

**Department of Health and Human Services**

**OFFICE OF  
INSPECTOR GENERAL**

**Child Support Enforcement Annual Report  
to Congress**



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Inspector General**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## PURPOSE

To provide the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) with user feedback on its Annual Report to Congress.

## BACKGROUND

The Child Support Enforcement program was established in 1975 under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act. The program's goal is to ensure that children are financially supported by both parents. It is administered at the State level and overseen Federally by OCSE.

Congress requires OCSE to submit to them an Annual Report, describing program activities over the prior year, no later than three months after the end of each fiscal year. While the law specifies much of the data to be included in the report, the Annual Report contains a considerable amount of information in addition to what is mandated. The OCSE compiles the Annual Report based on States' reports of their child support activities.

We conducted structured interviews, both in-person and over the telephone, with a purposive sample of 36 individual users of the Annual Report representing Congressional staff, other Federal agency staff (non-OCSE), State Child Support staff, academic staff, advocates, State legislators and media representatives. Whereas in our earlier survey of State satisfaction with OCSE, every State commented on the Annual Report, in this study we sought out individual users with extensive knowledge and experience with the child support program and the Annual Report. We particularly focused on users who need the report for policy purposes and have data expertise. In addition to these 36 interviews, we also held discussions with senior staff from OCSE to help us understand the context of users' responses.

## FINDINGS

### **Overall, Users Are Satisfied With and Rely on the Child Support Enforcement Annual Report to Congress**

Overall, a majority of users we spoke to (30 of 36) are satisfied with the Annual Report. Nearly all view the report as a valuable and unique source of child support program information. Most also praise the usefulness of the report and are generally happy with its current format; they find the section with State data tables and data on collections the most useful to them. Users report needing the Annual Report for several different purposes. Almost all use the report to answer specific data questions and to compare State programs to each other, and many also rely on it to conduct research (27), to obtain general program information (24), or to explain the child support program to others (24).

## **Users Cite the Lack of a Clearly Defined Story Line, Timeliness, and Data Integrity as the Report's Main Weaknesses**

**Story Line.** A majority of users (28) say the Annual Report, both data and text, does not convey a clear and consistent message on what is happening in the child support enforcement program. Half also thinks the report does not document program performance and that it lacks adequate analysis and does not give the reader a sense of what is working in the program and what is not. Others say the report lacks crucial data which is needed for them to evaluate the program's success.

**Timeliness.** Most users (22) also have concerns about the timeliness of the Annual Report. They say that the report takes too long to be published; the 1995 Annual Report to Congress was not released until the middle of 1997, and the 1996 report is yet to be published. Users must therefore work with data that are out of date and no longer relevant.

**Data Integrity.** Despite their reliance on the Annual Report, most users (22) have concerns about the integrity of the report's data. Specifically, they believe the report contains data that are not consistently accurate, reliable, or valid, and that some of the data are not comparable among States. They are therefore forced to make policy decisions with data they have limited confidence in, and are unable to compare State programs to the extent they would like.

Discussions with OCSE reveal that they are sensitive to users' concerns about an unclear story line, timeliness, and data integrity. Some believe the report's original legislative mandate restricts what data they can collect and report. They also point out that it must go through lengthy clearance processes before it can be formally released. However, they are optimistic that when all States have OCSE-certified systems, use standard definitions, and obtain funding through a new incentive system, data quality will improve.

## **Users Identify Several Opportunities for Strengthening the Report to Better Meet Their Needs**

Users offer several suggestions for improving the Annual Report. Twenty-four want it to contain more data analysis and report data in a more relevant context, such as providing more ratio and denominators; 27 think the report should include additional data and 23 say it should contain more explanation of the data. Furthermore, 17 users think OCSE should release a short and focused summary document prior to publication of the final Annual Report and 11 suggest putting preliminary data on the Internet. Finally, users also suggest re-evaluating the report's narrative section to make it more objective, increasing the report's visibility, and making future reports flexible to accommodate program changes. Most (22) think the report's main purpose in the future should be to show how well the program is performing, and a majority (30) do not believe the report needs to be totally redesigned in order to do this.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Based on user feedback, we believe that in the future the Child Support Enforcement Annual Report to Congress should focus primarily on performance. Specifically, it should:
  - highlight program successes, strengths, and weaknesses;
  - emphasize performance data which demonstrates how well the program is meeting its goals, and;
  - adequately describe program accomplishments that, when used to compare different program strategies, may be valuable to Federal policy makers and State programs.
2. We also believe OCSE should review the report's production and distribution processes and identify specific actions to improve the report's timeliness, which is a major concern of users.

