study the issue of child support guidelines and the advisability of establishing a national guideline to insure equitable awards;*
- *Universal, periodic, administrative updating of awards will be required for both AFDC and non-AFDC cases to ensure that awards accurately reflect the current ability of the noncustodial parent to pay support; and*
- *Revised distribution and payment rules will be designed to strengthen families. For those leaving welfare for work, arrearages will be paid to families first and arrearages owed to the State will be forgiven if the family unites or reunites in marriage.*

III. COLLECT AWARDS THAT ARE OWED

Current System

Enforcement of support is handled by State and local IV-D agencies, with tremendous state variation in terms of structure and organization. Cases are too often handled on a complaint-driven basis with the IV-D agency only taking enforcement action when the custodial parent pressures the agency. Many enforcement steps require court intervention, even when the case is routine. And even routine enforcement measures often require individual case processing rather than relying upon automation and mass case-processing. States are often not equipped with the necessary enforcement tools—tools that have proven successful in other States—to insure that people do not escape their legal and moral obligation to support their children.

When payments of support by noncustodial parents or their employers are made, they go to a wide variety of different agencies, institutions and individuals. As wage withholding becomes a requirement for a larger and larger segment of the noncustodial parent population, the need for one, central state location to collect and distribute payments in a timely manner has grown. Also, the ability to maintain accurate records that can be centrally accessed is critical. Computers, automation and information technology, such as those used by business, are rarely used to the extent necessary.

Welfare and non-welfare cases are handled differently, with less help for poor and middle class women outside the welfare system. States require a written application, and often a fee, in order to provide enforcement services to a non-welfare parent. The incentives built into the system mean that non-welfare cases often receive second-class services.

The Federal government currently has a role in enforcement through tax intercepts and full collection programs by the IRS and operation of the Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS) by the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE). Given that about 30 percent of the current caseload involves interstate cases and that we live in an increasingly mobile society, the need for a stronger federal role in location and enforcement has grown, particularly in interstate cases.

Through direct Federal matching, the Federal government currently pays 66 percent of most State and local program costs with a complicated incentive formula which caps the incentive for non-AFDC cases. There is almost universal agreement that the current funding and incentive structure fails to achieve the right objectives. In addition, existing audit procedures involve too many technical requirements and serve to address a State's deficiencies after the fact. Too little technical assistance is provided to States before problems occur.

Proposal

Under the proposal:

- *The State based system will continue, but with bold changes which move the system toward a more uniform, centralized and service oriented program. All States will maintain a State staff in conjunction with a central registry and centralized collection and disbursement capability. The State staff will monitor support payments to ensure that the support is being paid and will be able to impose certain enforcement remedies at the State level administratively. Thus, routine enforcement actions that can be handled on a mass or group basis will be imposed through the central State office using computers and automation. For States that opt to use local offices, this will supplement, but not replace, local enforcement actions.*
- *States will be required to establish a Central State Registry for all child support orders established in that State. The registry will maintain current records of all support orders and serve as a clearinghouse for the collection and distribution of child support payments. This will be designed to vastly simplify withholding for employers as well as insure accurate accounting and monitoring of payments.*
- *Welfare and non-welfare distinctions will be largely eliminated and all cases included in the central registry will receive child support enforcement services automatically, without the need for an application. Certain parents, provided that they meet specified conditions, can choose to be excluded from payment through the registry.*
- *The Federal role will be expanded to ensure efficient location and enforcement, particularly in interstate cases. In order to coordinate activity at the Federal level, a National Clearinghouse (NC) will be established consisting of three components: an expanded Federal Parent Locator Services (FPLS), the National Child Support Registry, and the National Directory of New Hires.*
- *Federal technical assistance will be expanded to prevent deficiencies before they occur. While penalties will still be available to ensure that States meet program requirements, the audit process will emphasize a performance based, "state friendly" approach.*
- *The entire financing and incentive scheme will be reconstructed offering States a higher Federal match and new performance-based incentive payments geared toward desired outcomes.*

- *New provisions will be enacted to improve State efforts to work interstate child support cases and make interstate procedures more uniform throughout the country.*
- *IV-D agencies will be able to quickly and efficiently take enforcement action when support is not being paid. IV-D agencies will use expanded access and matching with other state data bases to find location, asset and income information and will be provided administrative power to take many enforcement actions. A variety of tough, proven enforcement tools will also be provided.*

IV. GUARANTEEING SOME LEVEL OF CHILD SUPPORT -- CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT AND ASSURANCE DEMONSTRATIONS

Current System

Improving child support enforcement is absolutely essential if we are going to make it possible for people to move from welfare to work. Single parents cannot be expected to bear the entire financial burden of supporting their children alone. We have to do everything possible to ensure that the non-custodial parent also contributes to the support of his or her child. Still, there will be cases where the support from the non-custodial parent will not be available; for instance, in cases where the non-custodial parent has been laid off from a job or presently has very low income.

Child Support Enforcement and Assurance is a program that will seek to combine a dramatically improved child support enforcement system with the payment of a minimum child support payment so that the custodial parent could count on some minimum level of support even if the noncustodial parent is unable to pay. Currently, no state has such a program, although the Child Assistance Program (CAP) in New York State has many similar features. Many States have indicated a strong interest in implementing such a program if they could receive some federal assistance.

Proposal

- *State demonstrations encompassing a variety of different child support assurance approaches.*

V. ENHANCING RESPONSIBILITY AND OPPORTUNITY FOR NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS

Current System

Issues concerning child support enforcement and issues concerning non-custodial parents cross-cut to a great degree. The well-being of children who live with only one parent would be enhanced if emotional and financial support were provided by both of their parents. Yet, the needs and concerns of noncustodial parents are often ignored under the present system. Instead of encouraging noncustodial parents to remain involved in their children's lives, the system often drives them away.

Proposal

Under the proposal:

- *The system will focus more attention on this population and send the message that "fathers matter." The child support system, while getting tougher on those that can pay but refuse to do so, will also be fairer to those noncustodial parents who show responsibility towards their children. Some of the elements above will help. There*

will be better tracking of payments to avoid build-up of arrearages and a simple administrative process for modifications of awards. Downward modifications of awards will be made when income declines so that these parents are not faced with awards that they cannot pay. Paternity actions will stress the importance of getting fathers involved earlier in the child's life.

In addition:

- *Grants will be made to States for access and visitation related programs; including mediation (both voluntary and mandatory), counseling, education and enforcement.*
- *States will have the option to use a portion of JOBS program funding for training and work readiness programs for noncustodial parents with children receiving AFDC.*
- *States will have the option to use a portion of WORK program funding for noncustodial parents whose children are receiving AFDC or have arrearages owed to the State for past due child support. States could choose to make participation by non-custodial fathers mandatory or voluntary.*
- *Funding will be made available for Paternity and Parenting Demonstration grants will be made to selected states and/or community based organizations to develop and implement a noncustodial parent (fathers) component for existing program for high risk families (e.g., Healthy Start, Teen Pregnancy and Prevention) to promote responsible parenting, including the importance of paternity establishment and economic security for children and the development of parenting skills.*

Child Support Enforcement Proposal [Title VI]

I. ESTABLISH AWARDS IN EVERY CASE

The first step in ensuring that a child receives financial support from the noncustodial parent is the establishment of a child support award. This is normally done through a legal proceeding to establish paternity or at a legal proceeding at the time of a separation or divorce. States currently receive Federal funding for paternity establishment services provided through the IV-D agency. This proposal expands the scope and improves the effectiveness of current State paternity establishment procedures. States are encouraged to establish paternity for as many children born out-of-wedlock as possible, regardless of the welfare or income status of the mother or father and as soon as possible following the child's birth. This proposal further requires more outreach about paternity establishment to stress that having a child is a two-parent responsibility. Building on the President's recent mandate for in-hospital paternity establishment programs enacted as part of the Omnibus Budget and Reconciliation Act (OBRA) of 1993, it further encourages nonadversarial procedures to establish paternity as soon as possible following the child's birth, streamlines procedures surrounding genetic parentage testing, and requires efforts to remove barriers to interstate paternity establishment.

Paternity Performance and Measurement Standards

Under current law, state performance is only measured against those cases in the IV-D child support system that need paternity established. Children are often several years old or older by the time they enter the IV-D system (normally when the mother applies for welfare). Research shows that the longer the paternity establishment process is delayed, the less likely it is that paternity will ever be established, so it is important to start early, before a mother goes on welfare.

Under the proposal, each State's paternity establishment performance will be measured based not only upon cases within the State's current IV-D child support system, but upon all cases where children are born to an unmarried mother. States will then be encouraged to improve their paternity establishment for all out-of-wedlock births through performance-based incentives. (Current paternity establishment performance standards for IV-D cases will also be maintained.)

- (1) *Each State will be required, as a condition of receipt of Federal funding for the child support enforcement program, to calculate a State paternity establishment percentage based on yearly data that record:*
 - (a) *all out-of-wedlock births in the State for a given year, regardless of the parents' welfare or income status; and*
 - (b) *all paternities established for the out-of-wedlock births in the State during that year.*
- (2) *The Secretary shall prescribe by regulation the acceptable methods for determining the denominator and the numerator of the new paternity establishment performance measure with a preference for actual number counts rather than estimates.*

Financial Incentives for Paternity Establishment

In order to encourage States to increase the number of paternities established, the Federal government will provide performance-based incentive payments to States based on improvements in each State's paternity establishment percentage. The incentive structure will reward the early establishment of paternity so that States have both an incentive to get paternities established as quickly as possible and an incentive to work older cases. (See also State Paternity Cooperation Responsibilities and Standards, p. 11). Finally, current regulations establishing timeframes for establishing paternity will be revised since the administrative procedures required under the proposal will allow cases to be processed more quickly.

- (1) *Federal Financial Participation rate (FFP) will be provided for all paternity establishment services provided by the IV-D agency regardless of whether the mother or father signs a IV-D application.*
- (2) *Performance-based incentives will be made to each State in the form of increased FFP of up to 5 percent. The incentive structure determined by the Secretary will build on the performance measure so that States that excel will be eligible for incentive payments.*
- (3) *At State option, States may experiment with programs that provide financial incentives to parents to establish paternity. The Secretary will additionally authorize up to three demonstration projects whereby Federal Financial Participation is available for financial incentives to parents for establishing paternity.*
- (4) *The Secretary will issue regulations establishing revised timeframes for establishing paternity.*

Streamlining the Paternity Establishment Process

Encouraging Early Establishment of Paternity

Very little outreach is currently conducted about the importance and mechanics of establishing paternity in public health related facilities (e.g. prenatal clinics or WIC clinics), even though these facilities have significant contact with unmarried pregnant women. For example, in 1990, less than 1 percent of all counties reported they conducted outreach about paternity establishment in prenatal clinics. Conducting outreach in these public-health related facilities will not only broaden knowledge about the benefits of establishing paternity in general, but will also enhance the effectiveness of hospital-based programs. By the time the parents of an out-of-wedlock child are offered an opportunity to establish paternity in the hospital, the parent(s) will have already had an opportunity to obtain information about and reflect upon why they should establish paternity for their child.

As part of the effort to encourage the early establishment of paternity, the proposal allows State agencies and mothers to start the paternity establishment process even before the child is born. Since fathers are much more likely to have a continuing relationship with the mother at that time, locating the father and serving him with legal process is much easier. If the father does not acknowledge paternity, a genetic test can then be scheduled immediately after the birth of the child.

Experience has also shown that while a high proportion of fathers are willing to consent to paternity in the hospital, there are some who are unwilling to voluntarily acknowledge paternity outright but

would do so if genetic testing confirmed parentage. The hospital based paternity establishment process can be further streamlined by providing the opportunity for genetic testing right at the hospital. This is an efficient use of resources since hospitals are already fully equipped to obtain samples for these tests and blood tests are already performed on newborns at the hospital for other purposes.

As part of the State's voluntary consent procedures, each State must:

- (1) require, either directly or under contract with health care providers, other health-related facilities (including pre-natal clinics, "well-baby" clinics, in-home public health service visitations, family planning clinics and WIC centers) to inform unwed parents about the benefits of and the opportunities for establishing legal paternity for their children; this effort should be coordinated with the U.S. Public Health Service. WIC program information shall also be available to the IV-D agency in order to provide outreach and services to recipients of that program.*
- (2) require full participation by hospitals and other health-related facilities to cooperate and implement in-hospital paternity establishment programs as a condition of reimbursement of Medicaid.*

As part of a State's civil procedures for establishment of paternity, each State must:

- (1) have statutes allowing the commencement of paternity actions prior to the birth of the child and procedures for ordering genetic tests as soon as the child is born, provided that the putative father has not yet acknowledged paternity;*
- (2) make available procedures within hospitals to provide for taking a blood or other sample at the time of the child's birth, if the parents request the test.*

Simplifying Paternity Establishment

Currently, acknowledgements of paternity must create either a rebuttable or conclusive presumption of paternity. A rebuttable presumption means that even though someone has admitted paternity, they can later come in and offer other evidence to "rebut" their previous acknowledgement. This leaves many cases dangling for years and years. The parents believe in some cases that paternity is established when, in fact, it is not. Under the proposal, rebuttable presumptions "ripen" into conclusive presumptions after one year. A conclusive presumption acts as a judgment so that paternity has, in fact, been officially established. States are allowed some flexibility to tailor due process provisions.

