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Final Report: Nebraska Child Support Collection and Disbursement System Implementation Project

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Final Report

Nebraska Child Support Collection and Disbursement System Implementation Project

October 15, 1999

Submitted to the Executive Board of the Nebraska Unicameral

by

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June, 1999, the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center (PPC) was asked by the Executive Board of the Nebraska Legislature to undertake a study of child support issues. Specifically, the PPC was asked to recommend how Nebraska can preserve existing strengths and reduce or eliminate weakness in its child support *customer service* system as the state complies with a federal mandate and develops a centralized State Disbursement Unit (SDU) for the receipting and disbursement of child support payments.

In order to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of the present customer service system in Nebraska, as well as learn what other states are doing to service child support customers, the PPC spent most of its efforts consulting with Nebraska stakeholders (custodial and non-custodial parents; employers; child support enforcement workers, staff and officials; district court clerks; attorneys; policymakers and legislative and gubernatorial staff; judicial personnel; and other interested persons), state and federal child support enforcement staff and other officials from around the nation, leaders and staff from private companies working in child support around the country, and with other national experts. The PPC worked closely with an inter-governmental Work Group, consisting of representatives from the Unicameral, the Nebraska Child Support Enforcement/IV-D agency, the Governor's Office, the State Court Administrator's Office, and the District Court Clerk's Association.

The results of these efforts lead the PPC to offer 10 recommendations that we believe will help preserve existing customer service strengths and reduce or eliminate weaknesses:

- Establish an on-going, intergovernmental and key stakeholder team(s) to monitor and participate in the selection, implementation, and on-going evaluation of the customer service system in Nebraska.
- Make extensive use of a toll-free, Voice Response Unit (VRU)/automated telephone system with customer service representatives as the primary means of obtaining customer service.
- If possible, provide access to a person with whom customers can speak face-to-face for service.
- Provide customer services specifically for employers.
- Include all child support cases in the new SDU and customer service systems.
- Ensure adequate staffing and a sufficient infrastructure to allow customer service providers to succeed, and also slowly implement changes to the current child support system.
- Specify performance indicators and conduct customer satisfaction studies.
- Make use of new technologies to expand access to information and to allow innovative means for interactions between customers and customer service providers.

- Use the upcoming change as an opportunity to develop and expand innovative social programs designed to further the goals of the child support system.
- Be patient as the new systems are implemented and be proactive in informing stakeholders of upcoming changes.

Along with these 10 recommendations (and an elaboration of the rationales for the recommendations), seven policy decision points are identified and discussed. Five challenges to successful implementation of the SDU-linked customer service system are presented. Finally, we encourage all those involved in the child support system to work together, to move on from past disagreements, and engage in an effective decisionmaking process that will result in positive outcomes for Nebraska's children and families.

II. BACKGROUND: THE FEDERAL MANDATE

The Problem

Statistics paint a fairly bleak picture of a broken child support system in the United States. For example, as of 1989, 62% of all custodial parents in the United States did not receive the child support they were due, according to a 1994 Urban Institute report. Today, the gap between what is actually being collected and what legally is eligible for collection still totals in the billions of dollars. Millions of children entitled to support from a non-custodial parent received little or no support. In many cases, state and federal dollars are used to support custodial parents (typically mothers) in the absence of financial contributions from non-custodial parents who had the financial ability to pay.

Other data show other sides of the same problems and indicate inroads are being made. A report issued by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement in 1992 concluded that only 19% of all custodial parents covered by the nation's child support system received child support payments. By 1996 the figure increased to 20.5%. Despite such modest improvements, there exist wide disparities in state child support collections across states. For example, data from 1996 reveal 42% of support owed in Vermont was collected but only 10% in the District of Columbia was collected.

Over the past decades, various state and federal initiatives and mandates have succeeded in increasing child support collection rates. States are improving their child support enforcement procedures by using such tactics as revoking driver and other state issued licenses and posting a top 10 "deadbeat dads" list on the Internet. Between 1980 and 1992 child support enforcement caseloads grew by 180% as overall collections increased more than 400%. Between 1992 and 1996 the rate for collections rose by another 50%. Sixteen states improved their rates by 70% or more. In 1997 Minnesota, with the highest collection rate in the country, collected more than \$360 million. Between 1992 and 1996 collection rates in Texas increased 117% with \$700.3 million collected in 1997. In 1997 the total collected by all the states was \$13 billion, an increase of 68% more than 1992 collections, a figure that far exceeds what would be expected due to an inflationary adjustment during the same period. However, it is estimated that \$50 billion is still owed nationwide in past child support.

The Federal Response

The statistical figures cited above reflect a system that is undergoing repair. Despite upward trends, federal lawmakers continue to be concerned about the ongoing problem of inadequate financial support for custodial parents and the pressure this puts on the vast welfare system in the United States. Congressional attention to child support issues is not new; it has been increasing over the past half-century. In fact, Congress has been tinkering with child support enforcement-related legislation since the 1950 Social Security Act. A summary of federal legislation from 1950 through 1997 is included in Appendix A.

This was the context in which Congress, in 1996, addressed child support issues. Congress enacted a comprehensive reformation of welfare laws, in general. The welfare reform bill law was titled the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). At the last moment, in the framework of the myriad welfare initiatives addressed by PRWORA, state child support enforcement activities administered under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act (which encompass cases in which the custodial

parent receives governmental financial assistance or enforcement assistance, and which are commonly termed “**IV-D cases**”) were targeted and states’ IV-D programs were drastically affected.

Title III of PRWORA, the section of the law relating to child support enforcement, not only expands current requirements for state child support systems but also imposes a number of new mandates on states. Title III of PRWORA attempts to improve low collection of child support dollars from non-custodial parents and to improve enforcement of child support orders by implementing requirements to streamline child support collections, increase paternity establishments and child support orders, strengthen penalties for delinquent payments, and provide incentives for payment of child support orders.

In order to force states to make the changes mandated under PRWORA, the federal government tied compliance of the mandates to the receipt of federal welfare funds. Thus, states failing to enact the new child support reforms face severe financial sanctions, including suspension of all Title IV-D formula grants to the state, as well as potential reductions in Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant funding.

The potential economic consequence of noncompliance, through withholding federal funds, is staggering, with amounts at stake in the hundreds of millions of dollars in jurisdictions like California and Texas. In Nebraska, failure to comply carries a potential price tag of \$73 million.