We believe both of these recommendations complement recent Federal government initiatives. Child support enforcement is a rapidly-changing program with a strong need for performance measurement data. Such data are required by law under the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), which mandates performance monitoring at the Federal level. Users believe the report would best meet this mandate by providing information on program goals and outcomes. Recent Federal strategies suggest performance measurement as a fundamental aspect of future government policy, and many users, as well as OCSE, envision the Child Support Enforcement Annual Report to Congress paralleling this new emphasis on government accountability.

## COMMENTS

We received comments on the draft report from the Administration for Children and Families, which concur with our recommendations. Beginning in fiscal year 1999, OCSE is planning to change the Annual Report to Congress to focus more on performance, and is also working to streamline production and distribution of the report. The full comments are presented in Appendix A.

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# INTRODUCTION

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## PURPOSE

To provide the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) with user feedback on its Annual Report to Congress.

## BACKGROUND

### Child Support Enforcement Program

The Child Support Enforcement program was established in 1975 under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act. The goal of this program is to ensure that children, both Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and non-TANF, are financially supported by both parents. The major services provided by the program include: 1) locating noncustodial parents; 2) establishing paternity; 3) establishing child support obligations; and 4) enforcing child support orders.

The Child Support Enforcement Program is administered at the State level and overseen federally by the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE). One of OCSE's primary roles is to fund, evaluate, and provide technical assistance to the States. The OCSE also sets program standards and policy, and provides guidance to States in implementing that policy. Additionally, it provides support for systems, demonstration projects, and operations. The OCSE has its central office in Washington, D.C. and regional offices throughout the country.

The program has grown since its inception. In fiscal year 1993, the program's caseload consisted of approximately 17 million cases, and almost \$9 billion in child support was collected. Preliminary data show that by 1996, the caseload had increased to more than 19 million cases, and monetary collections were up to \$12 billion. In 1994, the child support program was selected to be a pilot project for the Government and Performance Results Act (GPRA), which mandates performance monitoring at the Federal level.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-193) had a direct impact on the Child Support Enforcement Program. Among the many changes to the program enacted with welfare reform is a new system developed by to implement performance-based incentive funding for States. With this new system, which is currently working its way through the legislative process, State programs will be evaluated on five key performance areas: paternity establishment; support order establishment; collection of current support; collection of arrearages; and cost effectiveness. Each State will be paid an incentive based on its score on these measures. Welfare reform also requires States to significantly expand the capacity and functions of their automated systems.

### Annual Report to Congress

In establishing the Child Support Enforcement Program, Congress requires OCSE to submit an annual report to them no later than three months after the end of each fiscal year. The report is

intended to describe program activities over the prior year.

The law specifies much of the data to be included in the report. It must include detailed information on program expenditures. The report must also include data on how much money is collected as a result of child support enforcement services, and how collections are distributed among families, and Federal, State, and local governments.

The law mandates that some information be reported separately for each State, such as the number of interstate cases filed, the amount of collections made for interstate cases, and the number of paternities established. It further requires that certain information be reported separately for TANF, former-TANF and non-TANF cases. Lastly, it specifies that the report document any major problems which have delayed or prevented implementation of the program.

While the legislation mandates the reporting of certain data, it does not define many of these data elements. For example, the law mandates that OCSE report “the total number of cases in which support was collected,” but does not define a “case.” State child support programs have not used common definitions when reporting data, although OCSE hopes to change this in FY 1999.

The Annual Report contains a considerable amount of information in addition to what is required by law. This additional material includes a general introduction to the program, a summary of the year’s achievements, and descriptions of new initiatives and demonstration projects.