The vast majority of paternity cases can be resolved without a trial once a genetic test is completed. Such tests are highly accurate and will effectively either exclude the alleged father or result in a paternity probability over 99 percent. Virtually all alleged fathers will admit to paternity when faced with genetic test results showing near certainty that he is the father. Currently in most States, however, changes in the legal process have not kept up with the changes in genetic testing technology, resulting in an unnecessary and inefficient reliance on the courts to handle the matters surrounding genetic tests.

Under the proposal, States will no longer have to start a legal proceeding through the courts and have a court hearing simply to have a genetic test ordered. States are also precluded from requiring a court hearing prior to ratification of paternity acknowledgments. These procedures will speed up

what is otherwise unnecessarily a very time consuming and labor intensive process. Another delay in the process occurs if the father fails to show for an ordered blood test. Often the IV-D agency must go back to court to get a default order entered, even though this process could be handled more efficiently on an administrative basis. Under the proposal, the IV-D agency will be given the authority to enter default orders without having to resort to the courts.

The Federal government currently pays 90 percent of the laboratory costs for paternity cases requiring genetic testing and will continue to do so. However, there is currently a great deal of variation at the State and local level regarding whether and under what circumstances the costs of genetic testing are passed on to fathers facing a paternity allegation. The proposal will eliminate the current variation by requiring all States to advance the costs of genetic tests, and then allowing recoupment from the alleged father in cases where he is determined to be the biological father of the child. By advancing the costs of genetic testing, there is no financial disincentive for alleged fathers to evade genetic testing. At the same time, requiring that an alleged father reimburse the state for the cost of genetic tests should he be determined to be the biological father eliminates any incentive for fathers to request genetic tests as a "stalling" technique and promotes voluntary acknowledgment of paternity when appropriate.

In the event that a party disputes a particular test result, the dispute should normally be resolved through further testing. The party should be given the opportunity to have additional tests but also be required to incur the costs of those additional tests. This will help to ensure that the opportunity to request additional testing is used only in cases where there is a legitimate reason to question the original test results and not used as a delaying tactic to avoid establishing paternity.

Currently, research on non-custodial fathers suggests that many fathers who might otherwise be open to the idea of establishing paternity are deterred from doing so because they may then be required to pay large amounts of arrears and/or face delivery-associated medical expenses in addition to ongoing support obligations. For low-income fathers with limited incomes, this poses a special problem. Providing the administrative agency/court the authority to forgive all or part of these costs will reduce disincentives to establish paternity in certain cases.

IV-D agencies currently are not encouraged to bring a paternity action forward on behalf of the putative father, even in cases in which the mother is not cooperating with the State in establishing paternity. In some states, fathers have no standing to bring paternity actions at all. If the primary goal is to establish paternity for as many children born out-of-wedlock as possible, IV-D agencies should be able to assist putative fathers as well as mothers in establishing paternity for a nonmarital child.

Under the OBRA of 1993 amendments, States are required to have expedited processes for paternity establishment in contested cases and each State must give full faith and credit to determinations of paternity made by other States. In order to further streamline the treatment of contested cases, the proposal provides that States can set temporary support in appropriate cases. This discourages defendants in paternity actions from contesting cases in order to simply delay the payment of support. The proposal also abolishes jury trials for paternity cases. Jury trials are a remnant from the time when paternity cases were criminal in nature. Almost two-thirds of the States still allow jury trials. While rarely requested, jury trials delay the resolution of cases and take a heavy toll on personnel resources. With the advent of modern scientific genetic testing, they serve very little purpose, as almost all cases will ultimately be resolved based on the results of the tests. The proposal also eases certain evidentiary rules, allowing cases to be heard without the need for establishing a foundation for evidence that is normally uncontroverted.

As part of a State's civil procedures for establishment of paternity, each State must:

- (1) provide that acknowledgments of paternity create either a rebuttable or conclusive presumption of paternity. If a rebuttable presumption of paternity is created, States must provide that the presumption ripens into a conclusive legal determination with the same effect as a judgment no later than 12 months from the date of signing the acknowledgment. States may, at their option, allow fathers to move to vacate or reopen such judgments at a later date in cases of fraud or if it is in the best interest of the child.*
- (2) provide administrative authority to the IV-D agency to order all parties to submit to genetic testing in all cases where either the mother or putative father requests a genetic test; and submits a sworn statement setting forth facts establishing a reasonable possibility of the requisite sexual contact, without the need for a court hearing prior to such an order. (State option remains as to whether to provide this administrative authority in cases where there is a presumed father under State law);*
- (3) preclude the use of court hearings to ratify paternity acknowledgments;*
- (4) provide administrative authority to the IV-D agency to enter default orders to establish paternity specifically where a party refuses to comply with an order for genetic testing (State law continues to determine the criteria, if any, for opening default orders);*
- (5) advance the costs of genetic tests, subject to recoupment from the putative father (subject to State pauper provisions) if he is determined to be the biological father of the child (Federal funding will continue at 90 percent for laboratory tests for paternity); if the result of the genetic testing is disputed, upon reasonable request of a party, order that additional testing be done by the same laboratory or an independent laboratory at the expense of the party requesting the additional tests;*
- (6) provide discretion to the administrative agency or court setting the amount of support to forgive delivery medical expenses or limit arrears owed to the State (but not the mother) in cases where the father cooperates or acknowledges paternity before or after a genetic test is completed;*
- (7) allow putative fathers (where not presumed to be the father under State law) standing to initiate their own paternity actions;*
- (8) establish and implement laws which mandate, upon motion by a party, a tribunal in contested cases to order temporary support according to the laws of the tribunal's State if:*
 - (a) the results of the parentage testing create a rebuttable presumption of paternity;*
 - (b) the person from whom support is sought has signed a verified statement of parentage; or*
 - (c) there is other clear and convincing evidence that the person from whom support is sought is the particular child's parent;*
- (9) enact laws which abolish the availability of trial by jury for paternity cases; and*

- (10) *have and use laws that provide for the introduction and admission into evidence, without need for third-party foundation testimony, of pre-natal and post-natal birth-related and parentage-testing bills; and each bill shall be regarded as prima facie evidence of the amount incurred on behalf of the child for the procedures included in the bill.*

Paternity Outreach

Paternity establishment is recognized as an important strategy to combat the high incidence of poverty among children born out of wedlock. Yet to date, there has been no cohesive national strategy to educate the public on this issue. As a result, many parents do not understand the benefits of paternity establishment and child support and are unaware of the availability of services. This proposal calls for a broad, comprehensive outreach campaign at the Federal and State level to promote the importance of paternity establishment as a parental responsibility and a right of the children.

A combined outreach and education strategy will build on the Administration's paternity establishment initiative included in last year's budget law, OBRA of 1993, by underscoring the importance of paternity establishment for children born outside of marriage and the message that child support is a two-parent responsibility. States will be asked to expand their point of contact with unwed parents in order to provide maximum opportunity for paternity establishment and to promote the norm that paternity establishment is doing the right thing for their children.

Under the proposal:

- (1) *the Department of Health and Human Services, including the Public Health Service, and in cooperation with the Department of Education, will take the lead in developing a comprehensive media campaign designed to reinforce both the importance of paternity establishment and the message that child support is a "two parent" responsibility;*
- (2) *States will be required to implement outreach programs promoting voluntary acknowledgment of paternity through a variety of means, such as the distribution of written materials at schools, hospitals, and other agencies. These efforts should be coordinated with the U.S. Department of Education. States are also encouraged to establish pre-natal programs for expectant couples, either married or unmarried, to educate parents on their joint rights and responsibilities in paternity. At State option, such programs could be required of all expectant welfare recipients;*
- (3) *States will be required to make reasonable efforts to follow up with individuals who do not establish paternity in the hospital, providing them information on the benefits and procedures for establishing paternity. The materials and the process for which the information is disseminated is left to the discretion of the States, but States must have a plan for this outreach, which includes at least one post-hospital contact with each parent whose whereabouts are known (unless the State has reason to believe that such contact puts the child or mother at risk);*
- (4) *all parents who establish paternity, but who are not required to assign their child support rights to the State due to receipt of AFDC, must, at a minimum, be provided subsequently with information on the benefits and procedures for establishing a child support order and an application for child support services; and*

- (5) *upon approval of the Secretary, Federal funding will be provided at an increased matching rate of 90 percent for paternity outreach programs.*

Improving Cooperation among AFDC Mothers in the Establishment of Paternity

Cooperation Standards and Good Cause Exceptions

Currently, cooperating with the IV-D agency in establishing paternity is a condition of eligibility for AFDC and Medicaid recipients. Cooperation is defined as appearance for appointments (including blood tests), appearance for judicial or administrative proceedings, or provision of complete and accurate information. The last standard is so vague that "true" cooperation is often difficult to determine. Research suggests that a greater percentage of mothers know the identity and whereabouts of the father of their child than is reported to the IV-D agency. Better and more aggressive procedures can yield a much higher rate of success in eliciting information about the father from the mother than is currently achieved.

The proposal contains several provisions aimed at significantly increasing cooperation among AFDC mothers while at the same time not penalizing those who have fully cooperated with the IV-D agency but for whom paternity for their child is not established due to circumstances beyond their control. Increased cooperation will result in higher rates of paternity establishment.

Under the proposal:

- (1) *the new cooperation standards described herein will apply to all applications for AFDC or appropriate Medicaid cases for women with children born on or after 10 months following the date of enactment;*
- (2) *the initial cooperation requirement is met only when the mother has provided the State the following information:*
 - (a) *the name of the father; and*
 - (b) *sufficient information to verify the identity of the person named (such as the present address of the person, the past or present place of employment of the person, the past or present school attended by the person, the name and address of the person's parents, friends or relatives that can provide location information for the person, the telephone number of the person, the date of birth of the person, or other information that, if reasonable efforts were made by the State, could lead to identify a particular person to be served with process);*
 - (c) *if there is more than one possible father, the mother must provide the names of all possible fathers;*
- (3) *the continued cooperation requirement is met when the mother provides the State the following information:*
 - (a) *additional reasonable, relevant information which the mother can reasonably provide, requested by the State at any point;*

- (b) *appearance at required interviews, conference hearings or legal proceedings, if notified in advance and an illness or emergency does not prevent attendance; or*
- (c) *appearance (along with the child) to submit to genetic tests;*
- (4) *good cause exceptions will be granted for non-cooperation on an individual case basis only if recipients meet the existing good cause exceptions for the AFDC program.*
- (5) *State IV-D workers must inform each applicant orally and in writing of the good cause exceptions available under current law and help the mother determine if she meets the definition. (Current exemptions for Medicaid eligibility for pregnant women are also maintained.)*

Cooperation Prior to Receipt of Benefits

Currently, many local IV-D agencies do not conduct intake interviews at all but rather rely on information (e.g., identity and location of the father) obtained by the IV-A agency. Those IV-D agencies that conduct intake interviews do not schedule them until after the mother has already applied for and been determined eligible to receive AFDC benefits. This practice reduces the incentive of AFDC mothers to cooperate with the IV-D agency in providing complete and accurate information about the father of their child because questions regarding cooperation do not arise until after eligibility for AFDC has been approved and the family is receiving benefits.

The proposal will increase the incidence of paternity establishment by making receipt of benefits conditional upon fulfilling the cooperation requirement; IV-D agencies will have to determine whether the cooperation requirement has been met prior to the receipt of benefits. States will be encouraged, but not required, to facilitate this change in procedure by either co-locating IV-A agencies and IV-D agencies or conducting a single IV-A/IV-D screening or intake interview. AFDC applicants who fail to fulfill the new cooperation requirement will be sanctioned.

- (1) *Applicants must cooperate in establishing paternity prior to receipt of benefits:*
 - (a) *using the new cooperation standards, an initial determination of cooperation must be made by the state IV-D agency within 10 days of application for AFDC and/or Medicaid;*
 - (b) *if the cooperation determination is not made within the specified timeframe, the applicant could not be denied eligibility for the above benefits based on noncooperation pending the determination;*
 - (c) *once an initial determination of cooperation is made, the IV-D agency must inform the mother and the relevant programs of its determination;*
 - (d) *individuals qualifying for emergency assistance or expedited processing could begin receiving benefits before a determination is made.*

- (2) *Failure to cooperate with the IV-D agency will result in an immediate sanction:*
- (a) *sanctions will be based on current law. States are required to inform all sanctioned individuals of their right to appeal the determination.*
 - (b) *if a determination is made that the custodial parent has met the initial cooperation requirement and the IV-D agency later has reason to believe that the information is incorrect or insufficient, the agency must:*
 - (i) *try to obtain additional information; and if that fails*
 - (ii) *schedule a fair hearing to determine if the parent is fully cooperating before imposing a sanction;*
 - (c) *if a mother fails to cooperate and is determined ineligible for benefits, but subsequently chooses to cooperate and takes appropriate action, Federal and State benefits will be immediately reinstated.*
 - (d) *if the determination results in a finding of noncooperation and the applicant appeals, the applicant could not be denied benefits based on noncooperation pending the outcome of the appeal. States can set up appeal procedures through the existing IV-A appeals process or through a IV-D appeals process.*
- (3) *States are encouraged to either co-locate IV-A and IV-D offices, provide a single interview for IV-A and IV-D purposes, or conduct a single screening process.*

State Paternity Cooperation Responsibilities and Standards

States will be held to new standards of responsibility for determining cooperation and ensuring that information regarding paternity is acted upon in a timely fashion. Under the proposal, if the mother meets this stricter cooperation requirement and provides full information, the burden shifts to the state to determine paternity within one year from the date the mother met the initial cooperation date. This is a shorter time period than what was required by regulation under the Family Support Act of 1988 and under the proposed OBRA of 1993 regulations.