Central to Title III of PRWORA is the creation of the state disbursement unit (SDU). Under the Act, states must centralize, into a single unit, the receipting and disbursement of payments of child support orders enforced under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act. The deadline initially was set for October 1, 1998, but this deadline was extended to October 1, 1999 for states like Nebraska with local court administered payment systems.

In addition, the Act mandates that payments of child support orders issued after January 1, 1994 in which the income of the non-custodial parent is subject to wage withholding be handled by the central unit. States had the option of *linking* local disbursement units instead of operating a single, centralized, SDU system, but only if the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services is satisfied that a linked system would be neither more costly nor more time consuming to establish or operate than a centralized system with a single disbursement unit. If the Secretary believes these conditions are met, a waiver from the centralization requirement can be issued. Of approximately 10 states that attempted a waiver, only South Carolina was successful in receiving approval.

Under the PRWORA provisions, the SDU is intended to streamline both collections and enforcement of child support orders. With a statewide payment and disbursement unit, the state is able to utilize technologies such as electronic funds transfer, high-speed check processing, and automatic billing and statement processing, thus providing more timely payment to the family at a lower cost to the state. Centralization is also expected to reduce discrepancies in records and promote standardized procedures and operations among local offices, thus reducing the number of disbursement errors and payment delays. Centralized collections will also simplify both wage withholding for employers by providing only one location to send

payments and interstate collections by having only one location in a state to contact for funds and for information.

Not surprisingly, Congress has continued to modify child support enforcement laws even as the implications of PRWORA are still being dealt with by states. During the summer of 1998, Congress expanded performance criteria for state receipt of Federal incentive funds. Previously, state incentive funds have been based on collection rates and program efficiency. Starting in fiscal year 2000, incentive funds will be based on a state's performance in five areas:

1. Paternity establishment percentage;
2. Number of cases with orders;
3. Number of cases receiving payments;
4. Number of cases receiving payments on arrears; and
5. Ratio of collections to costs.

Pending future changes to the federal child support enforcement may include the reduction of 66% reimbursement of state expenditures to 50%, and authorization for states to use unspent TANF funds to supplement state child support enforcement budgets.

III. NEBRASKA'S RESPONSE TO PRWORA'S REQUIREMENTS TO CENTRALIZE THE CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENT SYSTEM

Task Force and Study

In response to PRWORA, the Nebraska Legislature passed LB 437 in 1997. Among its provisions, LB 437 established a Governor's Child Support Collection Task Force to study and make recommendations for a centralized collection and distribution (i.e., SDU) unit in Nebraska that would handle child support orders enforced under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act (**IV-D cases**) and Income Withholding cases, as required under PRWORA. In addition, the Department of Health and Human Services contracted with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Bureau of Business Research (BBR) and Center on Children, Families, and the Law (CCFL) to compare the operating and staffing costs of three options for the state's child support payment. One of those options was to apply for a waiver to the mandate so Nebraska could operate a system linking local disbursement units rather than operate a centralized system with a single disbursement unit. In other words, the question was whether Nebraska, like South Carolina, might link together the district court clerks who, to this point, have been responsible for the administration of child support collections. In order to receive a waiver Nebraska would have to document that a decentralized system would neither cost more nor take more time to establish or operate.

The BBR/CCFL study found that a system of linked local units would not be more cost efficient than a centralized SDU. Instead, the study found that it would cost substantially less for the state to change its system to a centralized receipting/disbursement system because there were economies of scale that made a centralized administration of child support payments significantly more cost effective than the current decentralized system. Small jurisdictions simply could not compete with the cost efficiency of a single, large unit.

When presented with the BBR/CCFL study, the Governor's Task Force members reacted strongly. Some task force members felt that the study was unreliable in that its scope was too limited. For example, some members believed the cost efficiency calculus did not take into account the importance of customer service that district court clerks have provided to Nebraska's custodial and non-custodial parents. Other task force members were convinced of the validity of the study's findings and felt the state needed to comply with the federal mandate for centralized receipting and disbursement. These and other differences prevented the Task Force from coming to a consensus, and no recommendations were made regarding a centralized collection and distribution unit.

LB 637

Despite the inconclusive outcome of the Task Force, officials in the Nebraska Health and Human Services System (HHS) believed that the study sufficiently documented the cost savings of implementing an SDU and therefore believed that Nebraska would be unsuccessful in requesting a waiver. Thus, legislation was drafted to meet the requirements set forth by the federal government. The result was LB 637, introduced in the 1999 session by Senator Pam Brown.

Like many other states, discussion of a centralized child support unit started out with a political struggle. In part this struggle in Nebraska was attributable to general satisfaction with child support collection and

disbursement as it has evolved in the state, along with concerns about a federally mandated program that was felt not to be suited to the needs of Nebraskans. Numerous dissatisfied Nebraskans, including former members of the Governor's Task Force, strongly opposed proceeding with the implementation of an SDU. Among the concerns articulated were suspicions regarding the likelihood of success of a complex, technical system coordinated by the state's Department of Health and Human Services, and fears that the customer services provided by many district court clerks throughout the state would be lost. Moreover, there were specific concerns that the Child Support Enforcement agency would not employ enough customer service representatives to address the needs of custodial parents, non-custodial parents, and employers in light of the decreased customer service role for district court clerks.

In contrast, other Nebraskans argued strongly for the benefits of an SDU for the state. Some were convinced by the "economy of scale" perspective documented by BBR/CCFL in their study. Some were not convinced that district court clerks have been effective in their activities. Legislators heard complaints about checks being held for long periods by clerks to make sure the checks were backed by sufficient funds in the payor's account. They also heard from some dissatisfied custodial and non-custodial parents who spoke negatively about other aspects of the state's current system.

On general file, the first round of debate, there was a bracket motion filed which, if passed, would have stalled debate of LB 637 until the year 2000. Although this motion was defeated, the bill advanced in a form such that Nebraska would be required to seek a waiver from the SDU requirement, despite the conclusions of the BBR/CCFL study.

Notwithstanding the format of LB 637 following general file debate, the lawmakers came to believe that a waiver would not be feasible. The state's senators thus began working toward a compromise. This compromise was intended to address the needs and concerns of the stakeholders and constituencies who had been calling their legislative representatives, while at the same time complying with the federal mandate. Thus, on select file, the second round of debate, various options for LB 637 were discussed.