The OCSE compiles the Annual Report based on States’ reports of their child support activities. States report their data to OCSE, who then tabulate the data for presentation in the report. The report goes through a fairly lengthy review process and must be cleared by OCSE, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), and the Office of the Secretary (OS) in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) before being released in final.

### ***OCSE Initiatives***

The OCSE has recently undertaken various initiatives that will affect the Annual Report to Congress. First, a Federal/State workgroup was convened to develop standard program definitions. The group developed common definitions for basic program elements such as deciding on what constitutes a “case.” The workgroup also developed new reporting forms for State data. These forms will become effective in Fiscal Year 1999 and will be used by OCSE to obtain information on the status and accomplishments of each State’s child support program. Included on these forms are data elements for ten program items, such as case inventories and paternity establishments.

Furthermore, in the future OCSE audits will assess the reliability of State data through comprehensive examinations of States’ data collection and reporting systems. The new audits are designed to provide assurance that the data States report are accurate and complete. The quality of this data is especially important since they will be the basis of the new incentive funding system. The data reliability audits will include an analysis of internal controls, an assessment of program logic and data definitions, and data testing. These audits will be tested in select pilot States at the

end of this fiscal year.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Sample Selection***

We selected a purposive sample of 36 individual users of the Child Support Enforcement Annual Report to Congress. First, we identified 7 main user groups for the report. These are:

- Congressional staff
- other Federal agency staff (non-OCSE)
- State Child Support staff
- Academic staff
- Advocates
- State legislators
- Media representatives

Within each group, we then selected individual users for our sample based on the following criteria: their knowledge and experience with the child support program, their knowledge and experience with the Annual Report, and recommendations from both OCSE and the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE).

In selecting users for our interviews, we sought out individuals who are very familiar with the Annual Report and need it to do their work. We particularly focused on users who need the report for policy purposes. In a prior survey of State satisfaction with OCSE, we asked all 50 State child support directors about the Annual Report; their input helped shape this evaluation. In general, they say they use the Annual Report and rely on it to support their State programs. Most also recommend making the report more timely. We chose five States with particular experience or concerns about child support data for this user feedback survey.

### ***Interviews with Users***

We conducted extensive interviews, in person and by telephone, with the 36 individuals selected for our sample. We will refer to these individuals as “users” in the findings of this report. We spoke with:

- 5 Congressional staff, representing both the House of Representatives and the Senate, as well as both the Democratic and Republican parties;
- 11 staff from Federal agencies, including the Office of the Secretary and Administration for Children in the DHHS, the Office of Management and Budget, the Congressional Budget Office, the General Accounting Office, and the Library of Congress;
- 5 State child support staff from five States;
- 7 representatives from seven different advocacy groups;
- 4 university-based researchers;

- 2 State legislators, and;
- 2 reporters from two national newspapers.

*Discussions with OCSE*

In addition to our formal interviews with 36 users, we also held discussions with senior staff from OCSE to help us understand the context of users' responses. During these discussions, we talked about the process involved in putting together the report as well as what they envision for the report in the future.

This inspection was conducted in accordance with the **Quality Standards for Inspections** issued by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency.

# FINDINGS

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## **OVERALL, USERS ARE SATISFIED WITH AND RELY ON THE CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS**

### **The Majority of Users are Satisfied With the Report**

Overall, a majority of users we spoke to (30 of 36) are satisfied with the Annual Report to Congress. These users are about evenly divided between those that are very satisfied and those that are somewhat satisfied. Of the remaining six users, five are very or somewhat dissatisfied, and one offers no opinion. Within individual user groups, a majority are satisfied overall. However, both of the very dissatisfied users are advocates.

Nearly all users view the report as a valuable and unique source of child support program information. Many comment that it is the main data resource on child support and the first place they go when they want to find out about the program. Despite having somewhat different needs, users concur that the Annual Report contains the type of data they need to do their job.

A majority of users (27) also praise the usefulness of the report. Many cite valuable and ample data as the main reasons why they think the report is useful. They also like the report's readability, and comment that it is well organized, has a consistent format, and presents data in a straightforward way.

