



Department of Child Support Services (DCSS)

DCSS Working With Customers to Resolve Child Support Arrears

LeAnn Mast, Supervising Child Support Officer

Child support orders are established to help families meet the financial and medical needs of their children. The Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) works to ensure that accurate child support orders are established which reflect the non-custodial parent's (NCP's) ability to pay support.

When the monthly child support obligation is not met, the unpaid amount becomes past due; otherwise known as child support arrears. Interest accrues on the unpaid amount at a rate of 10 percent per year. According to the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, more than \$113 billion is owed in child support arrears nationally, with nearly \$18 billion of that total owed in California alone.

When working with an NCP who owes arrears, our first goal is to engage that person, and work with them on a realistic payment plan that will enable them to reduce or eliminate their arrears. In some circumstances, a modification of the order may be appropriate to address a change in the NCP's financial circumstances. In other cases, the NCP may qualify for the Compromise of Arrears Program (COAP), which allows qualified participants to have a portion of their arrears forgiven when they agree to, and comply with, a payment plan.

However, in some cases it can still be difficult to obtain consistent payment on child support arrears. In those circumstances, the department has a number of useful enforcement remedies that can assist in securing payments. One tool which has proven to be effective is suspension of drivers or professional licenses. NCPs who are delinquent in their payments, receive notice that their license will be suspended if they do not start paying their child support obligation. There are also other enforcement actions, such as property liens, bank levies, intercept of state and federal tax returns and lottery winnings, and passport holds that are automatically issued.

Providing resources to our customers is an important component of the services we provide. We offer information on employment opportunities and job fairs, as well as other information to assist our customers in obtaining needed community services. The department also recently added an arrears calculator to its website which allows an NCP to see how many months it might take to pay off his/her arrears when paying a certain amount.



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The department continues to work with NCPs to inform and educate them about the child support process with the goal of ensuring accurate orders and full payment of owed child support. Educating our customers plays a vital role in effective customer service and is proving to be a positive step in helping to reduce the amount of arrears that is owed.