It was on select file that customer service became a central concern, and thus a central part of discussions. As the bill was considered on select file, many stakeholders reported to their senators that they felt that Nebraska was doing a reasonable job of responding to the needs of those involved in child support, and that they had concerns that the 14 customer service representatives located in Lincoln (as proposed in LB 637) would not only be an insufficient number of representatives to serve all of the stakeholders in Nebraska, but also that not having a local contact would be a disservice to particular parts of the state (e.g., western Nebraska). Again, other stakeholders were lobbying their senators to stay the course on implementing an SDU because of the economic efficiencies to be gained for the state and because of the federal sanctions that loomed as a result of noncompliance with the federal mandate. In light of these competing interests, LB 637 was passed in a very different form than first introduced. See Appendix B for the final version of LB 637.

There are four key provisions in LB 637. The first is Section 2, which created the SDU so that Department of Health and Human Services/Child Support Enforcement Agency could proceed with federal compliance and implementation of a centralized child support payment system. This section was written to be

very stark so as not to require or prohibit specific technicalities of the SDU, thus allowing for flexibility in its implementation.

Section 4 of LB 637 requires payments to be disbursed within two days after receipt, as required by PRWORA. It also requires the state, instead of the clerks, to be liable for unrecovered costs associated with insufficient funds checks. This section was an attempt to show the federal government that Nebraska was making a good faith effort to comply with the mandate in as timely a fashion as possible.

Section 5 requires all district courts to use the statewide automated data processing and information system. This was also part of the federal requirements, and thus a necessary section of the bill.

Section 3 requires a study to determine a method by which Nebraska could comply with federal requirements while maintaining aspects of the current system, such as high enforcement and good customer service. This section was added because it became apparent to the legislature that issues related to the SDU, such as customer service, needed further examination before the SDU was to be fully implemented. As a result, the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center was contacted and asked to consider taking on the task.

Implementation Project

In July 1999 the Nebraska Unicameral entered into an agreement with the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center (PPC) to undertake an implementation project:

to study customer service experiences in other selected states which are undergoing, or have undergone, the state disbursement unit (SDU) implementation process for child support collection and disbursement; to identify and examine customer service issues in Nebraska in the context of the SDU's implementation; and make recommendations that will assist in facilitating an effective implementation of an SDU for child support collection and disbursement.

In addition, the PPC was asked to maintain ongoing communication with the Child Support Enforcement officials to keep informed about the development of the state's SDU process and structure (see PRWORA and LB 637 § 2). The purpose of ongoing communications was to facilitate coordination between child support enforcement activities and the interests of the Executive Board of the Unicameral, as such coordination relates to customer service and child support enforcement features within SDU implementation.

Implementation Project Work Group

An Implementation Project **Work Group** was established to provide ongoing feedback about and advice on the study direction, information gathering, stakeholder contact, and data evaluation. The Work Group included PPC staff, and staff representatives from the Child Support Enforcement agency, the legislature, the judiciary, the Governor's office, and the Nebraska District Court Clerk's Association (see Appendix C for Work Group members). The Work Group had involvement in all aspects of the Implementation Project. The Work Group was provided additional technical assistance by the Child Support Enforcement Director (Daryl Wusk) and by federal governmental officials (Max Smith, Director for Administration for

Children and Families; David Aerts, Program Specialist in the same office; and several other of their colleagues) from the federal Child Support Enforcement office in our region (Region VII).

The Work Group met regularly, every other week, for two to three hours to consider the information collected and to discuss the meaning of the information we obtained for Nebraska's child support enforcement system. Additional opportunities for communication were facilitated through the Implementation Project through direct communications between meetings (via telephone, via e-mail, and via face-to-face discussions), joint visits by a subset of Work Group members to other states, joint participation in conferences and seminars, data evaluation, and in synthesizing of information and experiences. A draft Management Action Plan and the Calendar of Activities was developed to outline expected activities and responsibilities and the calendaring of these activities.

Implementation Project Components

Study Customer Service Experiences in Other Selected States. Other states' experiences, both successes and failures, offer constructive lessons as Nebraska begins embarking on compliance with the federal mandate. Indeed, a benefit of Nebraska's delay in moving toward a centralized SDU system is that the State is able to critically evaluate other states' implementation processes and learn from their successes and mistakes. Thirty-one states and territories have functioning SDU systems, as of this time, with those remaining in varying degrees of compliance with the SDU implementation mandate (ranging from South Carolina, which received a waiver pursuant to a cost-benefit study conducted in their state, to California, which simply has refused to comply with the federal mandate to this point). In order to cull experiences from states that would offer most relevance to Nebraska's unique challenges, it was decided that we would gather information about other states' experience both through collection of printed materials (e.g., reports, audits, surveys, etc.) and through interviews of child support officials and staff from various states. We determined those states with mature SDU systems as well states where the SDU process was closer to Nebraska's situation could offer important guidance. We wanted to focus on those states with geographies and population numbers and distributions approximating Nebraska, but we did not want to avoid states dissimilar to Nebraska but which might have lessons for Nebraska. We also determined that the perspective of federal officials, private consulting firms, and representatives from national organizations, such as the National Conference of State Legislatures and the National Center for State Courts, could provide importance guidance and insights to Nebraska.

Our study of customer service experiences in other states entailed visits to several states for direct observations of their child support systems' operations; collecting and examining published and unpublished literature from states, federal agencies, associations, news media, academic and trade journals, web pages, private evaluators and consultants, and other sources; telephone and in-person meetings with officials, staff, and stakeholders from other states and from child support organizations and agencies; and attendance at and participation in several conferences and meetings, including the joint Iowa/Kansas/Missouri/Nebraska ("Four State") Judicial Conference, the annual meeting of the National Child Support Enforcement Association, the National Legislators' Symposium on Child Support, and the annual meeting of the Nebraska Child Support Enforcement Association. See Appendix Y for listing of persons interviewed regarding other states' experiences.

We also decided that the private sector -- that is, the general corporate world, not the private sector involved in providing child support services -- might provide valuable guidance and a business perspective in understanding customer service expectations and experiences. We also contacted two customer service call centers and researched business literature about customer satisfaction with and response to call centers and automated voice response units (VRUs).

Identify and Examine Customer Service Issues in Nebraska. Nebraska stakeholder input was a primary component of the Implementation Project. The Project inquired into current experiences in the child support system, asked about aspects of the current system that should be retained, examined problems and barriers in the current system, presented information about possible alternatives, and solicited feedback from a broad cross-section of stakeholders. The Implementation Project sought Nebraska feedback through the convening of two Child Support Advisory Group meetings, presentations and roundtable discussions at the Nebraska Child Support Enforcement Association annual meeting, personal interviews with stakeholders throughout the state, administering several surveys, and engaging in other information gathering activities.