Finally, users are also generally happy with the report's current format. More specifically, the majority suggests the report remain the same in terms of overall length, number of graphics, amount of text, and data tables. However, 10 users would like to see more data tables. Furthermore, 2 mention recent changes to the report, such as photographs and icons within graphs, as not entirely necessary. Finally, a few believe color coding and section tabs would help the reader to navigate through the report.

### **Users Need the Report for a Variety of Purposes**

Users report using the Annual Report to Congress in several different ways. Almost all use the report to answer specific data questions (35) and to compare State programs to each other (31). At least half of all users also use the report to conduct research, to obtain general program information, or to explain the child support program to others. Of all potential uses, the least common is to promote or advocate on behalf of the program. Fifteen users need the report for this purpose, including all seven advocates. Their greater need of the report for this purpose is the only difference among groups on how they use the Annual Report.

Users find particular sections of the report more useful than others. Table A below shows which sections of the report they use on a regular basis. As this table illustrates, users say that, of all the different sections, the one with State data tables is the most important to them.

Table A  
**Report Sections Used on A Regular Basis**

<b>Report Section</b>	<b>Regular Users #</b>
State Data Tables	33
State Box Scores	24
Graphic Summaries of Program Results	18
State Child Support Program Addresses	12
Federal Legislative History	11
OCSE Organizational Charts	10
Text on New Program Initiatives	8
Program Overview	7
Lists of State and Regional GPRA Projects	3
Appendix Summarizing Action Transmittals	3

Users also prefer certain types of data over others. Most (23) find the information on collections the most useful. Fourteen or more also say State-specific data and performance data is useful to them. On the other hand, only nine say data on paternities and expenditures is of greatest importance.

Users make frequent use of the report in their work, 9 use the report at least weekly, and 12 use the report monthly. Advocates appear to be the most frequent users; six of the seven advocates say they use the Annual Report at least monthly, and in fact half say they use it weekly. Over half of other Federal agency staff also use the report on a weekly basis. Media representatives and State legislators are the most infrequent users.

**Users Need a Variety of Child Support Data**

Users report needing different types of child support data. In order to effectively do their jobs, 13 say they need State-specific data and performance data, ten need financial data (six of which are Federal agency staff), and nine need data on program successes and weaknesses. The data needs of academics, media representatives, and State legislators are more limited than those of Congressional and other Federal agency staff, whose needs tend to be broader in scope. Certain

groups have particular needs for certain types of data. Congressional staff have the greatest need for State specific data, other Federal agency staff have the greatest need for performance and financial data, and advocates' greatest need is for performance data.

## **USERS CITE THE LACK OF A CLEARLY DEFINED STORY LINE, TIMELINESS, AND DATA INTEGRITY AS THE REPORT'S MAIN WEAKNESSES**

### **The Report Does Not Tell a Clear Story**

A majority of users (28) say the Annual Report to Congress, both data and text, does not convey a clear and consistent message on what is happening in the child support enforcement program. For example, many users want the report to link program resources with program outcomes, such as whether committing resources to license revocation results in the collection of additional child support payments.

Half of the users think the report does not show how the program is performing. Those who think the report is unsuccessful in documenting program performance say the report lacks analysis and does not give the reader a sense of what is working in the program and what is not. Says one user, "the way the current report is structured, the success of the program is underestimated . . . [the report] does not accurately reflect how well the program is doing." Others say the report lacks crucial data which is needed for them to evaluate the program's success. For example, some users note that no data are reported on the number of families or children receiving child support services, making it difficult to know if the program is meeting its ultimate goal.

On the other hand, a similar number of users say the report does an excellent or good job showing program performance. They say the report is data-intensive and provides a good overview of the program. One user makes the point that, considering the difficulty in showing how the program is doing given State variation, the report does a good job. Another believes it is up to the reader, using data from the report, to make his or her own judgement on how well the program is performing.