If the state fails to establish paternity within the new specified one-year timeframe, it will lose Federal FFP for those cases. This FFP penalty does not exist under current law, and provides a significant incentive for states to work their incoming paternity cases in a timely fashion. A tolerance level is allowed for cases where paternity cannot be established despite the State's best efforts. Other paternity standards under existing law will be maintained to encourage States to continue to work all new and old IV-D cases.

For all cases subject to the new cooperation requirements:

- (1) *State IV-D agencies must either establish paternity if at all possible or impose a sanction in every case within one year from the date that the initial cooperation requirement is met; or*

- (2) *If the mother has met the cooperation requirements and the State has failed to establish paternity within the one year time limit, the State will not be eligible for FFP of the AFDC grant for those cases. (The Secretary will establish by regulation a method for keeping track of those cases. The FFP penalty will be based on an average monthly grant for cases where paternity is not established rather than by tracking individual cases.) The Secretary shall prescribe by regulation a tolerance level, for which there will be no penalty, for cases where paternity cannot be established despite the best efforts of the State. The tolerance level shall not exceed a percentage of the State's mandatory cases that need paternity established in any given year (25 percent in years 1 and 2, 20 percent in years 3 and 4, 15 percent in years 5 and 6, and 10 percent thereafter).*

Accreditation of Genetic Testing Laboratories

In 1976 a joint committee of the American Bar Association (ABA) and the American Medical Association (AMA) established guidelines for paternity testing. In the early 1980's, the Parentage Testing Committee of the American Association of Blood Banks (AABB), under a grant from the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, developed standards for parentage testing laboratories. These standards served as a foundation for an inspection and accreditation program for parentage testing laboratories. In addition, the Parentage Testing Committee developed a checklist for inspectors to use in determining if laboratories are in conformance with the standards required for AABB accreditation. These standards are subject to future revision as the state-of-the-art and experience dictate.

Using accredited laboratories ensures that laboratories do not take shortcuts, employ unqualified personnel, fail to perform duplicate testing or otherwise compromise quality control. Thirty-six of the fifty-four IV-D Child Support Enforcement agencies currently use solely AABB accredited laboratories for paternity testing. Under the proposal, the Secretary will authorize an organization such as the AABB or a U.S. agency to accredit laboratories conducting genetic testing and States will be required to use only accredited laboratories.

State law often fails to keep pace with scientific advances in genetic testing. For instance, while DNA testing for paternity cases is widely accepted in the scientific community, some state laws remain from a time prior to DNA testing. Such state laws may refer only to "HLA" or "blood" testing, so state agencies are unable to contract with laboratories using more modern techniques. Under the proposal, States must amend their laws to accept all accredited test results with the type of tests to be determined by the authorized organization or agency based upon what testing is widely accepted in the scientific community.

- (1) *The Secretary will authorize an organization or U.S. agency to accredit laboratories conducting genetic testing and the procedures and methods to be used; and*
- (2) *States are required to use accredited labs for all genetic testing and to accept all accredited test results.*

Administrative Authority to Establish Orders Based on Guidelines

Establishing paternity alone does not establish an obligation to pay support. An obligation to pay support is only created when the proper authority issues an order that support be paid (i.e., an "award" of support). Sometimes this is done when paternity is established and sometimes not—there are many state variations. States also vary in how they establish an award when someone enters the IV-D system in non-paternity cases. A few States provide administrative authority to establish child support orders. Many States require that a separate court action be brought.

Establishing support awards is critical to ensuring that children receive the support they deserve. Under the proposal, all IV-D agencies will have the authority to issue the child support award. This will vastly simplify and speed-up the process of getting an award in place. Adequate protections are provided to ensure that award levels are fair; the IV-D agency must base the award level on state guidelines and States are provided the flexibility to set up procedural due process protections. These administrative procedures apply to paternity and IV-D cases only. Legal separations and divorces may still be handled through the court process.

States can be exempted from this requirement if they can establish orders as effectively and efficiently through alternative procedures.

- (1) States must have and use simple administrative procedures in IV-D cases to establish support orders so that the IV-D agency can impose an order for support (based upon State guidelines) in cases where:*
 - (a) the custodial parent has assigned his or her right of support to the state;*
 - (b) the parent has not assigned his or her right of support to the State but has established paternity through an acknowledgment or State administrative procedure; or*
 - (c) in cases of separation where a parent has applied for IV-D services and there is not a court proceeding pending for a legal separation or divorce. At State option, States may extend such authority to all cases of separation and divorce, but they are not required to do so.*
- (2) In all cases appropriate notice and due process as determined by the State must be followed.*
- (3) Existing provisions for exempting States under section 466(d) of the Social Security Act are preserved.*

II. ENSURE FAIR AWARD LEVELS

National Commission on Child Support Guidelines

States are currently required to use presumptive guidelines in setting and modifying all support awards but have wide discretion in their development. While the use of state-based guidelines has led to more uniform treatment of similarly-situated parties within a state, there is still much debate concerning the adequacy of support awards resulting from guidelines. This is due to inadequate information on the costs of raising a child by two parents in two separate households and because disagreements abound over what costs (medical care, child care, non-minor and/or multiple family support) should be included in guidelines. The issue is further compounded by charges that individual State guidelines result in disparate treatment between States and encourage forum shopping.

To resolve these issues and ensure that guidelines truly provide an equitable and adequate level of support in all cases, the proposal creates a national commission to study and make recommendations on the desirability of uniform national guidelines or national parameters for setting guidelines.

- (1) *A twelve-member National Commission on Child Support Guidelines will be established no later than March 1, 1995, for the purpose of studying the desirability of a uniform, national child support guideline or national parameters for State guidelines.*
- (2) *The Chairman of the Senate Committee on Finance and the Chairman of the House Committee on Ways and Means shall appoint two members each, the Ranking Minority Members of such Committee shall appoint one member each, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services shall appoint six members. Appointments to the Commission must include a State IV-D Director and members or representatives of both custodial and non-custodial parent groups.*
- (3) *The Commission shall prepare a report not later than two years after the date of appointment to be submitted to Congress. The Commission terminates six months after submission of the report.*
- (4) *If the Commission determines that a uniform guideline should be adopted, the Commission shall recommend to Congress a guideline which it considers most equitable, taking into account studies of various guideline models, their deficiencies, and any needed improvements. The Commission shall also consider the need for simplicity and ease of application of guidelines as a critical objective.*

In addition, the Commission should study the following:

- (1) *the adequacy of existing state guidelines*
- (2) *the treatment of multiple families in State guidelines including:*
 - (a) *whether a remarried parent's spouse's income affects a support obligation;*
 - (b) *the impact of step and half-siblings on support obligations; and*

- (c) *the costs of multiple and subsequent family child raising obligations, other than those children for whom the action was brought;*
- (3) *the treatment of child care expenses in guidelines including whether guidelines should take into account:*
 - (a) *current or projected work related or job training related child care expenses of either parent for the care of children of either parent; and*
 - (b) *health insurance, related uninsured health care expenses, and extraordinary school expenses incurred on behalf of the child for whom the order is sought;*
- (4) *the duration of support by one or both parents, including the sharing of post-secondary or vocational institution costs; the duration of support of a disabled child including children who are unable to support themselves due to a disability that arose during the child's minority;*
- (5) *the adoption of uniform terms in all child support orders to facilitate the enforcement of orders by other States;*
- (6) *the definition of income and whether and under what circumstances income should be imputed;*
- (7) *the effect of extended visitation, shared custody and joint custody decisions on guideline levels; and*
- (8) *the tax aspects of child support payments.*

Modifications of Child Support Orders

Inadequate child support awards are a major factor contributing to the gap between the amount of child support currently collected versus the amount that could potentially be collected. When child support awards are determined initially, the award is set using current guidelines which take into account the income of the noncustodial parent (and usually the custodial parent as well). Although the circumstances of both parents' (including their income) and the child change over time, awards often remain at their original level. In order to rectify this situation, child support awards need to be updated periodically so that the amount of support provided reflects current circumstances. Recent research indicates that an additional \$7.1 billion dollars per year could be collected if all awards were updated (based upon the Wisconsin guidelines).

The Family Support Act of 1988 responded to the problem of inadequate awards by requiring States to review and modify all AFDC cases once every three years, and every non-AFDC IV-D case every three years for which a parent requests a review. Although a good start, there are several shortcomings with current policy.

First, requiring the non-AFDC custodial parent, usually the mother, to initiate review places a heavy burden on the mother to raise what is often a controversial and adversarial issue. Research indicates that a significant proportion of mothers would rather not "rock the boat" by initiating a review, even though it could result in a higher amount of child support. In order to eliminate this burden on the non-AFDC custodial parent and this inequitable treatment of AFDC and non-AFDC cases, child

support awards of non-AFDC children should be subject to automatic review and updating just as current law now provides for AFDC children.

Second, current review and modification procedures are extremely labor intensive, time-consuming, and cumbersome to implement. This problem is particularly pronounced in, although not limited to, States with court-based systems. Improvements in automated systems will help diminish some of the time delays and tracking problems currently associated with review and modification efforts. However, a simplified administrative process for updating awards is also needed for States to handle the volume of cases involved in a more efficient and speedier manner.

- (1) *States shall have and use laws that require the review of all child support orders included in the State Central Registry once every three years. The review may consist of an exchange of financial information through the State Central Registry. The State shall provide that a change in the support amount resulting from the application of guidelines since the entry of the last order is sufficient reason for modification of a child support obligation without the necessity of showing any other change in circumstances. (States may, at their option, establish a threshold amount not to exceed 10 percent since entry of the last order.) States shall adjust each order in accordance with the guidelines unless both parents decline the adjustment in a writing filed with the State Central Registry.*
- (2) *States may set a minimum timeframe that runs from the date of the last adjustment that bars a subsequent review before a certain period of time elapses, absent other changed circumstances. Individuals may request modifications more often than once every three years if either parent's income changes by more than 20 percent.*
- (3) *States are not precluded from conducting the process at the local or county level. Telephonic hearings and video conferencing are encouraged.*
- (4) *To ensure that all reviews can be conducted within the specified timeframe, States must have and use laws which:*
 - (a) *provide the child support agency through the State Central Registry administrative power to modify all child support orders and medical support orders, including those orders entered by a court (unless the State is exempted under section 466(d) of the Social Security Act);*
 - (b) *provide full faith and credit for all valid orders of support modified through an administrative process;*
 - (c) *require the child support agency to automate the review and modification process to the extent possible;*
 - (d) *ensure that interstate modification cases follow UIFSA and any amending Federal jurisdictional legislation for determining which state has jurisdiction to modify an order;*
 - (e) *ensure that downward modifications as well as upward modifications must be made in all cases if a review indicates a modification is warranted;*

- (f) *simplify notice and due process procedures for modifications in order to expedite the processing of modifications (Federal statutory changes also);*
 - (g) *provide administrative subpoena power for all relevant income information; and*
 - (h) *provide default standards for non-responding parents.*
- (5) *The Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Secretary of the Treasury shall conduct a study to determine if IRS income data can be used to facilitate the modification process.*

Distribution of Child Support Payments

Priority of Child Support Distribution

Families are often not given first priority under current child support distribution policies. The proposal will make such policies more responsive to the needs of families by reordering child support distribution priorities, giving States the option to pay current child support directly to families who are recipients and reordering Federal income tax offset priorities.

When a family applies for AFDC, an assignment of support rights is made to the State by the custodial parent. Child support paid (above the first \$50 of current support) is retained by the State to reimburse itself and the Federal government for AFDC benefits expended on behalf of that family. When someone goes off public assistance, payments for support obligations above payment of current support (i.e., arrearages) may be made to satisfy amounts owed the State and the family. States currently have discretion to either pay these child support arrearages first to the former AFDC family or to use such arrearage payments to recover for past unreimbursed AFDC assistance. Only about 19 States have chosen to pay the family arrearages first for missed payments after the family stops receiving AFDC benefits.

The proposed change will require all States to pay arrearages due to the family before reimbursing any unreimbursed public assistance owed to the State. Such a change will strengthen a families post-AFDC self-sufficiency. Families often remain economically vulnerable for a substantial amount of time after leaving AFDC; about 40 percent of those who leave return within a year and another 60 percent return within two years. Ensuring that all support due to the family during this critical transition period is paid to the family can mean the difference between self-sufficiency or a return to welfare.

States that have already voluntarily implemented this policy believe that such a policy is more fair to the custodial family who now depends on payment of support to help meet its living expenses. States have also found it difficult to explain to custodial and non-custodial parents why support paid when a family has left welfare should go to reimburse the state arrearages first before arrearages owed the family are paid. If child support is about ensuring the well-being of children, then the children's economic needs should be taken care of before state debt repayment.