Facilitate Communications Regarding SDU Development Process and Structure. Impending federal sanctions dictated that the development of an SDU structure and recommendation of a public or private entity to administer the SDU needed to occur in parallel to the Implementation Project. Thus, assuring that communication flow was maximized between the SDU structure development and the Implementation Project would be of crucial importance. Because the Work Group comprised representatives from the executive branch (responsible for development of the SDU structure and responsible for the recommendation to the Legislature whether a public or private entity should be used to administer the SDU) and the legislative branch, it was hoped that the Work Group meetings could provide a forum for ongoing communication about both the SDU process and structure.

Make Recommendations. It was decided the PPC should issue recommendations after undertaking its inquiry. The inquiry would allow the PPC to review existing information regarding child support, in general, and child support customer service, in particular; collect new data on these same issues; and consult with stakeholders of all levels from Nebraska and experts, staff, and officials from outside Nebraska.

IV. NATIONAL AND OTHER STATES' EXPERIENCES

The National Experience

As previously discussed, the experience of other states would be a critical component in the Implementation Project's efforts. We begin with a discussion of the national context in which Nebraska's activities are taking place.

Child support enforcement is a significant national effort. Total expenditures to operate child support enforcement throughout the country totaled \$3.4 billion in the 1997 fiscal year. Of that amount, approximately \$2.3 billion was borne by the federal government and \$1.1 billion was provided through state dollars. During fiscal year 1997, collections totaled \$13.4 billion, making the investment-to-collection ratio approximately one dollar for every four dollars in collections. There are 60,000 child support enforcement workers nationally. No federal program affects more children (with the exception of the Department of Education), and child support reaches four times more families than the TANF program.

A recent study found that child support enforcement expenditures produce savings in programs such as AFDC (now TANF), Food Stamps Program and Medicaid, and that expansions to the child support enforcement program could result in roughly 23 cents in saving for each additional dollar collected. Another study, in the state of Washington, reported that the child support enforcement program contributed to \$6.5 million in savings during two study periods and substantially increased how long people stayed off welfare. A study conducted by the Center for Law and Social Policy concluded that the size of a state's child support budget was positively related to program performance.

When child support collections are made on behalf of a family receiving TANF or other federal welfare programs, the state retains the child support payment to offset state welfare costs. These funds and other fees have often provided a margin of profit in state child support programs. However, by the year 2000, most states will be experiencing net costs in administering their child support programs. This is, in part, because there has been a rapid decline in the number of families receiving TANF funds. In fact, in 1998, less than one-fifth of IV-D collections (and 29% of the cases) were for TANF families.

The child support system now extends beyond social service systems, encompassing the business and financial communities. The use of financial institutions for data matching purposes helps to identify funds that in the past were often shielded from child support authorities. Perhaps the most significant development involves employers. They are mandated to participate in New Hire reporting (tracking new employees). Over the past decade, federal legislation has provided for employers to participate in income withholding, and now approximately 60% of all collected funds are due to income withholding efforts.

Other States' Experiences

Other states' experiences, both successes and failures, offer constructive lessons as Nebraska begins embarking on compliance with the federal mandate. Indeed, a benefit of Nebraska's delay in moving toward a centralized SDU system is that the State may critically evaluate other states' implementation processes and learn from their successes and mistakes. According to the federal Office of Child Support

Enforcement, 31 states and territories will have implemented their SDU system by October 1, 1999. The majority of remaining states and territories plan to implement their SDU system by October 1, 2000.

States are approaching the organization of SDUs and their related customer service activities in many different combinations of ways. That is, some states have contracted the administration of their SDU and customer service activities to a single vendor. Other states administer the SDU and customer service activities within state agencies. Still other states have developed combined privatized and public partnerships. Appendices D and E include the results of two national surveys of public/private partnerships, partnerships between IV-D agencies and private contractors, and a broader survey of private contracts within human services. Although all collections and disbursements must be handled centrally, states are variously providing customer services using centralized, decentralized (locally-based), and combined methods. A recent survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families found that four states have developed stand-alone contracts for the administration of automated VRUs. Six have included the administration of a VRU in the contract for their SDU. Twenty-one states are operating in-house VRUs. A chart is included in Appendix F that provides information on states and the administrative configurations they are using for their SDUs and customer services.

Information about other states' experiences was gathered both through collection of printed materials (e.g., Reports, Audits, Surveys, etc.) and through interviews of staff and officials from those states. We determined that states with mature SDU systems as well as states where the SDU process was closer to Nebraska's situation could offer important guidance. We wanted to focus on those states with geographies and population demographics approximating Nebraska, but we did not want to avoid states dissimilar to Nebraska which might have lessons for Nebraska. We also determined that the perspective of federal officials, private consulting firms, and representatives from national organizations, such as the National Conference of State Legislatures and the National Child Support Enforcement Association, could provide important guidance and insights to Nebraska.

Printed Materials

A vast amount of information has been collected from a wide variety of sources to inform our understanding of other states' experiences. Materials include information from public agencies, private contractors, researchers and others. These materials are listed in Appendix Z (Bibliography).

Interviews with State Officials

The information gathering process provided a picture of the range of experiences and likely relevance of those experiences for Nebraska. To further probe and better understand the successes, failures, and recommendations of others in the implementation of SDU systems and customer service activities, interviews were conducted with key staff and officials. Specifically, we wanted to: understand states' overall models for providing customer service (e.g., centralized versus decentralized, regional versus local, reliance on a VRU, use of private contractors); hear about the availability of different types of customer contact options and states' experiences in providing alternatives; gather statistics about use of and satisfaction with customer service options; and learn how states had managed the change process. Below is summarized, very briefly, aspects of selected states' customer service structures and SDU systems. The

summaries show the breadth of available alternatives and challenges facing Nebraska as a system is chosen here.

Mature SDU Systems

Three states—Iowa, New York, and Maine—were selected because they are pioneering states in developing and using SDUs in their child support program. Indeed all three states began their SDUs during the 1980s, well before the federal mandate.