Some staff in OCSE believe the report's original legislative mandate limits what data they can collect and report in the Annual Report to Congress. They say that they are not able to collect more relevant and meaningful data because the legislation is outdated and has not been amended to reflect the many changes to child support enforcement over the past several years. They also say that in the future they would like to be able to highlight the program's successes and program goals and outcomes. Furthermore, staff in OCSE say they are reluctant to report more ratios, which might help to establish a more clearly defined story, because all necessary data may be unavailable or unreliable.

### **The Report is Not Timely**

Most users (22) also have concerns about the timeliness of the Annual Report. They say that the report takes too long to be published. As an example of this delay, the 1995 Annual Report to Congress was not released until the middle of 1997, and the 1996 report is yet to be published.

As a result, users must work with data that are out of date and no longer relevant in their work. One Congressional staffer says timeliness is a problem when Congressmen want to know the impact of welfare reform on child support enforcement and no current data are available to answer their questions. State child support staff are concerned with timeliness because they would like to be able to present more up-to-date comparative data to their State legislators. Additionally, a few users mention that it is difficult to publicize the program and explain it to others when the numbers are so outdated. One user, reflecting the views of several others, says the report “shouldn’t lag more than one year. [OCSE] should allow 6 months for States to report and correct their data, and 6 months to publish.”

Staff from OCSE are also concerned with timeliness. They point out that the Annual Report must go through a lengthy clearance process before it can be formally released. They also say that they are required to respond to comments from reviewers at each level of review before the report moves on. Furthermore, OCSE staff point out that States are allowed 6 months by law to revise their data. This time period is longer than the law’s requirement that the Annual Report be published no later than 3 months after the end of each fiscal year. Finally, OCSE staff state that the program has become more visible in recent years, which can influence when the report is released.

### **The Report Contains Poor Quality Data**

Despite their use of and reliance on the Annual Report, most users (22) have additional concerns with the integrity of its data. More specifically, they believe the report contains data that are not consistently accurate, reliable, or valid. Many also mention that some of the data reported are not comparable among States. As a result, they are forced to make policy decisions with data they have limited confidence in, and are not able to compare State programs to the extent they would like. Poor quality data is also a major reason why many users think the current report fails to meet all of their needs for child support information. Several users suggest OCSE provide some explanation of problems with data which may not be entirely accurate or reliable, such as on interstate cases. A majority also believe OCSE’s reporting forms should be included in the report, to show where the data come from.

Discussions with OCSE reveal that they are sensitive to users’ concerns about poor quality data. Some point out that States do not always report accurate data and are not always responsive to suggestions that they correct any questionable numbers. However, they are optimistic that quality will improve in the future. First, once all States have certified systems in place, the data States collect and report will be more comparable and reliable. Second, States will start to use standard definitions for basic program elements beginning in Fiscal Year 1999. This should eliminate some of the differences among States in how data are collected. For example, States should report unduplicated caseloads using a standard definition for “case.” Finally, with the implementation of incentive funding, States will be motivated to report accurate data in order to obtain greater funding for their State.

Most users react favorably to the recent OCSE initiatives to improve the quality of data in the report. Twenty-one are aware of the new standard definitions, and most believe these definitions

will improve the quality and comparability of data in the report. Several also mention that certified systems should facilitate more standardized data collection.

### **Users Judge the Report on Data Accuracy, Usefulness of Data, and Timeliness**

When selecting among multiple criteria that they would use to judge the Annual Report to Congress, nearly all users choose accuracy of State data, usefulness of data, and timeliness (35, 34 and 34 respectively), and rank these as being of greatest importance to them. As illustrated in Table B below, two of the criteria users rate as being most important to them are also those that they rate the lowest.

Table B  
**Users' Evaluation of Report**

<b>Rank*</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Average Rating**</b>
1	Accuracy of Underlying State Data	Fair
2	Usefulness of Data	Good
3	Timeliness	Poor
4	Accuracy of OCSE Reporting	Good
5	Usefulness of Text	Good

\* Users' ranking in order of most important to least important

\*\* On a 4-point scale from excellent to poor

### **USERS IDENTIFY SEVERAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR STRENGTHENING THE REPORT TO BETTER MEET THEIR NEEDS**

#### **Report Data in a More Meaningful Way**

A majority of users (24) say they want the report to contain more analysis of the data. In addition to wanting more context, users say they would also like further analysis of multi-year trend data, differences across States that affect performance, and the impact of recent program initiatives. Some users also suggest that OCSE make the most important data tables available in spreadsheet software format (such as Lotus or Quattro Pro), which would enable them to do additional analysis of the raw data on their own.