Public policy also ought to promote the establishment of two-parent families. Having two parents living together within marriage provides children with more emotional and financial support than having two parents living apart. Under current law, child support arrears are not dischargeable even if the parents marry or reconcile. In these circumstances, the family must pay back itself, or the

State, if the family was on AFDC. For families with no AFDC arrearages, such payments are illogical and inefficient; a check must be written by the family, sent to the IV-D agency, credited against the arrearage amount, and re-issued by the state back to the family. For families with AFDC arrearages, such payments are not re-issued to the family, but are be used to reduce the State and Federal debt. This can make low income families even poorer. Under the proposal, families who unite or reunite in marriage can have their arrearages suspended or forgiven if the family income is less than twice the Federal poverty guideline. Protections will be included to ensure that marriage (or remarriage) is not undertaken for the sole purpose of eliminating child support arrearages.

- (1) *States shall distribute payments of all child support collected in cases in which the obligee is not receiving AFDC, including moneys collected through a tax refund offset, in the following priority:*
 - (a) *to a current month's child support obligation;*
 - (b) *to debts owed the family (non-AFDC obligations); if any rights to child support were assigned to the State, then all arrearages that accrued after or before the child received AFDC shall be distributed to the family;*
 - (c) *subject to (2), to the State making the collection for any AFDC debts incurred under the assignment of rights provision of Title IV-A of the Social Security Act;*
 - (d) *subject to (2), to other States for AFDC debts (in the order in which they accrued); the collecting State must continue to enforce the order until all such debts are satisfied and to transmit the collections and identifying information to the other State;*
- (2) *If the noncustodial and custodial parents unite or reunite in a legitimate marriage (not a sham marriage), the State must suspend or forgive collection of arrearages owed to the State if the reunited family's joint income is less than twice the Federal poverty guideline.*
- (3) *The Secretary shall promulgate regulations that provide for a uniform method of allocation/proration of child support when the obligor owes support to more than one family. All States must use the standard allocation formula.*
- (4) *Assignment of support provisions shall be consistent with (1) above.*

Treatment of Child Support for AFDC Families - State Option

With the exception of the \$50 pass-through, states may not pay current child support directly to families who are AFDC recipients. Instead child support payments are paid to the State and are used to reimburse the State for AFDC benefit payments. Many States have found that both AFDC recipients and noncustodial parents misunderstand and resent child support being used for state debt collection. Under waiver authority, Georgia has undertaken a demonstration to pay child support directly to the AFDC family and a number of other States have expressed interest in this approach. The proposal will allow states the option to pay child support directly to the AFDC family, thereby allowing States to choose the distribution policy that will work best in their state. The AFDC benefit amount is reduced in accordance with state policy to account for the additional family income. This

policy change makes child support part of a family's primary income and places AFDC income as a secondary source of support.

- (1) *At State option, States may provide that all current child support payments made on behalf of any family receiving AFDC must be paid directly to the family (counting the child support payments as income).*
- (2) *The Secretary shall promulgate regulations to ensure that States choosing this option have available an AFDC budgeting system that minimizes irregular monthly payments to recipients.*

III. COLLECT AWARDS THAT ARE OWED

Overview

Currently, enforcement of support cases is too often handled on a complaint-driven basis with the IV-D agency only taking enforcement action when the custodial parent pressures the agency to take action. Many enforcement steps require court intervention, even when the case is a routine one, and even routine enforcement measures often require individual case processing rather than relying upon automation and mass case processing.

Under the proposal, all States will maintain a central state registry and centralized collection and disbursement capability through a central payment center. State staff will monitor support payments to ensure that the support is being paid and will be able to impose certain administrative enforcement remedies at the State level. Thus, routine enforcement actions that can be handled on a mass or group basis will be imposed through the central State office using computers and automation. States may, at their option, use local offices for cases that require local enforcement actions. State staff thus will supplement, but not necessarily replace, local staff.

The Federal role will be expanded to ensure efficient location and enforcement, particularly in interstate cases. In order to coordinate activity at the Federal level, a National Child Support Enforcement Clearinghouse (NC) will be established to help track parents across state lines. The National Clearinghouse includes a national child support registry, the expanded FPLS and a national directory of new hires. The National Clearinghouse will serve as the hub for transmitting information between States, employers, and Federal and State data bases. Interstate processing of cases will be made easier through the adoption of uniform laws for handling these types of cases.

The proposal includes a number of child support enforcement tools--tools that have been proven effective in the best performing States. Finally, changes in the funding and incentive structure of the IV-D program and changes designed to improve program management and accountability are proposed.

STATE ROLE

Central State Registry

Currently, child support orders and records are often scattered through various branches and levels of government. This fragmentation makes it impossible to enforce orders on an efficient and organized basis. Also, the ability to maintain accurate records that can be centrally accessed is critical. Under the proposal, States will be required to establish a Central State Registry for all child support orders established or registered in that State. The registry will maintain current records of all the support orders and work in coordination with the Central Payment Center for the collection and distribution of child support payments. This will vastly simplify withholding for employers. The creation of central state registries was one of the major recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Interstate Child Support and is a concept supported by virtually all child support professionals and advocacy groups.

- (1) *As a condition of receipt of Federal funding for the child support enforcement program, each State must establish an automated central state registry of child support orders.*
- (2) *The registry must maintain a current record of the following:*
 - (a) *all present IV-D orders established, modified or enforced in the State;*
 - (b) *all new and modified orders of child support (IV-D and non-IV-D) established by or under the jurisdiction of the State, after the effective date of this provision; and*
 - (c) *at either parent's request, existing child support cases not included in the IV-D system on the effective date of the registry.*
- (3) *The State, in operating the child support registry, must:*
 - (a) *maintain and update the registry at all times;*
 - (b) *meet specified timeframes for submission of local court or administrative orders to the registry, as determined by the Secretary;*
 - (c) *receive out-of-state orders to be registered for enforcement and/or modification;*
 - (d) *record the amount of support ordered and the record of payment for each case that is collected and disbursed through the central payment center;*
 - (e) *conform to a standardized support abstract format, as determined by the Secretary, for the extraction of case information to the National Registry and for matches against other data bases on a regular basis;*
 - (f) *program the statewide automated system to extract updates automatically of all case records included in the registry;*
 - (g) *provide a central point of access to the Federal new-hire reporting directory and other Federal data bases, statewide data bases, and interstate case activity;*
 - (h) *routinely match against other State data bases to which the child support agency has access;*
 - (i) *use a uniform identification number, preferably the Social Security Number, for all individuals or cases as determined by the Secretary;*
 - (j) *maintain procedures to ensure that new arrearages do not accrue after the child for whom support is ordered is no longer eligible for support or the order becomes invalid (e.g., triggering notices to parents if order does not terminate by its own terms or by operation of law);*

- (k) *use technology and automated procedures in operating the registry wherever feasible and cost-effective;*
- (l) *ensure that the interest or late payment fees charged can be automatically calculated;*
- (m) *ensure that the registry has access to vital statistics or other information necessary to determine the new paternity performance measure. (If automated elsewhere, access to these other data bases should be automated as well); and*
- (n) *ensure that the system is capable of producing a payment history as determined by the Secretary.*

Option for Integrated State Registry

- (4) *States may, at their option, maintain a unified, integrated registry by connecting local registries through computer linkage. (Local registries must be able to be integrated at a cost which does not exceed the cost of a new single central registry.) Under this option, however, the State and State staff must still perform all of the activities described herein for central registries and must maintain a State Central Payment Center for collection and disbursement of payments.*

Automated Mass Case Processing and Administrative Enforcement Remedies

In most States, routine enforcement actions, which are necessary in thousands or tens of thousands of cases, are still handled on an individual case basis. Often these actions require court involvement in each individual case or, at the very least, initiation of the routine action at the local level. Such a process by its nature is slow and cumbersome, causing many cases to simply never receive the attention they deserve. A few States, such as Massachusetts, are handling routine enforcement actions by using mass case processing techniques and imposing administrative enforcement remedies through centralized case handling. Computer systems routinely match child support files of delinquent obligors against other data bases, such as wage reporting data and bank account data, and when a match is found can take enforcement action automatically without human intervention. The system automatically notifies the obligors of the actions being taken and offers an appeal process. The vast majority of obligors do not appeal, so the case proceeds routinely and the support is obtained and sent to the families due support.

The use of such mass case processing techniques and administrative remedies has significantly reduced the number of cases where the IV-D agency has to resort to contempt or other judicial measures. This also frees up staff to work paternity cases or other more labor intensive enforcement measures. The proposal requires all States to develop the capacity to handle cases using mass case processing and the administrative enforcement remedies.

- (1) *As a condition of State plan approval, the State must have sufficient State staff, State authority and automated procedures to monitor cases and impose those enforcement measures that can be handled on a mass or group basis using computer automation technology. "State staff" are staff that are employed by and directly accountable to the State IV-D agency (private contractors are allowed). (Where States have local staff,*

this supplements, but does not necessarily replace, local staff. Therefore, local staff are still provided where necessary.)

Specifically the State shall:

- (2) monitor all cases within the registry on a regular basis, determining on at least a monthly basis whether the child support payment has been made;*
- (3) maintain automation capability whereby a disruption in payments triggers automatic enforcement mechanisms;*
- (4) administratively impose the following enforcement measures without need for a separate court order:*
 - (a) order wages to be withheld automatically for the purposes of satisfying child support obligations, and direct wage withholding orders to employers immediately upon notification by the national directory of new hires;*
 - (b) attach financial institution accounts (post-judgment seizures) without the need for a separate court order for the attachment; (States can, at their option, freeze accounts and if no challenge to the freeze of funds is made, turn over the part of the account subject to the freeze up to the amount of the child support debt to the person or State seeking the execution);*
 - (c) intercept certain lump-sum monies such as lottery winnings and settlements to be turned over to the State to satisfy pending arrearages;*
 - (d) attach public and private retirement funds in appropriate cases, as determined by the Secretary;*
 - (e) attach unemployment compensation, workman's compensation and other State benefits;*
 - (f) increase payments to cover arrearages;*
 - (g) intercept State tax refunds; and*
 - (h) submit cases for Federal tax offset.*
- (5) In all cases, appropriate notice and due process as determined by the State must be followed but State laws and procedures must recognize that child support arrears are currently treated as judgments by operation of law and reducing amounts to money judgments is not a prerequisite to any enforcement.*

Centralized Collection and Disbursement Through a State Central Payment Center

Under current law, payments of support by noncustodial parents or by employers on behalf of noncustodial parents are made to a wide variety of different agencies, institutions and individuals. As wage withholding becomes a requirement for a larger and larger segment of the noncustodial population, the need for one, central location to collect and disburse payments in a timely manner has

grown. States vary regarding how the child support payments are routed. In some States, locally distributed child support payments stay at the local level, with the remainder going to the State for distribution. In other States, all the money is transmitted to the state and is then distributed to either the family or to the governmental entity receiving AFDC reimbursement. A few States are beginning to collect and distribute child support payments at the State level.

Collection and distribution practices vary in non-IV-D cases as well. Some States route the money through local clerks or courts. In other States the non-IV-D child support payments flow entirely outside of government, from the obligor or his or her employer directly to the custodial parent.

Under the proposal, payments made in all cases entered in the central registry are processed through a Central Payment Center, run by the State government as part of the Central Registry or contracted to a private vendor. (Parents may opt out of payment through the State Central Payment Center under certain conditions; see p. 29 for further detail.) This eases the burden on employers by allowing them to send withholdings to one location within the state instead of to several county clerks or agencies. In addition, distribution and disbursement is accomplished based on economies of scale, allowing for the purchase of more sophisticated processing equipment than many counties could individually purchase, ensuring speedy disbursement and central accountability in intercounty cases. State governments will be able to credit their AFDC reimbursement accounts quickly and parents who opt for direct deposit could have their share of the support almost immediately deposited.

- (1) *Through a fully automated process, the State Central Payment Center must:*
 - (a) *serve as the State payment center for all employers remitting child support withheld from wages; and*
 - (b) *serve as the State payment center for all non-wage withholding payments through the use of payment coupons or stubs or electronic means, unless the parties meet specified opt-out requirements. States, at their option, may allow cash payments at local offices or financial institutions only if the payments are remitted to the State Central Payment Center for payment processing by electronic funds transfer within 24 hours of receipt.*
- (2) *In fulfilling these obligations, the State Central Payment Center must:*
 - (a) *accept all payments through any means of transfer determined acceptable by the State including the use of credit card payments and Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) systems;*
 - (b) *generate bills which provide for accurate payment identification, such as return stubs or coupons, for cases not covered under wage withholding;*
 - (c) *identify all payments made to the State Central Payment Center and match the payment to the correct child support case record;*
 - (d) *disburse all collections in accordance with priorities as set forth under the proposal;*

- (e) *disburse the child support payments to the custodial parents through a transmission process acceptable to the State, including direct deposit if the custodial parent requests;*
 - (f) *provide that each child support payment made by the noncustodial parent is processed and sent to the custodial parent promptly at the time it is received (exceptions by regulation for unidentified payments);*
 - (g) *maintain records of transactions and the status of all accounts including arrears, and monitor all payments of support;*
 - (h) *develop automatic monitoring procedures for all cases where a disruption in payments triggers automatic enforcement mechanisms;*
 - (i) *accept and transmit interstate collections to other States using electronic funds transfer (EFT) technology; and*
- (3) *In order to facilitate the quick processing and disbursement of payments to custodial parents, States are encouraged to use Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) systems wherever possible.*
 - (4) *States must also be able to provide parents up-to-date information on current payment records, arrearages, and general information on child support services available. Use of automated Voice Response Units (VRU) to respond to client needs and questions, the use of high-speed check-processing equipment, the use of high-performance, fully-automated mail and postal procedures and fully automated billing and statement processing are encouraged; the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) will facilitate private businesses in providing such technical assistance to the States.*
 - (5) *States may form regional cooperative agreements to provide the collection and disbursement function for two or more States through one "drop box" location with computer linkage to the individual State registries.*
 - (6) *States must enact procedures providing that in child support cases, a change in payee may not require a court hearing or order to take effect and may be done administratively, with notice to both parties.*

Eligibility for IV-D Enforcement Services

Under the existing system, child support services are provided automatically to recipients of AFDC, Medicaid and, in some cases, Foster Care Assistance. Other single parent families, however, must seek services on their own by making a written application to the IV-D agency. Further, they must pay an application fee unless the State elects to pay the fee for them. Women may be intimidated from initiating a request for services and many States view the written application requirement as an unnecessary bureaucratic step.