State of Iowa. Iowa has one of the most mature SDUs in the United States. Receipting and disbursement are performed by state agencies. The CSE/IV-D agency receipts payments and the Department of Revenue disburses them. During the 1980s, the Iowa legislature called on the CSE/IV-D agency to increase enforcement/collection activities. This led the CSE/IV-D agency to reduce customer service availability in order to focus on collections. The neglect of customer services, however, resulted in widespread dissatisfaction and complaints to the legislature, the Governor's office, and the CSE/IV-D agency itself. In response, the legislature changed its expectation of the CSE/IV-D program from solely looking at collections to also looking at customer service. The CSE/IV-D agency decided to undertake specific measures to improve customer services. One of the decisions was to undertake a comprehensive customer satisfaction survey. As a result of this survey, Iowa has implemented a series of steps to better serve custodial and non-custodial parents. They were so pleased with their successes in light of the survey they decided to make customer service satisfaction surveys an ongoing part of their activities. A private consulting and evaluation firm, Data Point Research Inc., works closely with the CSE/IV-D agency to design the surveys and decide on the sampling strategies. In addition, Iowa developed an employer task force to examine employer issues. The result of this task force was the creation of a special customer service center for employers. Finally, the CSE/IV-D agency currently maintains some separation of operations for IV-D and non-IV-D clients. They had previously only worked with IV-D clients and are now including non-IV-D cases as well. Until recently, non-IV-D/non-income withholding cases were the responsibility of the state's district court clerks.

Since November 1997, Iowa has contracted its child support customer service responsibilities to a private vendor (Policy Studies, Inc. of Colorado). Iowa's VRU system is intended to assist callers with basic questions regarding payment history and child support enforcement activities. When customer support representatives are unable to answer a caller's question, they may refer the question, by email, to the appropriate child support enforcement worker. The child support worker is mandated to respond within 48 hours. Iowa's privatized customer service center consists of five team leaders, one trainer, two administrative assistants, one deputy manager, and thirty-nine child support customer service specialists to handle the calls. The current contract requires the call center to answer 1,302 calls per day, averaged over a one month period. Ninety-five percent of their customer service representatives have no government or child support background. A separate call center takes questions from employers.

Iowa estimates that approximately 120,000 calls are received through the VRU each month, and that 98-99% of callers want information regarding payments. Iowa's current caseload consists of:

160,000 IV-D cases; 30,000 non-IV-D/income withholding cases; and an indeterminate number of non-IV-D/non-income withholding cases. Iowa is only now beginning to include non-IV-D/income withholding cases in their centralized system. Previously, however (when the SDU only included IV-D and income-withholding orders), if a non-IV-D/non-income withholding case at anytime moved to an IV-D case it was, from that point on, included within the centralized collection system. A parent could appeal to the courts to revert payment to the district court clerk; however, only a very few parents chose to do so.

Iowa's customer service representatives (attached to the VRU) receive approximately 1,400-1,600 calls per day. They resolve 85% of all callers' questions, without needing to refer to state staff. One person is able to handle approximately 45-55 customer service questions per day. Their average handling time of calls is 5-5½ minutes of talk time and a total time of 9 minutes for the entire transaction (from caller hold time to talk time to representative updating the narrative). Iowa's experience is that if they have 300 busy signals during a given time frame that translates to approximately one-third of actual individuals attempting to call (100). They busy-out 20% of all calls.

Analysis of the caller profile to the VRU customer service representatives indicates the following breakdown: 60% custodial parents; 20% non-custodial parents; 4% employers; 16% other (e.g., bankers, other states, current spouses, child support enforcement workers).

Iowa's CSE/IV-D agency has a contract for approximately \$1 million dollars with the state's court administrator's office for local district court clerks to establish orders, make copies, and provide other support activities in child support cases. The clerks' offices conduct quarterly time studies and bill for the work done. As the state further centralizes collection activity, clerks will accept only one final non-IV-income withholding payment through their offices and will notify employers that future payments must be made through the centralized unit. In moving non-IV-D/income withholding cases from the clerks, they are not aware of the loss of any clerks' staff. They report that removal of collection and payment will free clerks to do more court-focused work.

State of New York. New York's system of customer service provision relies primarily on face-to-face interaction at the local level. They do not operate an extension call center, believing that call centers are costly to operate, and serve a small group of callers, telling them the same things, over and over. New York's VRU, by some officials' assessments, is notoriously hard to reach. New York's SDU operations are privatized (Lockheed Martin) and have been operational for over a decade. New York has a \$50 million, five-year contract with Lockheed Martin. New York has 1.2 million IV-D cases and collects more than \$1 billion per year. They have approximately 2,100 local child support enforcement workers throughout their 58 counties. Their SDU only handles IV-D payments and disbursements. Customer service is provided primarily in a decentralized manner through county child support offices with some support by the SDU vendor. County workers are able to access records and have their own call center at the SDU to offer assistance in resolving payment questions. Lockheed Martin has approximately 20 staff persons who work with employers to resolve questions about suspended payments (e.g., payments with inadequate

information, miscalculated totals, etc.). Approximately 80% of these suspended payments are resolved within one day. In moving to the SDU system, New York produced brochures and convened various meetings throughout the state for employers. New York charges non-TANF families for representation. However, some counties do waive this fee.

State of Maine. Maine centralized the collection and disbursement of IV-D payments in 1981. The state is currently in the process of adding non-IV-D cases. All SDU and customer service responsibilities are handled by public employees. Maine's VRU receives 480,000 calls annually (and their IV-D orders total 61,000). The VRU provides payment information, and information about where to call if additional assistance is needed. Custodial parents may contact the centralized case review unit for information about enforcement, and so on. This unit is staffed by approximately 13 front-line workers. Non-custodial parents, employers, and others with questions not answered by the VRU can contact their local field office. Maine has seven local field offices, staffed by state workers, throughout the state. A citizen may have to travel several hundred miles to reach the local field office. Only the state SDU workers are able to make changes to the payment record, but field offices can authorize payment changes. The district court clerks are not involved in any substantive way with child support customer service. The child support program has worked closely with TANF to provide information about and orientation to the programs. The child support program provides information packets and ongoing assistance to legislators. Child protective service and child support cases comprise the largest segment of calls to legislators.

Geographically Proximate and Demographically Similar

It was felt that states in the same region might face challenges similar to Nebraska's challenges. In order to learn what these states are doing and to learn how well they think things are progressing, we spoke to staff and officials from three adjacent states.