Similarly, 19 users suggest that the report present data in a more relevant context. In particular, they cite a desire for denominators and ratios to make the data more meaningful and comparable. For example, users want the report to give a ratio for the number of children who receive child support payments over the total number of children who are eligible for child support. This would be more helpful in showing how successful the program is in getting child support to the children who need it. In fact, OCSE staff indicate more meaningful ratios will be reported once

incentive funding data collection is fully implemented.

Many users believe that, without placing the data in a meaningful context and providing additional analysis, numbers alone do not tell how well the program is doing. One says, “You need denominators to tell the real story.” She suggests the report include statistics on collections received per amount due, and paternities established as a percentage of the number in need of being established. Users also want the report to provide an accurate picture of the program over time, enabling them to inform constituents, plan strategically, and effectively evaluate existing policies.

In addition to providing data in a more meaningful context, 23 users also think the report should contain more explanation of the data than it does now. The most frequent request for more explanation is for further definition of the data elements being reported. Some users also suggest integrating child support data with other program data, such as data from Head Start and TANF.

Another specific suggestion users have regarding the report’s data is to include more of it in the report. The majority of users (27) say important data are missing from the report. Some of their requests for additional data are very specific, such as license suspension data, data on non-custodial parents’ income and data related to the aging of debt. Other suggestions for what other data the report should include are broader, such as data on incentive funding measures, outcomes attributable to different initiatives, and the impact of welfare reform.

### **Make Program Information Available Sooner**

As already noted, the majority of users indicate that data in the report are out-of-date by the time it is published. While they acknowledge the challenges associated with getting a report of this nature out quickly, they do believe timeliness needs to be improved and offer specific suggestions for getting data out sooner. First, users who have access to preliminary report data cite this as a good step toward getting information out quicker; 11 suggest that OCSE release preliminary data on the Internet. Many users also cite the need to reduce the time it takes to review the report prior to publication. One user points out that incentive funding presents an opportunity to motivate States to improve the timeliness of their data submissions, thus allowing OCSE to speed up publication of the report.

Seventeen users suggest that OCSE release a short, focused summary document, preferably within one year of the end of the reporting period and prior to publication of the final Annual Report to Congress. One Congressional staffer says “I would like to see a shorter version of the report [before the Annual Report] with the most pertinent statistics because I need to have data in hand which reflects recent changes to the program for the upcoming legislative session.” Another user envisions one report, released on a fast track, which would be “refined, crisp, and limited to key indicators,” and a second report including “background information, additional statistics, and details that are secondary in nature.”

### **Re-evaluate the Report’s Narrative Section**

Users give mixed reviews of the report’s narrative section. Only a small number of users report

using this section of the report on a regular basis, one of whom says that having the program highlights in both textual and graphic form is helpful. However, 10 users suggest that the report has too much “spin” and is not objective enough. One suggests, “focus [should be] on giving an accurate picture instead of cheerleading.” Another user captures a number of others’ thoughts on the narrative section by saying “the text needs to be more of an analysis and summary of what’s going on with the Child Support Enforcement program and why.”

### **Consider Wider Distribution and Better Publicity of the Report**

Half of the users suggest more publicity of the Annual Report. More specifically, they say it should be better publicized to Congress, the media, and academia. For example, some advocates say they have to answer questions about the program from Congressional staffers who are not aware of the report’s existence. On a related note, half of all users say they did not get the 1995 report right away; these users are more likely to think the report should be better publicized. For example, one of the State legislators says she had difficulty obtaining the 1995 Annual Report. This suggests that, at a minimum, a more thorough distribution of the report would help interested users get the report sooner.

### **Make Future Reports Flexible to Accommodate Changes to the Program**

In the future, as child support enforcement continues to change, most users (22) think the report’s main purpose should be to show how well the program is performing. However, a majority (30) do not believe the report needs to be totally redesigned in order to do this. In fact, several users caution that changing the report too much might exclude a particular audience or threaten data continuity. A few users also note that they are finally familiar with the current report and that a totally new format would be frustrating.