To foster an environment where routine payment of child support is inescapable without placing the burden on the custodial parent to take action, all cases included in the central registry (that is, all families with new and modified orders for support, all families currently receiving IV-D services and any other family desiring inclusion in the registry) will receive child support enforcement services

automatically, without the need for application. However, in situations where compliance with the order is not an issue, parents can opt to be excluded from payment through the central payment center. This essentially carries forward the flexibility provided under existing immediate wage withholding requirements.

- (1) *All cases included in the State's central registry shall receive child support services without regard to whether the parent signs an application for services. Current child support cases not covered through the IV-D system at the time of enactment could also request services through the State child support agency.*
- (2) *Under no circumstances may a State deny any person access to State child support services based solely on the person's nonresidency in that State or require the payment of any fees by a parent for inclusion in the central registry.*
- (3) *No fees or costs may be imposed on any custodial or noncustodial parent or other individual for application for IV-D child support services; no fees or costs may be imposed on any custodial parent for any child support enforcement services, including collections, provided by the IV-D child support agency. (Non-custodial parents may be charged fees or costs except where prohibited herein.)*

Opportunity to Opt-Out

- (3) *Parents with child support orders included in the central registry can choose to opt-out of payment through the central payment center if they are not otherwise subject to a wage withholding order (current provisions for exceptions to wage withholding are preserved).*
- (4) *Parents who opt-out must file a separate written form with the agency signed by both parties, indicating that both individuals agree with the arrangement.*
- (5) *If the parents choose to opt-out of wage withholding and payment through the central payment center, the noncustodial parent fails to pay support, and the custodial parent notifies the agency for enforcement action, compliance will be monitored by the State thereafter.*

FEDERAL ROLE

National Clearinghouse (NC)

The National Clearinghouse will consist of four components, three of which have direct bearing on improving child support enforcement: the National Child Support Registry, the expanded FPLS, and the National Directory of New Hires. (The National Transitional Assistance Registry is not discussed in this section.) The National Clearinghouse shall operate under the direction of the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

National Child Support Registry

The Family Support Act of 1988 mandated the implementation and operation of a comprehensive, statewide, automated child support enforcement system in every State by October 1, 1995. Statewide automation will help correct some of the deficiencies associated with organizational fragmentation as well as alleviate another problem - ineffective case management. For interstate case processing, the Child Support Enforcement Network (CSENet), currently being implemented, is designed to link together statewide, automated systems for the purpose of exchanging interstate case data among States. While all States will eventually be linked through CSENet, no national directory or registry of all child support cases currently exists. A national registry in combination with statewide automated systems has the potential to greatly improve enforcement nationally, through improved locate and wage withholding, and to also improve interstate case processing.

Under the proposal, a National Child Support Registry will be operated by the Federal government to maintain an up-to-date record of all child support cases and to match these cases against other databases for location and enforcement purposes. The primary function of the Registry is to expedite matches with other major databases.

- (1) The Federal government will establish a National Child Support Registry that maintains a current record of all child support cases based on an extract of information from each State's Central Registry. The National Registry will:*
 - (a) contain minimal information on every child support case from each State: the name and Social Security Number of the noncustodial parent (or putative father) and the case identification number;*
 - (b) interface with State Central Registries for the automatic transmission of case updates;*
 - (c) match the data against other Federal data bases;*
 - (d) point all matches back to the relevant State in a timely manner; and*
 - (e) interface and match with National Directory of New Hires.*
- (2) The Secretary shall determine the networking system, after considering the feasibility and cost, which may be any of the following:*
 - (a) building upon the existing CSENet interstate network system;*
 - (b) replacing the existing CSENet;*
 - (c) integrating with the current SSA system; or*
 - (d) integrating with the proposed Health Security Administration's network and data base.*
- (3) An amount equal to two (2) percent of the Federal share of child support collections made on behalf of AFDC families in the previous year shall be authorized in each fiscal year to fund the National Clearinghouse.*

National Directory of New Hires

A National Directory of New Hires, operated by the Federal government, will be created to maintain an up-to-date data base of all new employees for purposes of determining child support responsibility. Information will come from transmission of the W-4 form, which is already routinely completed or through some other mechanism as the employer chooses. Information from the data base will be matched regularly against the National Registry to identify obligors for automatic income withholding and the appropriate State will be notified of the match. This national directory will provide a standardized process for all employers and interstate cases will be processed as quickly as intrastate cases.

Currently, information about employees and their income is reported to State Employment Security Agencies on a quarterly basis. This data is an excellent source of information for implementing wage withholding as well as for locating the noncustodial parent to establish an order. A major drawback, however, is that this data is approximately three- to six-months old before the child support agency has access to it. A significant number of obligors delinquent in their child support change jobs frequently or work in seasonal or cyclical industries. Therefore, it is difficult to enforce child support through wage withholding for these individuals. At least ten States have passed legislation and implemented a process requiring employers to report information on new employees soon after hiring. Several others have introduced legislation for employer reporting.

The problem with continuing on the current path is that each State is taking a slightly different approach concerning who must report, what must be reported, and the frequency of reporting, etc. Also, while improving intrastate wage withholding, this approach does little to improve interstate enforcement. The time has come for more standardization as well as expansion through a national system for reporting new hire information. Many employers and the associations which represent them, such as the American Society for Payroll Management, are calling for a centralized, standardized single reporting system for new hire reporting to minimize the burden on the employer community. A National Directory of New Hires will significantly reduce the burden on employers, especially multi-state employers, as well as increase the effectiveness for interstate wage withholding.

- (1) *The Secretary of Health and Human Services shall operate a new National Directory of New Hires which maintains a current data base of all new employees in the United States as they are hired.*
- (2) *All employers are required to report information based on every new employee's W-4 form (which is already routinely completed) within 10 days of hire to the National Directory:*
 - (a) *employers may mail or fax a copy of the W-4 or use a variety of other filing methods to accommodate their needs and limitations, including the use of POS devices, touch tone telephones, electronic transmissions via personal computer, tape transfers, or mainframe to mainframe transmissions;*
 - (b) *information submitted must include: the employee's name, Social Security Number, date of birth, and the employer's identification number (EIN);*
- (3) *employers will face fines or civil penalties if they intentionally fail to: comply with the reporting requirements; withhold child support as required; or disburse it to the payee of record within five calendar days of the date of the payroll.*

- (4) *The National Directory of New Hires shall:*
- (a) *match the data base against several national data bases on a periodic basis including:*
 - (i) *the Social Security Administration's Employer Verification System (EVS) to verify that the social security number given by the employee is correct and to correct any transpositions;*
 - (ii) *the National Child Support Registry (matching to occur at least every 48 hours); and*
 - (iii) *the Federal Parent Locate Service (FPLS);*

(all cases submitted to the National Child Support Registry and other locate requests submitted by the States shall be periodically cross-matched against the National Directory of New Hires);
 - (b) *notify the State Registry of any new matches within 48 hours including the individual's place of employment so that States can initiate wage withholding for cases where wages are not being withheld currently or take appropriate enforcement action; and*
 - (c) *retain data for a designated time period, to be determined by the Secretary.*
- (5) *The State Employment Security Agencies (SESAs) shall submit extracts of their quarterly wage reporting data to the National Directory of New Hires. The SESAs shall utilize a variety of automated means to transmit the data electronically to the National Directory of New Hires. The National Directory shall take appropriate measures to safeguard the privacy and unauthorized disclosure of the wage reporting data submitted by SESAs.*
- (6) *States shall match the hits against their central registry records at least every 48 hours and must send notice to employers (if a withholding order/notice is not already in place) within 48 hours of receipt from the National Directory of New Hires.*
- (7) *A feasibility study shall be undertaken to determine if the New Hire Directory should ultimately be part of the Simplified Tax and Wage Reporting System, or the Social Security Administration's or the Health Security Act-created data bases.*

Expanded FPLS

States currently operate State Parent Locator Services (SPLS) to locate noncustodial parents, their income, assets and employers. The SPLS conducts matches against other state databases and in some instances has on-line access to other State databases. In addition, the SPLS may seek information from credit bureaus, the postal service, unions, and other sources. Location sources may vary from State to State depending on the individual State's law. One location source used by the SPLS is the Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS). The FPLS is a computerized national location network operated by OCSE which obtains information from six Federal agencies and the State Employment Security agencies (SESAs).

In order to improve efforts to locate noncustodial parents, under the proposal, OCSE will significantly expand the Federal Parent Locate Services and make improvements in parent locator services offered at the Federal and State levels. The FPLS shall operate under the National Clearinghouse.

- (1) *The OCSE shall expand the scope of State and Federal locate efforts by:*
 - (a) *allowing States (through access to the FPLS and the National Child Support Registry) to locate persons who owe a child support obligation, persons for whom an obligation is being established, or persons who are owed child support obligations by accessing:*
 - (i) *the records of other State IV-D agencies and locate sources;*
 - (ii) *Federal sources of locate information in the same fashion; and*
 - (iii) *other appropriate data bases.*
 - (b) *requiring the child support agency to provide both ad-hoc and batch processing of locate requests, with ad-hoc access restricted to cases in which the information is needed immediately (such as with court appearances) and batch processing used to troll data bases to locate persons or update information periodically;*
 - (c) *for information retained in a State IV-D system, providing for a maximum 48 hours turnaround from the time the request is received by the State to the time information/response is returned; for information not maintained by the State IV-D system, the system must generate a request to other State locate data bases within 24 hours of receipt, and respond to the requesting State within 24 hours after receipt of that information from the State locate sources;*
 - (d) *broadening the definition of parent location to include the parents' income and assets;*
 - (e) *developing with the States an automated interface between their Statewide automated child support enforcement systems and the Child Support Enforcement Network (CSENet), permitting locate and status requests from one State to be integrated with intrastate requests, thereby automatically accessing all locate sources of data available to the State IV-D agency; and*
- (2) *States shall have and use laws that require unions and their hiring halls to cooperate with IV-D agencies by providing information on the residential address, employer, employer's address, wages, and medical insurance benefits of members;*
- (3) *The Secretary shall authorize:*
 - (a) *a study to address the issue of whether access to the National Locate Registry should be extended to noncustodial parents seeking the location of their children and whether, if it were, custodial parents fearful of domestic violence could be adequately protected and shall make recommendations to Congress; and*

- (b) *a study to address the feasibility and costs of contracting with the largest credit reporting agencies to have an electronic data interchange with FPLS, accessible by States, for credit information useful for the enforcement of orders, and if the Fair Credit Reporting Act is amended, for establishment and adjustment of orders.*
- (c) *demonstration grants to States to improve the interface with State data bases that show potential as automated locate sources for child support enforcement.*

Expanded Role of Internal Revenue Service

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is currently involved in the child support enforcement program both as a source of valuable information to assist in locating noncustodial parents, their assets and their place of employment, and as a collection authority to enforce payment of delinquent support obligations. In FY 1992, well over one-half of a billion dollars was collected by the IRS on behalf of over 800,000 child support cases. This proposal focuses on strengthening the IRS role in child support enforcement in three areas: enhancing data exchange; expanding the tax refund offset program; and, improving the full collection process.

Enhancing Data Exchange Between IV-D Child Support and the IRS Data

The Internal Revenue Code currently provides access to certain tax information used by child support enforcement agencies. Simplifying this access to information will greatly enhance State enforcement efforts and the utility of the locate network. Accordingly, under the proposal the Secretary of the Treasury will establish procedures whereby States can more readily obtain access to IRS data.

- (1) *The Secretary of the Treasury shall institute procedures whereby States can more readily obtain access to IRS data (including 1099 data), if allowed by law, for the purposes of identifying obligors' income and assets. Safeguards must be in place to protect the confidentiality of the information.*

IRS Tax Refund Offset

Current statutory requirements for Federal tax refund interception set different criteria for AFDC and non-AFDC cases. One especially inequitable difference is that the tax refund offset is not available to collect past-due child support for non-AFDC children who have reached the age of majority, even if the arrearage accrued during the child's minority. The proposal will eliminate all disparities between AFDC and non-AFDC income tax refund offsets for child support collection purposes.