State of Missouri. In an effort to improve customer service to child support stakeholders, Missouri elected to implement a centralized customer service unit in 1992. All customer calls to the state office, as well as written correspondence and inquiries from the Governor's office and legislative offices, are handled by the unit. Missouri's central customer service unit is intended to handle customers' most basic questions. More specific questions are referred to the caseworkers in the field. Missouri's vendor provides limited support with a VRU and staff, answering collection and disbursement questions only. Like Montana and Massachusetts, Missouri has set up a 1-800 number for child support customers to call. The 800 number is usually the point of first contact. Callers are greeted by a VRU, which functions 24 hours a day, and are given a menu of options, one of which is to speak to a live customer service technician.

In the future, both customer service and SDU operations will be privatized. Missouri has had a regional customer service VRU. As they move into their SDU, they have separated customer service from the SDU contract. Missouri has used very close collaboration between the executive, judicial, and legislative branches to implement their SDU and preserve funding for clerks, who no longer will be working in the child support customer service area. A weighted work time study of Missouri's circuit court clerks resulted in the addition of more than 110 clerks as the study showed

that more clerks were needed for court-focused work (regardless of “losing” the component of child support customer service). Missouri is developing an outreach/dissemination plan to notify constituencies of the new system. In Missouri, the district court clerk’s record is as significant as Nebraska’s clerk’s records are.

State of Kansas. Kansas’ employer profile is very close to Nebraska’s (i.e., in Nebraska, more than 80% of employers employ 10 or fewer employees). Kansas only recently issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for their SDU, which will include both IV-D and non-IV-D cases. As they move into their SDU, customer service is a biddable (but optional) part of the SDU contract. Their SDU system will provide information to district court clerks, but the clerks will not have any ability to update information on IV-D orders. Clerks will continue to update and make changes to non-IV-D orders. Kansas is currently reviewing several proposals but have not decided on a vendor yet. The review of the proposals resulted in additional questions for the vendors and is taking longer than expected. They are planning to begin negotiations September 23-24, 1999.

State of Colorado. Colorado has been receipting and disbursing IV-D payments centrally since 1991. Lockheed Martin has been their SDU contractor since its inception. In conjunction with the SDU, Lockheed Martin operates a VRU. Approximately 80% of the calls are handled through the automated system, with the remaining 20% handled by customer service representatives. Customer service representatives may send an e-mail to county offices when they are unable to answer a IV-D caller’s question and it then becomes the county’s responsibility to return the call. Parents, employers, and county-level, child support workers all use the VRU. Colorado conducts an annual survey of callers to the VRU and finds that people are generally satisfied with their experience. When Colorado started the SDU in 1991, they did have some start-up problems and it ended up taking a year to fully convert all the IV-D cases to the SDU. Colorado is now moving toward including non-IV-D cases into the SDU, and hopes to have the conversion completed by next March. Colorado is finding that non-IV-D cases have been more problematic and time-consuming to include in the SDU because case information is often missing or incorrect. IV-D customer service questions (beyond payment) are handled by county offices. The county offices are structured a variety of ways (e.g., privatized, public). Non-IV-D customer service questions (beyond payment) will be handled by a central office-administered call center where five customer service representatives are available directly by phone (no VRU). With the move to including non-IV-D orders into the SDU, the clerks’ major responsibilities will be to set up cases and occasionally take cash payments. Counties are responsible for computing arrearages. The state will hold the official record. Colorado has worked closely with the courts to implement the SDU. Colorado also has ongoing collaborative teams of stakeholders to provide feedback and help prioritize initiatives. Lockheed Martin also has a contract with Denver County to provide child support enforcement and establishment.

More Recent SDUs

A number of states are (by their report and the assessment of federal officials and other commentators) successfully implementing SDUs in direct response to the federal mandate. These states differ in their use of contractors, centralized versus decentralized customer service, technological resources, district court or friends of the court, and state agency staff.

State of Arizona. Arizona centralized its child support customer service in Maricopa County in 1994. This unit is limited to one county because a statewide unit was not feasible at the time. Arizona implemented their statewide SDU in December 1998. Arizona's SDU had first processed only IV-D payments, and later also incorporated non-IV-D payments. Their experience was that non-IV-D cases were more problematic in including in the SDU because case information was often missing or incorrect. During the first months of SDU implementation, Arizona found that two key issues in incorporating non-IV-D cases into the SDU were: unidentified payments (fully 2% were not on their child support enforcement system) and misdirected payments (payments made to clerks instead of SDU with the military being the worst offender). Lockheed-Martin is their SDU vendor and they process both IV-D and non-IV-D payments.

IV-D customers may use a centralized VRU to obtain information, leave a message, or talk to a customer service representative (a recently completed audit recommended privatizing the CSE/IV-D customer service call center). Non-IV-D cases obtain customer service assistance from their Clerks of the Superior Courts (similar to Nebraska's District Court Clerks). Clerks have real time access to the SDU's records. Clerks had ranged from manual to technologically sophisticated, so there were training issues for clerks to enable them to use the system. Either the central office or the clerks may provide evidentiary information as both entities access the same database. There are security profiles for each level of worker that determines what screens they can view and what they can change. When a customer service call center worker cannot resolve a question, they send a tickler note to the appropriate worker and in most cases the worker must respond in 48 hours.

Policy Studies, Inc. operates a separate employer customer service operation. Employers use the VRU and may access five customer service representatives specializing in employer concerns.

State of Minnesota. The customer service system is decentralized. Customer service is provided by county child support workers (these are county employees, *not* state employees). The CSE/IV-D agency maintains a VRU for payment information only, and voice messaging capabilities. Voice messaging bundles similar messages (e.g., requests for brochures) into mailboxes, streamlining staff activity. For example, prior to the voice messaging it took staff up to 20 minutes to take a brochure order and mail it out; it now has been reduced to about 3 minutes. A fax server automatically faxes out requested information, needing no staff involvement. From May through July 1999, Minnesota's VRU received an average of 144,054 calls per month.

Another VRU handles employers, interstate callers, banks, and others' calls. Automated messages provide information about New Hire reporting, income withholding, fax requests, and brochure orders. Callers may transfer to offsite assistance provided through customer service provided by other state programs (e.g., New Hire Reporting Center, Electronic Fund Transfer Desk, State Parent Locate, Policy Help Desk, Central Registry). This call center received an average of 1,173 calls per month from May through July 1999.

A general information VRU provides information on child support services and will receive information from callers about alleged fathers. From May through July 1999, Minnesota's general information call center received an average of 2,058 calls per month.

A staffed, centralized call center is only available to county workers who have questions they cannot resolve. From May through July 1999, Minnesota's county call center received an average of 3,353 calls per month.