Only five users suggest a completely new document for the future. These users believe that only a completely redesigned report can adequately meet the main purpose of showing overall program performance. Specifically, these users think that future reports should include other relevant actors from within government, the nonprofit sector, private interests, and even “the man on the street.” Some hope this will lend greater objectivity to the report, while others believe that different perspectives will better inform the report. One staff person from OCSE adds that the inclusion of more States in future designing of the report would not only be helpful but would also enhance current Federal/ State partnership goals.

When asked to suggest other reports of value, the most frequently cited is the Green Book, which is published annually by the House Ways and Means Committee and contains background and data on human service programs. Users believe this report provides a detailed and comprehensive story, with sufficient context and analysis. In particular, it is considered the standard resource for trend data and legislative changes; according to users, it is well-written, concise, and objective.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. Based on user feedback, we believe that in the future the Child Support Enforcement Annual Report to Congress should focus primarily on performance.

Specifically, it should:

- highlight program successes, strengths, and weaknesses;
  - emphasize performance data which demonstrates how well the program is meeting its goals, and;
  - adequately describe program accomplishments that, when used to compare different program strategies, may be valuable to Federal policy makers and State programs.
2. We also believe OCSE should review the report's production and distribution processes and identify specific actions to improve the report's timeliness, which is a major concern of users.

We believe both of these recommendations complement recent Federal government initiatives. Child support enforcement is a rapidly-changing program with a strong need for performance measurement data. Such data are required by law under the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), which mandates performance monitoring at the Federal level. Users believe the report would best meet this mandate by providing information on program goals and outcomes. Recent Federal strategies suggest performance measurement as a fundamental aspect of future government policy, and many users, as well as OCSE, envision the Child Support Enforcement Annual Report to Congress paralleling this new emphasis on government accountability.

## COMMENTS

We received comments on the draft report from the Administration for Children and Families. The ACF concurs with our recommendations. Beginning in fiscal year 1999, OCSE is planning to change the Annual Report to Congress to focus more on performance, and is also working to streamline production and distribution of the report. The full comments are presented in Appendix A.

# APPENDIX A

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In this appendix, we present in full the comments from the Administration for Children and Families.



COMMENTS OF THE ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
ON THE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL'S DRAFT REPORT, "CHILD  
SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS" (OEI-02-98-  
00070)

**General Comments:**

The Office of Child Support Enforcement's (OCSE) Annual Report to Congress has a diverse audience including State child support staff, academia, advocates, State legislators, and the media. In general, we believe the draft report fairly represents the views of these users of the Annual Report. We are particularly pleased to observe that 30, of the 36 persons the OIG interviewed, indicated their overall satisfaction with and reliance on the report. Nearly all of the commenters view it as a valuable and unique source of Child Support Program information, and most are generally satisfied with its current format.

**OIG Recommendation:**

Based on user feedback, we believe that in the future the Child Support Enforcement Annual Report to Congress should focus primarily on performance. Specifically, the report should: highlight program successes, strengths, and weaknesses; emphasize performance data which demonstrates how well the program is meeting its goals, and, adequately describe program accomplishments that, when used to compare different program strategies, may be valuable to Federal policy makers and State programs.

**Response:**

The OCSE has been working to be a results-oriented organization, and we have demonstrated this focus through efforts such as being chosen to participate as a pilot site for the Government Performance and Results Act. The performance based mandates of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 and the new incentive legislation will change the way data are gathered and reported, and these changes will be reflected in the Annual Report, beginning in fiscal year 1999.

**OIG Recommendation:**

We also believe OCSE should review the report's production and distribution processes and identify specific actions to improve the report's timeliness, which is a major concern of users.

**Response:**

The OCSE is working to streamline production and distribution of the report. We also publish a preliminary data report each year and distribute it to States and other interested parties. To make the report as user friendly as possible, we have it on our internet site and send it to all State offices as well as researchers and public interest groups.