- (1) *The disparities between AFDC and non-AFDC cases regarding the availability of the Federal income tax refund offset shall be eliminated, the arrearage requirement shall be reduced to an amount determined by the Secretary, and offsets shall be provided regardless of the age of the child for whom an offset is sought. Timeframes, notice and hearing requirements shall be reviewed for simplification.*

IRS Full Collections

Currently, the IRS full collection process (which may include seizure by the IRS of property, freezing of accounts, and other procedures) is available to States as an enforcement tool in collecting delinquent child support payments. While use of the IRS full collection process could be an effective enforcement remedy, especially in interstate cases, it is currently used only rarely, in part, because the current process is cumbersome and prohibitively expensive from the States' perspective. The IRS and HHS have recently undertaken a study to explore how to improve the IRS full collection process and to make recommendations regarding its expansion. As part of this study, 700 cases were certified to IRS for collection in September, 1993. These cases are being closely monitored and the data obtained will be used to make recommendations for improvement to the IRS Full Collection project, including the establishment of a new fee structure. The proposal will require the Secretary of Treasury to improve the full collection process by establishing a simplified and streamlined process, including the use of an automated collection process for child support debts.

- (1) *To improve the IRS Full Collection process, the Secretary of the Treasury shall:*
- (a) *simplify the IRS full collection process;*
 - (b) *establish procedures to ensure that the process is expeditious and implemented effectively;*
 - (c) *explore the feasibility of the IRS using its automated tax collection techniques in child support full collection cases; and*
 - (d) *the IRS will not charge an extra submission fee if a State updates the arrears on an open case.*

INTERSTATE ENFORCEMENT

Currently, many child support efforts are hampered by States' inability to locate noncustodial parents and secure orders of support across State lines. New provisions will be enacted to improve State efforts to work interstate child support cases and make interstate procedures more uniform throughout the country.

Under current law, most States handle their interstate cases through the use of versions of the Uniform Reciprocal Enforcement of Support Act (URESA), promulgated in 1950 and changed in 1952, 1958 and 1968. Using URESA may result in the creation of several child support orders in different States (or even counties within the same state) for different amounts, all of which are valid and enforceable. Interstate income withholding, an administrative alternative to URESA, is not widely used and limits the enforcement remedy of withholding.

Under the proposal, States will be required to adopt verbatim URESA's replacement, the Uniform Interstate Family Support Act (UIFSA). UIFSA ensures that only one State controls the terms of the order at any one time. UIFSA, unlike URESA, includes a comprehensive long-arm jurisdiction section to ensure that as many cases stay in one State as is possible. Direct withholding will allow a State to use income withholding in interstate cases by serving the employer directly without having to go through the second State's IV-D agency. Additionally, States could quickly obtain wage information from out-of-state employers. Interstate locate through the National Clearinghouse should improve locate capability dramatically, by linking state agencies, Federal locate sources and the new hire data base.

We will also ask Congress to express its sense that it is constitutional to use "child-state" jurisdiction, which if upheld by the Supreme Court, will allow agencies to bring the child support case where the child resides instead of where the noncustodial parent lives if he or she has no ties to the child's state. This extends long arm jurisdiction's reach to all cases instead of just most cases. It would also eliminate arguments and court proceedings regarding jurisdiction.

While all States have implemented immediate wage withholding programs for child support payment, there are significant variances in individual State laws, procedures and forms. Those differences are significant enough to bog down the interstate withholding system. Even within States, forms and procedures may vary, resulting in slow or inaccurate case processing. The proposal will require the Secretary to promulgate regulations defining income and other terms so that income withholding terms, procedures and definitions are uniform. This will improve interstate wage withholding effectiveness and fairness and facilitate a more employer-friendly withholding environment. The net effect of UIFSA, direct and uniform withholding, national subpoenas, interstate lien recognition, interstate communication, and child-state jurisdiction is to almost eradicate any barriers that exist to case processing simply because the parents do not reside in the same state.

To facilitate interstate enforcement efforts, each State must have and use laws, rules and procedures that:

- (1) *provide for long-arm jurisdiction over a nonresident individual in a child support or parentage case under certain conditions;*
- (2) *require Social Security Numbers of all persons applying for a marriage license or divorce to be listed on the supporting license or decree;*
- (3) *require Social Security Numbers of both parents to be listed on all child support orders and birth certificates;*
- (4) *adopt verbatim the Uniform Reciprocal Enforcement of Support Act (URESA) drafting committee's final version of the Uniform Interstate Family Support Act (UIFSA), to become effective in all States no later than October 1, 1995 or within 12 months of passage, but in no event later than January 1, 1996;*
- (5) *give full faith and credit to all terms of any child support order (whether for past-due, currently owed, or prospectively owed support) issued by a court or through an administrative process which has jurisdiction under the terms of UIFSA;*
- (6) *provide that out-of-State service of process in parentage and child support actions must be accepted in the same manner as are in-State service of process methods and proof of service so if service of process is valid in either State it is valid in the hearing State;*
- (7) *require the filing of the noncustodial parent's and the custodial parent's residential address, mailing address, home telephone number, driver's license number, Social Security Number, name of employer, address of place of employment and work telephone number with the appropriate court or administrative agency on or before the date the final order is issued; in addition:*
 - (a) *presume for the purpose of providing sufficient notice in any support related action, other than the initial notice in an action to adjudicate parentage or*

establish or modify a support order that the last residential address of the party given to the appropriate agency or court is the current address of the party, in the absence of the obligor or obligee providing a new address;

- (b) prohibit the release of information concerning the whereabouts of a parent or child to the other parent if there is a court order for the physical protection of one parent or child entered against the other parent;*
- (8) provide for intrastate transfers of cases to the city, county, or district where the child resides for purposes of enforcement and modification, without the need for refiling by the plaintiff or re-serving the defendant; require the State child support agency or State courts that hear child support claims to exert statewide jurisdiction over the parties and allow the child support orders and liens to have statewide effect for enforcement purposes;*
- (9) make clear that visitation denial is not a defense to child support enforcement and that nonsupport is not available as a defense when visitation is at issue;*
- (10) require States to require employers, as a condition of doing business in the State, to respond to requests by out-of-state IV-D agencies for individual income information pertaining to all private, State and local government employees for purposes of establishing and collecting child support.*

In addition, the Federal government shall:

- (1) make a Congressional finding that child-state jurisdiction is consistent with the Due Process clauses of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments, Section 5, the Commerce Clause, the General Welfare Clause, and the Full Faith and Credit Clause of the United States Constitution, so that due process is satisfied when the State where a child is domiciled asserts jurisdiction over a nonresident party, provided that party is the parent or presumed parent of the child in a parentage or child support action;*
 - (a) test the constitutionality of this assertion of child-state jurisdiction by providing for an expedited appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court directly from a Federal court;*
- (2) provide that a State that has asserted jurisdiction properly retains continuing, exclusive jurisdiction over the parties as long as the child or either party resides in that State or if all the parties consent to the State retaining jurisdiction;*
 - (a) when no State has continuing exclusive jurisdiction when actions are pending in different States, the last State where the child has resided for a consecutive six month period (the home State) can claim to be the State of continuing and exclusive jurisdiction, if the action in the home State was filed before the time expired in the other State for filing a responsive pleading and a responsive pleading contesting jurisdiction is filed in that other State;*
- (3) provide that a State loses its continuing, exclusive jurisdiction to modify its order regarding child support if all the parties no longer reside in that State or if all the parties consent to another State asserting jurisdiction;*

- (a) *if a State loses its continuing, exclusive jurisdiction to modify, that State retains jurisdiction to enforce the terms of its original order and to enforce the new order upon request under the direction of the State that has subsequently acquired continuing, exclusive jurisdiction;*
- (b) *if a State no longer has continuing jurisdiction, then any other State that can claim jurisdiction may assert it;*
- (c) *when actions to modify are pending in different States, and the State that last had continuing, exclusive jurisdiction no longer has jurisdiction, the last State where the child has resided for a consecutive six month period (the home State) can claim to be the State of continuing, exclusive jurisdiction, if:*
 - (i) *a responsive pleading contesting jurisdictional control is filed in a timely basis in the nonhome State, and*
 - (ii) *an action in the home State is filed before the time has expired in the nonhome State for filing a responsive pleading;*
- (4) *provide that the law of the forum State applies in child support cases, unless the forum State must interpret an order rendered in another State, so that the rendering State's law governs interpretation of the order; in cases in which a statute of limitations may preclude collection of any outstanding child support arrearages, the longer of the forum or rendering State's statute of limitations shall apply; and*
- (5) *provide that all employers can be served directly with a withholding order by any State, regardless of the State issuing the order; The Secretary shall develop a universal withholding form that must be used by all States.*

In addition:

- (1) *Section 466 of the Social Security Act will be amended to require regulations so that income withholding terms, procedures, forms and definitions of income for withholding purposes are uniform to ensure interstate withholding efficiency and fairness, based on regulations promulgated by the Secretary;*

OTHER ENFORCEMENT MEASURES

Currently, State and Federal enforcement efforts are often hampered by cumbersome enforcement procedures that make even routine enforcement actions difficult and time consuming. In order to enable States to take more efficient and effective action when child support is not paid, the proposal requires States to adopt several additional proven enforcement tools and streamline enforcement procedures.

Routinized Lien-Placing Process on Motor Vehicles

Liens have two faces. They are either passive encumbrances on property that entitle the lienholder to money when the property changes owners, or they are proactive collection tools that force the obligor to relinquish the property to satisfy the child support debt. Under current law, States must have and use procedures to impose liens on personal and real property. However, the time consuming and cumbersome nature associated with the case-by-case judicial activity now required to impose liens is a major reason for their limited use in practice. Under the proposal, the process by which liens on motor vehicles are imposed will be made more routinized and efficient, resulting in an increase in child support collected. States will be required to set up a routine lien-placing process on motor vehicle titles, without the necessity of first acquiring writs from courts, on non-custodial parents who are delinquent in paying child support.

Universal Wage Withholding

Withholding child support directly from wages has proven to be one of the most effective means of ensuring that child support payments are made. Currently, all IV-D orders should generally be in withholding status if the parties have not opted out or a decisionmaker has not found good cause. IV-D orders entered prior to 1991 in which no one has requested withholding or the obligor has not fallen behind by one month's worth of support are the only orders that do not have to be in withholding status. Arrearage-triggered IV-D withholding requires prior notice in all but a handful of States. Non-IV-D orders entered after January 1, 1994 are subject to immediate withholding if the two opt-outs are not invoked. Other non-IV-D orders may be in withholding status, depending on if there are arrearages and whether the parties took the appropriate action to impose if the withholding State does not impose it automatically in non-IV-D cases.

While the patchwork of orders subject to withholding is gradually being filled in, one way to speed up the universality of withholding is to require withholding in all cases unless the parties opt out or a court finds good cause. As under current law, if an arrearage of one month of support accrues whether or not there is an opt out, withholding must be implemented; however, it should be implemented automatically without need of further court action in non-IV-D cases as well, and without need for notice prior to withholding in the arrearage-triggered cases. Universalizing withholding (except for opt outs) makes the system equal for the non-IV-D and the IV-D parent. It allows for the immediate implementation of withholding when an obligor begins a new job. Imposing withholding without prior notice gives the States the jump on collection, instead of waiting up to 45 days for resolution. In the very few cases in which withholding might be incorrectly imposed, a hearing will be immediately available to the aggrieved obligor to satisfy due process concerns and to ensure accurate withholding (if a phone call to the agency does not quickly resolve the dispute).

Access to Records

Access to current income and asset information is critical to tracking down delinquent noncustodial parents who are trying to escape their responsibilities. The need to petition the courts for information on the address, employer, and income of parents on a case-by-case basis impedes the ability of States to effectively carry out child support enforcement actions. Recognizing the value of timely and

systematic access to information, the proposal will require States to make the records of various agencies available to the child support agency on a routine basis, through automated and nonautomated means. In addition, the proposal will require that child support agencies be granted access to specific case-related financial institution records for location or enforcement action.

Reducing Fraudulent Transfer of Assets

A major problem in some child support cases occurs when an obligor transfers his or her assets to someone else to avoid paying support. To protect the rights of creditors, States have enacted laws under the Uniform Fraudulent Conveyance Act and the Uniform Fraudulent Transfer Act to allow creditors to undo fraudulent transfers. Applying such laws to child support will provide equal protection to the support rights of custodial parents as applied to any other creditor and may deter obligors who are considering fraudulent transfer. The proposal will make it easier to take legal steps against parents who intentionally transfer property to avoid child support payment.

License Revocations

An effective enforcement tool recently implemented by a number of states is withholding or suspending professional/occupational licenses and, in some states, also standard driver's licenses of noncustodial parents owing past-due child support. States that have added this procedure to their arsenal of enforcement remedies have favorable perceptions about its effectiveness, noting that it has both increased the amount of arrearages collected and served as an incentive for noncustodial fathers to keep current in their monthly child support obligation. Often the mere threat of suspending a license is enough to get many recalcitrant obligors to pay. The proposal requires all states to adopt such laws while allowing State flexibility to tailor due process protections.

Statute of Limitations for Child Support Arrearages

Under current law, each state may decide when it no longer has the power to collect old debts. Usually invoking a state statute of limitations is done by the debtor, and is not automatic. Some state statute of limitations for child support debts are as short as seven years. Under the proposal, a uniform and extended statute of limitations for collecting child support debts of 30 years after the child's birth will be required. This ensures that a non-payor is less likely to forever escape payment simply because they have avoided payment in the short-term.

Interest on Arrearages

Child support debts are currently at a competitive disadvantage compared to commercial debts. While many States have the authority to apply interest to delinquent support, few routinely do so and thus there is no financial incentive for a noncustodial parent to pay support before paying an interest accruing debt. To raise the priority of child support debts to at least that afforded to other creditors, the proposal will require States to calculate and collect interest or late penalties on arrearages.