The county record is the official record for payment; however, both county and the state may make changes to the record. Minnesota prefers to include all child support orders in the CSE/IV-D computerized system. One means by which this is accomplished is through a fee system in which parents are given the option, when an order is established, to pay \$25 to be included in the system, or to pay \$15 per month if they choose not to be included in the system but at some later date request IV-D designation.

State of Illinois. The DuPage County District Court Clerk's Office was selected to act as the SDU in Illinois. DuPage County will also maintain a centralized VRU with customer service information for the entire state. The VRU will be used by local clerks, state workers, and parents. There will be a separate VRU number for employers. Customers may also receive local customer service from their district court clerk. Employers, clerks, and state workers will all receive customer service from the VRU maintained by the SDU.

When the federal mandate was issued the CSE/IV-D program faced challenges in developing the SDU. There was an absence of trust between the agency and the legislature. In addition, the district court clerk's association was strongly and vocally opposed to the state's complying with the mandate. A new CSE/IV-D director was hired and immediately began building collaborative working relationships with many stakeholder groups. A formal task force was convened, comprising employers, clerks, advocacy groups, and others. The task force researched the options available to Illinois (including privatization, governmental options, and applying for a waiver from the mandate). Illinois, through legislation, determined that it would strictly comply with the federal mandate (i.e., SDU receipting and disbursing for only IV-D and income withholding cases, as required by the mandate). The legislation also enables clerks to continue to charge and receive fees, such as the \$36 annual fee to users to be included in the IV-D system.

In light of the fact that the DuPage County District Court Clerk's Office will run the SDU, clerks throughout the state expect to remain actively involved in the child support system and continue to

provide customer service to constituencies. Clerks may take information from customers about address changes and other changes to the record (and then provide the information to the state). In essence, local clerks' roles remain unchanged, with the exception of no longer receipting and disbursing IV-D and income withholding payments. Checks issued by the SDU will even continue to carry the name of the appropriate district court clerk. However, because clerks are no longer receipting and disbursing payments, there is some realization that payments to clerks, from the CSE/IV-D agency, may be reduced in future years.

The SDU is responsible for outreach to large businesses. The local clerks are responsible for outreach to small employers in their communities.

State of Wisconsin. Wisconsin has contracted with Lockheed Martin to operate both the SDU and the VRU. Lockheed Martin subcontracts disbursement to a local bank (FirstStar). County child support workers also provide some minimal types of customer service (e.g., responding to allocation, distribution and account reconciliation questions and issues), and will accept cash payment for those persons (approximately 7% of collections) who persistently refuse to use the SDU. County workers have their own, direct line to SDU customer service workers. The responsibility for receipting and disbursing of child support had previously been assumed by clerks of court in most counties. District court clerks had also provided customer service, and the move to the centralized VRU and county worker-based customer service has resulted in the loss of some district court clerk staff. Clerks from counties with the smallest populations were particularly reluctant to give up their child support customer service. However, the statewide association made the decision that the clerks would not be extensively involved in child support activities after SDU implementation. Clerks now are only involved minimally in child support (e.g., entering orders, etc.). When Wisconsin initially attempted to develop its SDU system, it failed. The state did not have the information technology to successfully operate an SDU.

Parents, employers, and the telecommunication device for deaf persons may call separate toll-free numbers that route calls to the VRU for payment and collection information. Callers have the option of speaking with one of the 24 customer service representatives, who are available from 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. If someone calls after-hours, they have the option of using reply-side messaging, in which they leave their question and are instructed on how to retrieve their answer from a private voice mail box after a customer service representative has had the chance to respond. Employers may identify themselves and receive assistance from customer service representatives specifically trained to handle employer issues. Approximately 70% of Wisconsin's payments are through income withholding. Lockheed Martin sends monthly bills to all employers. Twelve additional customer service representatives specialize in adjustments (misapplied payments, etc.).

Wisconsin formed an advisory group for the SDU implementation; however, employers were not involved in the group. In hindsight, officials believe that they should have done more to include participation from employers.

Wisconsin found that, even after extensive planning, they faced unexpected problems in the centralized receipting and disbursing. For instance, upon implementation of the SDU they received numerous complaints from custodial parents who reported that they had not received their child support payment. After an extensive investigation, Wisconsin found that the checks had been received by the custodial parents, but because they came in a different envelope, some custodial parents had assumed they were junk mail and had been throwing them away without opening them.

Wisconsin also established a “Fast Track Policy Group” that returns policy decisions in one week to counties and the vendor when policy decisions are needed. An advisory group provides answers to frequently asked questions so that there is as much standardization as possible in the system.

Wisconsin expects to pay approximately \$31 million over their five-year contract with Lockheed Martin. The payment for a customer service contract is fixed based on collection volume. A state CSE/IV-D employee is housed on-site at the SDU facility to gather data and monitor performance.

Since inception of full operations, Lockheed Martin averages 16,276 calls per day to their VRU, and 1,114 to their customer service representatives. A one-day snapshot of their customer service center indicates 8% of the calls were hang-ups, and there was an average one minute, 11 second wait time. Wisconsin expects to collect \$900 million this year. They receive approximately 22,000 payments a day. They handle approximately 485,000 total cases per year (approximately 70,000 of which are non-IV-D).

State of Florida. Florida has contracted with the Florida Association of Court Clerks to administer the SDU. The contract is a five-year contract, renewable up to 10 years. The RFP for the SDU was developed with the CSE/IV-D agency, the clerks’ association, and the legislature. The clerk’s association has subcontracted the receipting and disbursing to Lockheed Martin. The clerk’s association’s contract with Lockheed Martin is a three-year contract and has been negotiated at a flat rate, so if collections increase, they will likely have to request additional funding. Lockheed Martin is responsible for insufficient funds checks and for misapplied checks, unless the clerks have provided an incorrect address. Lockheed Martin is also responsible for business outreach and maintaining the tables of the state’s employers. The SDU will have a VRU with 40 customer service representatives; however, district court clerks will also provide local customer service. Each clerk makes the determination whether their non-mandated cases (non-IV-D, non-income withholding) will be included in the SDU processing or not. Clerks are responsible for making distribution decisions for non-standard payments. Clerks hold the official record. Florida has established clear performance measures to monitor the SDU. Florida charges a 4% fee for collections on non-IV-D cases. The clerk’s association is working with the clerks throughout the state to redesign staffing and business processes. Florida has approximately 980,000 cases (approximately half are “inactive,” i.e., have not received payment during the last six months).