Expanded Use of Credit Reporting

Credit Bureaus can be an effective mechanism for collecting information needed to locate parents and establish awards at the appropriate level and for ensuring that child support payments are kept current. Under current law, credit report information may be used for locate and enforcement purposes. Agencies may not use credit reports for establishment or modification purposes, however. States are also not required to report arrearages upon a request from a credit bureau unless the arrearages are in excess of \$1000. (States may report, at state option, when a lesser amount is owed.) This proposal will give IV-D agencies access to all credit bureau information for consideration in establishing, modifying, and enforcing child support orders. Since credit reports are likely to fully disclose income generating activities, such reports can be extremely important in identifying assets and income needed to establish awards. Additionally, requirements for States to report child support arrears of more than one month would encourage non-custodial parents to stay current in their payment of support, because non-payment could jeopardize their credit rating. Many States have improved their credit reporting activities regarding child support arrearages. This proposal will ensure uniformity among the states and prevent any one state from becoming a safe-haven for non-paying parents.

Bankruptcy

Although a noncustodial parent obligated to pay support may not escape the obligation by filing bankruptcy, the ability to collect amounts due is hampered by current bankruptcy practices. One of the difficulties faced is that the filing of a bankruptcy action automatically "stays" or forbids various actions to collect past-due support. In order to continue child support collections, permission from the Bankruptcy Court must be granted to lift the automatic stay. Another obstacle is a requirement that the attorney handling the child support creditor's claim must either be a member of the Federal bar in the jurisdiction where the bankruptcy action is filed, appear by permission, or find alternative representation. In addition, child support obligations are often treated less favorably than other financial obligations such as consumer debts and, under a Chapter 13 bankruptcy proceeding, an individual debtor is allowed to pay off debts over an extended period of time—usually three to five years. Even though the current child support continues and arrearages cannot be forgiven through bankruptcy, the ability to collect these arrearages quickly can be thwarted when, as under current practice, a bankruptcy payment plan could require a different payment arrangement on support arrearages than that imposed by a court or administrative support process.

The proposal will eliminate these types of bankruptcy related obstacles to collecting child support. It will remove the effects of an automatic stay with respect to child support establishment, modification, and enforcement proceedings, require the establishment of a simple procedure under which a support creditor can file their claim with the bankruptcy court, treat unsecured support obligations as a second priority claim status, and require that the bankruptcy trustee recognize and honor an arrearage payment schedule established by a court or administrative decisionmaker. These changes will facilitate the uninterrupted flow of support to children in the event the obligor files for or enters into bankruptcy.

Federal Garnishment

Garnishment of Federal employees salaries and wages for child support was authorized prior to the requirement that all States have and use wage withholding procedures which do not require specific court or administrative authorization. The Federal garnishment statute was not changed to make its procedures consistent with the requirements for all other child support wage withholding. The proposal will simplify the implementation of child support wage withholding by requiring that the same procedures be used for Federal and non-Federal employees. The proposal also allows garnishment of military pay more consistent with other types of garnishable money.

Passports

Collecting child support from persons who have left the country is extremely difficult, even if the United States has a reciprocal agreement with the country in which the noncustodial parent currently resides. If there is no reciprocal agreement with that country, it is often virtually impossible to collect child support from the noncustodial parent. Under the proposal, passports and visas will not be issued for foreign travel for the most egregious cases in which support is owed—those owing over \$5,000 in past due support.

In order to enforce orders of support more effectively, States must have and use laws that:

- (1) systematically impose liens on vehicle titles for child support arrearages using a method for updating the value of the lien on a regular basis or allowing for an expedited inquiry to and response for proof of the amount of arrears; provide an expedited method for the titleholder or the individual owing the arrearage to contest the arrearage or request a release upon fulfilling the support obligation; the liens shall cover all current and future support arrearages and shall have priority over all other creditors' liens imposed on a vehicle title other than a purchase money security interest; in appropriate cases the agency shall have the power to execute on, seize, sell and distribute encumbered or attached property in accordance with State law;*
- (2) require the State agency to initiate immediate wage withholding action for all cases for which a noncustodial parent has been located and wage withholding is not currently in effect, without the need for advance notice to the obligor prior to the implementation of the withholding order;*
- (3) empower child support agencies to issue administrative subpoenas requiring defendants in paternity and child support actions to produce and deliver documents to or to appear at a court or administrative agency on a certain date; sanction individuals who fail to obey a subpoena's command;*
- (4) provide, at a minimum, that the following records are available to the State child support agency through automated or nonautomated means:*
 - (a) recreational licenses of residents, or of nonresidents who apply for such licenses, if the State maintains records in a readily accessible form;*

- (b) *real and personal property including transfers of property;*
 - (c) *State and local tax departments including information on the residence address, employer, income and assets of residents;*
 - (d) *publicly regulated utility companies and cable television operators; and*
 - (e) *marriages, births, and divorces of residents;*
- (5) *provide, at a minimum, the following records of State agencies are available to the State child support agency: the tax/revenue department, motor vehicle department, employment security department, bureau of corrections, occupational/professional licensing department, secretary of state's office, bureau of vital statistics, and agencies administering public assistance. If any of these State data bases are automated, the child support agency must be granted either on-line or batch access to the data.*
- (6) *provide for access to financial institution records based on a specific case's location or enforcement need through tape match or other automated or nonautomated means, with appropriate safeguards to ensure that the information is used for its intended purpose only and is kept confidential; a bank or other financial institution will not be liable for any consequences arising from providing the access, unless the harm arising from institution's conduct was intentional;*
- (7) *provide indicia or badges of fraud that create a prima facie case that an obligor transferred income or property to avoid a child support creditor; once a prima facie case is made, the State must take steps to avoid the fraudulent transfer unless settlement is reached;*
- (8) *require the withholding or suspension of professional or occupational licenses from noncustodial parents who owe past-due child support or are the subject of outstanding failure to appear warrants, capiases, and bench warrants related to a parentage or child support proceeding;*
- (a) *the State shall determine the procedures to be used in a particular State and determine the due process rights to be accorded to obligors.*
 - (b) *the State shall determine the threshold amount of child support due before withholding or suspension procedures are initiated.*
- (9) *suspend the driver's licenses, including any commercial licenses, of noncustodial parents who owe past-due child support:*
- (a) *the suspension shall be determined by the IV-D agency, which shall administratively suspend licenses. The State shall determine the due process rights to be accorded the obligor, including, but not limited to, the right to a*

hearing, stay of the order under appropriate circumstances, and the circumstances under which the suspension may be lifted;

- (b) the State shall determine the threshold amount of child support due before withholding or suspension procedures are initiated.*
- (10) extend the statute of limitations for collection of child support arrearages until the child for whom the support is ordered is at least 30 years of age.*
- (11) calculate and collect interest or late penalties on arrearages (accrued after the date of enactment) for non-payment. (Late penalties may be imposed on a monthly, quarterly, or annual basis.) All such charges must be distributed to the benefit of the child (unless child support rights have been assigned to the State). The Secretary shall establish by regulation a rule to resolve choice of law conflicts.*

In addition, Congress shall:

- (12) amend the Fair Credit Reporting Act to allow State agency access to and use of credit reports for the location of noncustodial parents and their assets and for establishing and modifying orders to the same extent that the State agency may currently use credit reports for enforcing orders;*
- (13) require reports to credit bureaus of all child support obligations when the arrearages reach an amount equal to one month's payment of child support;*
- (14) amend the Bankruptcy Code to:*
 - (a) allow parentage and child support establishment, modification and enforcement proceedings to continue without interruption after the filing of a bankruptcy petition; preclude the bankruptcy stay from barring or affecting any part of any action pertaining to support as defined in section 523 of Title 11;*
 - (b) allow child support creditors to file a claim without charge or having to meet special local court rule requirements for attorney appearances in a bankruptcy case or district court anywhere in the United States by filing a simplified form that includes information detailing the child support creditor's representation, and the child support debt, its status, and other characteristics;*
 - (c) require the establishment of a simple procedure under which support creditors can file claims with the bankruptcy court;*
 - (d) give child support creditors priority over all other unsecured creditors; and*

- (e) *require that the bankruptcy trustee make payments to a child support creditor from the bankruptcy estate in accordance with a payment schedule established in a family court or other administrative or judicial proceeding.*
- (15) *amend and streamline Sections 459, 461, 462 and 465 of the Social Security Act and companion laws to make the garnishment of Federal employees and retirees (including military) salaries, wages and other benefits and income consistent with the terms and procedures of the IV-D withholding statute (466(b) of the Social Security Act);*
- (16) *amend laws and procedures to ensure that passports, and visas for persons attempting to leave the country, are not issued if they owe more than \$5,000 in child support arrearages. The State Department may match its list of applicants against tax offset files of noncustodial parents with orders who owe more than \$5,000;*

The Social Security Administration shall be authorized to:

- (17) *provide the State IV-D or Department of Motor Vehicle agency access to electronic verification of Social Security Numbers.*

Privacy Protection

Historically, child support enforcement agencies have had access to information unavailable to other Federal and or State agencies because of the special nature of their mission—ensuring that children receive appropriate financial support from their parents. Parents cannot be located and orders cannot be established and enforced unless the State has access to a wide array of information sources which identify places of employment and other information about assets and income. Under current Federal and State regulations and rules, information obtained for child support purposes is protected from unwarranted disclosure. The proposal ensures that privacy safeguards continue to cover all sensitive and personal information by extending such protections to any new sources of information. States are required to ensure that safeguards are in place to prevent breaches of privacy protection for individuals not liable or potentially liable for support and to prevent the misuse of information by those employees and agencies with legitimate access for child support purposes only.

(1) States shall:

- (a) *extend their data safeguarding state plan requirements to all newly accessible information under the proposal. States shall also institute routine training for state and local employees (and contractors shall be required to do the same for their staff) who handle sensitive and confidential data.*
- (b) *regularly self-audit for unauthorized access or data misuse, and investigate individual complaints as necessary.*
- (c) *have penalties for persons who obtain unauthorized access to safeguarded information or who misuse information that they are authorized to obtain.*

Supervisors who knew or should have known of unauthorized access or misuse shall also be subject to penalties.

- (2) *Procedures for protection of tax records should include such protections as:*
- (a) *data matching performed by staff having access only to related data fields necessary to perform child support functions;*
 - (b) *controlling access to individual child support computer records by the use of individual passwords; and*
 - (c) *monitoring access on a regular basis by use of computerized audit trail reports and feedback procedures.*

In addition:

- (3) *All child support enforcement staff shall be kept informed of Federal and state laws and regulations pertaining to disclosure of confidential tax and child support information.*
- (4) *Access to state vital statistics shall be restricted to authorized IV-D personnel.*
- (5) *The Federal government shall ensure that New Hire information is limited to IV-D agency use by authorized persons (as defined under current law).*
- (6) *The Secretary shall issue regulations setting minimum privacy safeguards that States must follow to ensure that only authorized users of personal information have access to it solely for official purposes.*

Funding

Federal Financial Participation and Incentives

The current funding structure of the Child Support Enforcement program is comprised of three major components: direct Federal matching, incentive payments to States, and the States' share of child support collections made on behalf of AFDC recipients.

Direct Federal matching, known as Federal financial participation or FFP, provides for 66 percent of most State/local IV-D program costs. A higher rate, 90 percent, is paid for genetic testing to establish paternity and, until October 1, 1995, for comprehensive state wide automated data processing (ADP) systems. The Federal government also pays States an annual incentive based on collections and cost effectiveness equalling 6-10 percent of collections from the Federal share of AFDC-related collections. States must pass on part of the incentive to any local jurisdiction that collected the child support if the State required the jurisdiction to participate in the program's costs.

Currently, States may profit from the IV-D program's funding structure irrespective of their performance. The proposed child support financing reforms are primarily directed at the Federal financial participation and the payment of incentives. Basic FFP will be increased from 66 percent to 75 percent to ensure that all States had a sufficient resource base to operate an efficient and effective program. Incentives will be based on State performance in the areas of paternity establishment, order establishment, collections and cost-effectiveness. Such incentives will ensure that States focus on the results that are expected from the program activities. States and the Federal Government will still share in the reduction in costs resulting from support collections made on behalf of AFDC recipients.

- (1) *The Federal government will pay 75 percent of State administrative costs. All cases included in the State's Central Registry will be eligible for federal funding.*
- (2) *States are eligible for incentive payments in the following areas:*
 - (a) *paternity establishment – earning an increase of up to 5 percentage points in FFP for high paternity establishment rates, as determined by the Secretary; and*
 - (b) *overall performance – earning an increase of up to 10 percentage points in FFP for strong overall performance which factors in:*
 - (i) *the percentage of cases with support orders established (number of orders compared to the number of paternities established and other cases which need a child support order);*
 - (ii) *the percentage of overall cases with orders in paying status;*
 - (iii) *the percentage of overall collections compared to amount due;*
 - (iv) *cost-effectiveness.*
- (3) *All incentives will be based on a formula to be determined by the Secretary.*
- (4) *All incentive payments made to the States must be reinvested back into the State child support program.*

Registry and Clearinghouse Start-up Enhanced FFP

Enhanced funding for the automated central registries and centralized collection distribution systems is critical to enable States to implement these new requirements.

- (1) *States will receive enhanced FFP at a 80%/10% Federal/State match rate, or at the base 75% FFP plus incentives, whichever is higher, for the planning, design, procurement, conversion, testing and start-up of their full-service, technology-enabled*

state registries and centralized payment centers. (This includes necessary enhancements to the automated child support system to accommodate the proposal.)

- (2) *For the next 5 years, the match rate is 80 percent and total Federal payments to States are capped at \$260,000,000, to be distributed among States by a formula set in regulations which takes into account the relative size of State caseloads and the level of automation needed to meet applicable ADP requirements.*

State/Federal Maintenance of Effort

- (1) *Using a maintenance of effort plan, the Federal government will require States to maintain at least their current level of contribution to the program, representing the State FFP match and any other State funds or receipts allocated to the child support program.*

Revolving Loan Fund

In order to encourage ongoing innovation in the IV-D program, it is proposed that a revolving loan fund be created. The revolving loan fund will allow the Federal government more flexibility in helping States develop and implement innovative practices which have significant effects on increasing collections and ongoing innovation.

- (1) *The Federal government through OCSE shall provide a source of funds appropriated up to \$100 million to be made available to States and their subdivisions to be used solely for short-term, high-payoff operational improvements to the State child support program. Projects demonstrating a potential for increases in child support collections will be submitted to the Secretary on a competitive basis. Criteria for determining which projects to fund shall be specified by the Secretary based on whether adequate alternative funding already exists, and whether collections can be increased as a result. Within these guidelines, States shall have maximum flexibility in deciding which projects to fund.*
- (2) *Funding will be limited to no more than \$5 million per State or \$1 million per project, except for limited circumstances under which a large State undertakes a statewide project, in which case the maximum for that State shall be \$5 million for the project. States may supplement Federal funds to increase the amount of funds available for the project and may require local jurisdictions to put up a local match.*
- (3) *Funding will be available for a maximum of three years based on a plan established with the Secretary. OCSE must expeditiously review and, as appropriate, fund the approved plan. At the end of the project period, recipients must pay funds back to the Revolving Fund out of increased performance incentives.*

- (4) *Beginning with the next Federal fiscal year after the project ends, the Federal government shall offset half of the increase in the State's performance incentives every year until the funds are fully repaid. If the State fails to raise collections that result in a performance incentive increase at the projected attributable level, the funds will be recouped by offsetting the FFP due to a State by a sum equal to one-twelfth of the project's Federal funding, plus interest, over the first twelve quarters beginning with the next fiscal year following the project's completion.*

Program Management

Dramatically improving child support enforcement requires improved program management at both the State and Federal levels. The proposal includes several provisions designed to lead to better program performance and better services.

Training

From 1979 through the late 1980s OCSE contracted with outside organizations to provide on-site training to States across a broad range of topics. In early 1991, OCSE established the National Training Center within the Division of Program Operations to take over many training functions formerly performed by contractors. The purpose of the Center is to bolster States' training initiatives through curriculum design/development, dissemination of information and materials and, to the extent resources permit, the provision of direct training. While a few States have developed training standards for staff, there is currently no mandate that States have minimum standards for persons involved in the child support program.

Under the proposal, the Federal share of funding for training, technical assistance and research will significantly increase and will be earmarked each year for such things as training, technical assistance, research, demonstrations and staffing studies. Furthermore, States will be required to have minimum standards for training in their State plans. Under the proposal, OCSE will also develop a training program for State IV-D Directors. The IV-D program's complexity and importance to children and family self-sufficiency require that States have experienced and well-trained managers. Experts often point to the leadership experience of IV-D managers as a major factor in a state's performance.

- (1) *an amount equal to one (1) percent of the Federal share of child support collections made on behalf of AFDC families in the previous year shall be authorized in each fiscal year to fund technical assistance, training, research, demonstrations and staffing studies.*
- (2) *OCSE shall provide a Federally developed core curriculum to all States to be used in the development of State-specific training guides. OCSE shall also develop a national training program for all State IV-D directors.*
- (3) *States must also have minimum standards in their State plans for training, based on the newly developed state-specific training guide, that include initial and ongoing training for all persons involved in the IV-D child support program. The program*

shall include annual training for all line workers and special training for all staff when laws, policies or procedures change.

- (4) In addition, funds under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act shall be made available to States for the development and conduct of training of IV-A and IV-E caseworkers, private attorneys, judges and clerks who need a knowledge of child support to perform their duties but for whom a cooperative agreement does not exist for ongoing child support activities.*

Technical Assistance

Currently, States complain that they receive very little technical assistance from the Federal government. Indeed, the level of technical assistance provided to State child support enforcement agencies has declined significantly over the past several years because of staff and resource limitations. Aside from the provision of training and publication dissemination, most of the assistance provided is in the nature of problem identification through program reviews.

Under the proposal, OCSE will provide comprehensive direct technical assistance in a variety of forms to States. In particular, OCSE will take an active role in developing model laws and identifying best practices that States may adopt, reviewing State laws, procedures, policies, and organizational structure, and providing enhanced technical assistance to meet the program's goals. Such provision of technical assistance will be designed to prevent program deficiencies before they occur.

The OCSE shall provide technical assistance to States by:

- (1) developing model laws and identifying model legislation and "best" State practices that States may follow when changing State laws to meet new Federal requirements;*
- (2) reviewing State laws, policies, procedures, and organizational structure, including cooperative agreements, as part of the State plan approval process;*
- (3) providing a State with a written assessment of its program and, when appropriate, identifying areas in which the State is deficient;*
- (4) providing enhanced technical assistance to States to meet the program's goals; and*
- (5) allowing 100 percent FFP for certain limited interstate training and technical assistance approved by the Secretary.*

Audit and Reporting

The Federal statute mandates periodic comprehensive Federal audits of State programs to ensure substantial compliance with all federal requirements. If deficiencies identified in an audit are not corrected, States face a mandatory fiscal penalty of between 1 and 5 percent of the Federal share of the State's AFDC program funding. Once an audit determines compliance with identified deficiencies, the penalty is lifted.

The detail-oriented audit is time-consuming and labor intensive for both Federal auditors and the States. One result is that audit findings do not measure current State performance or current program requirements. States contend that the audit system focuses too much on administrative procedures and processes rather than performance outcomes and results. However, it is widely agreed that efforts to pass the audit have been a significant driving force behind States' improved performance. While two-thirds of the States fail the initial audit, three-fourths of these same States come into compliance after a corrective-action period and avoid the financial penalty.

The proposal will simplify the Federal audit requirements to focus primarily on performance outcomes and require States to conduct self-reviews to assess whether or not all required services are being provided. Federal auditors will assess States' data used to determine performance outcomes to determine if it is valid and reliable and conduct periodic financial and other audits as the Secretary deems necessary. If State self-reviews or the level of grievances/complaints indicates that services are not being provided, OCSE will evaluate the State's program and ascertain the causes for the problems to help States correct the problems. Audit penalties assessed on the basis of deficiencies found with respect to a fiscal year will be waived if the State passes the audit at the end of the next fiscal year.

(1) Audit procedures by the Secretary shall include:

- (a) simplifying the Federal audit requirements to focus primarily on performance outcomes;***
- (b) requiring States to develop their own control systems to ensure that performance outcomes are achieved, while making the results subject to verification and audit;***

(2) States shall:

- (a) develop internal automated management control reporting systems that provide information to enable States to assess their own performance and employees' workload analysis, on a routine, ongoing basis so that exceptions can be called to the program management's attention;***
- (b) develop computer systems controls that provide reasonable assurances that computer-based data are complete, valid, and reliable;***
- (c) in accordance with Federal regulations, annually conduct a self-review to assess whether or not the State meets the program's specified goals,***

performance objectives and any recently completed staffing studies, as well as ensure that all required services are being provided.

(3) Federal auditors shall:

- (a) at a minimum, based upon the U.S. Comptroller General's Government Auditing Standards, every 3 years, assess the reliability of the computer-processed data (or results provided as a result of the self-review). These audits will: (a) examine the computer system's general and application controls; (b) test whether those controls are being complied with; and (c) test data produced by the system on computer magnetic tape or other appropriate auditing medium to ensure that it is valid and reliable;*
- (b) if a State has failed a previous audit, continue to evaluate on an annual basis, whether the State has corrected the deficiencies identified under (1) above;*
- (c) if the State self-reviews determine that the Federal requirements are not being met, ascertain the causes for the deficiency/weakness so that States will be able to take better corrective actions; and*
- (d) if the State's report on the status of grievances/complaints indicates substantial and material noncompliance with the program requirements, then evaluate the State's program.*
- (e) each State will also be subject to periodic financial audits to ensure that their funds are being allocated and expended appropriately and adequate internal controls are in place which will help ensure that all monies are being safeguarded. The Secretary may conduct such other audits as deemed necessary to ensure compliance.*

(4) The Secretary shall promulgate regulations to revise the penalty process for failures to meet the program's performance goals and objectives and/or failure to generate reliable and valid data. Penalties will be imposed immediately after a one year corrective action period.

Director of Office of Child Support Enforcement

- (1) The individual with responsibility for the day to day operation of the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement shall have the title of Director instead of Deputy Director.*

Staffing Study

Insufficient staff levels have been cited as the greatest barrier to effectively processing child support cases. Despite significant State savings from the program, staffing levels have not kept pace with caseloads ever increasing in size and complexity. Comprehensive data on staffing is almost nonexistent. To address this information vacuum, staffing studies will be conducted for each State child support enforcement program, including an assessment of the effects of automation on human resource needs. States can use this information for informed personnel and budgetary decision-making.

- (1) *The Secretary of Health and Human Services or a disinterested contractor shall conduct staffing studies of each State's child support enforcement program. Such studies shall include a review of the automated case processing system and central registry/central payment center requirements and include adjustments to future staffing if these changes reduce staffing needs. Such staffing studies may be periodically repeated at the Secretary's discretion. The Secretary shall report the results of such staffing studies to the Congress and the States.*

Expanded Outreach

No manner of child support reform will be truly successful unless parents are aware of and have reasonable access to services. Despite the fact that State child support agencies are currently required to advertise the availability of services, many families remain unaware of the program and still others find that services are not easily accessible.

In addition to the paternity establishment outreach provisions described earlier, the proposal will require each State to develop an outreach plan to inform families of the availability of IV-D services and to provide broader access to services, including initiatives which target the needs of working families and non-English speaking families. The Federal government will aid this effort by developing outreach prototypes and a multi-media campaign which focuses on the positive effects a noncustodial parent's involvement can have on a child's life as well as the detrimental effects of a parent's failure to participate.

- (1) *In order to broaden access to child support services, each State plan must:*
 - (a) *respond to the need for office hours or other flexibility that provide parents opportunity to attend appointments without taking time off of work; and*
 - (b) *develop and appropriately disseminate materials in languages other than English where the State has a significant non-English-speaking population; staff or contractors who can translate should be reasonably accessible for the non-English-speaking person provided services.*

- (2) *To aid State outreach efforts, OCSE must:*
- (a) *develop prototype brochures that explain the services available to parents with specific information on the types of services available, the mandated time frames for action to be taken, and all relevant information about the procedures used to apply for services;*
 - (b) *develop model public service announcements for use by States in publicizing on local television and radio the availability of child support services;*
 - (c) *develop model news releases that States could use to announce major developments in the program that provide ongoing information of the availability of services and details of new programs; and*
 - (d) *focus more resources on reaching putative fathers and noncustodial parents through a multimedia campaign that acknowledges positively those who comply and spotlights the detrimental effects on a child of a parent's failure to financially and emotionally participate in the child's life.*

Customer Accountability

Under current law, OCSE has few requirements regarding how IV-D offices are to interact with the "customer," i.e., the affected family members, and how State agencies should respond to child support customers' complaints. Under the proposal, States will be required to notify custodial parents on a timely basis before all scheduled establishment and modification hearings or conferences. The State agency has 14 days to provide a copy of any subsequent order to the custodial parent. If someone receiving IV-D services feels the services provided were inadequate, he or she may request a fair hearing or a formal review process. Complaint and disposition reports shall be forwarded to the Department of Health and Human Services. These reforms give the "customers," the children's parents acting on behalf of the children, the redress that seems lacking in many States when the system fails to perform adequately. A mandatory grievance system should take care of most complaints, with a back-up right to sue in case the state grievance system inadequately resolves serious deficiencies of the program.

- (1) *State agencies shall notify custodial parents in a timely manner of all hearings or conferences in which child support obligations might be established or modified;*
- (2) *State agencies shall provide custodial parents with a copy of any order that establishes or modifies a child support obligation within 14 days of the issuance of such order;*
- (3) *An individual receiving IV-D services shall have timely access to a State fair hearing or a formal, internal complaint-review process, according to regulations established by the Secretary, provided that there is no stay of enforcement as a result of the*

pending request (reports of complaints and dispositions shall also be reported to the Secretary);

- (4) *It is the intent of Congress that the express purpose of Title IV-D is to assist children and their families in collecting child support owed to them. Individuals who are injured by a State's failure to comply with the requirements of Federal law, including State plan requirements of various titles of the Social Security Act, should be able to seek redress in Federal court. (No specific private cause of action to enforce child support provisions of the law are contained herein because there is already a private cause of action under 42 U.S.C. 1983 to redress state and local officials' violations of Federal child support statutes.)*

Effective Date

Unless otherwise stated in the Appendix, the amendments made by this Act shall take effect on October 1, 1994.