State of Montana. In 1995, Montana's Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED) contracted with a vendor to create and maintain a centralized Child Support Customer Service Unit to respond to incoming telephone calls. All calls to CSED are directed through the customer service unit. Prior to the establishment of the centralized customer service unit, customers called a regional office, where they talked to caseworkers. The centralized customer service unit was created to make it easier for customers to get answers to inquiries regarding child support. Unit staff workers answer basic questions, and refer all calls that require action to field staff. Customers calling the 800 number set up by the state are immediately routed to the VRU. Once there, they can either access automated information regarding payments or speak to an agent. Feedback from customers and caseworkers has been positive. The CSE/IV-D agency's privatization of the customer service function was premised on the belief that child support enforcement workers (and perhaps, particularly the best ones) do not always have the patience and tact to deal with customer service-related questions and complaints, and that privatization enables the state to benefit from a contractor's experience with providing customer service.

Montana receives approximately 22,000 phone calls a month (they have approximately 40,000 cases); about 30% go to the VRU for payment information. The average length of a customer service representative-handled phone call is 3½ minutes with 1½ minutes allowed for documentation. Montana's contract with the vendor sets parameters such as: calls must be answered within four rings, no one is kept on hold for more than one minute, and 95% of all calls are resolved by the vendor (without needing to ask for state assistance).

State of Massachusetts. Massachusetts, which in 1998 had a total of 253,000 child support cases, has had a centralized customer service unit (call center) in operation since 1993. Customer service is handled by case workers, a central child support enforcement unit, and an automated voice responder. Customer service unit staff do a certain amount of case work in order to resolve the calls, including issuing income withholdings, mailing out new applications for services, sending employer and address verification requests, and mailing copies of payment records. They also make calls to employers and others to verify information and call back customers when appropriate. The receipting and disbursement vendor does not provide customer service.

Massachusetts has set up an 800 number dedicated to child support questions that is available in all fifty states and parts of the Caribbean. When a customer calls the 800 number, he or she is routed to the VRU. Once connected to the VRU, the customer can either access automated information regarding payments and other IV-D program information, or speak to an agent. Massachusetts' customer service unit receives approximately 28,168 calls per week. Of those calls, 9,593, or 34%, are handled by customer service representatives and 18,575, or 66%, are answered by the VRU. Calls that cannot be resolved by customer service agents are sent to the local offices for further work. Massachusetts experimented with allowing voice messages, but found it too time consuming to transcribe the messages and many messages were too incoherent to be transcribed. Massachusetts has approximately 242,000 IV-D child support cases.

Planning Stage SDUs

Three additional states – Michigan, Alabama, and Texas – were selected for consultation as they, like Nebraska, are still in the planning stages. Michigan’s approach was instructive as they make use of a local, Friends of the Court system. Alabama plans to use an existing VRU and both clerks and county offices for customer service. Texas is redrafting the RFP for its SDU, but has a customer service component already operational.

State of Michigan. Michigan is one of only two states that has received a federal waiver that will provide an extended time-line for SDU implementation (in the meantime they will utilize local, linked receipting and disbursement). Michigan is now putting in place the receipting and disbursing of income-withholding payments only. They will bring in non-income-withholding payments (direct pay) during the coming year. In the meantime, Friends of the Court will continue to receipt and disburse direct pays, and provide customer service. (In Michigan, Friends of the Court are quasi-judicial offices that also provide child support enforcement activities. Therefore, there is an expectation that reduced receipting and disbursing responsibility will free up Friends to concentrate on enforcement, maintenance, and mediation issues, and there will be no reduction in funds paid to the Friends. Friends are civil servants of the Supreme Court.) Lockheed Martin has been contracted to operate the SDU and VRU for a five-year, \$107 million contract. Upon SDU implementation, Friends of the Court will continue to make distribution determinations, as well as provide local customer service, beyond questions about payments. The privatized SDU will receipt and disburse payments, but the Friends of the Court will instruct the SDU on how to distribute payments whenever there is a judgment to be made.

Michigan expects to create one of the largest, centralized customer service operations in the United States. They expect to have 50-75 customer service representatives backing up the VRU to provide payment and collection information to employers, parents and Friends. Customers with questions beyond what may be provided by the customer service representative will be asked to contact their local Friend of the Court for additional information. Friends of the Court will continue to hold the official record.

The SDU is, essentially, a “dumb” system that simply receipts and disburses, making distributions as outlined by the Friends of the Court. There are Friends of the Court offices in 64 of the 83 counties. Some Friends of the Court offices also operate separate, local VRUs and voice mail systems. Employers, parents, and Friends of the Court will have separate numbers and customer service representatives. The contract with Lockheed Martin is structured so that they are “rewarded” for increased collections through electronic bank transfers (since overall this costs less to transact and is better for customers). Michigan’s child support program is overseen by a coordinating council comprising appointments from the executive and judicial branches (the legislature declined making appointments so there would not be conflict of interest issues, but may sit in on meetings). Michigan expects that customer service costs will increase in this new system, but that receipting and disbursing costs will decrease, leading to an overall reduction in costs for the program. In many ways, Michigan intends to structure its system largely on Wisconsin’s model. Addi-

tionally, Michigan intends to use electronic bank transfers for a very large percentage of receipted payment and disbursements.

State of Alabama. Alabama is in the planning stages for the SDU implementation. Currently, state workers (hired by each county where they are located) receipt IV-D payments and the state Comptroller (similar to Nebraska's Treasurer) disburses payments. Alabama has approximately 315,000 IV-D cases. District court clerks currently receipt and distribute the non-IV-D payments. When the SDU is implemented, it will receipt both IV-D and non-IV-D orders, distributions will be determined through the statewide child support enforcement system, and the Comptroller will cut the check. The county offices will be able to receive direct payments from those persons who persistently refuse to pay through the SDU. Alabama currently operates a statewide VRU and will continue to do so, contracting out administration to the SDU vendor. State workers will act as customer service representatives if a caller to the VRU wants to talk to a person. The state workers in each county will provide local customer service for IV-D orders and clerks will provide customer service for non-IV-D orders. The clerks, reportedly, are positive about being relieved of their responsibility for receipting non-IV-D payments.

State of Texas. In Texas, the Office of the Attorney General, Child Support Division operates as the CSE/IV-D agency. The office operates a 24-hour automated 800 number. Calls are answered by a VRU and a centralized call center. All calls to the Division are routed through the VRU. At that point customers have the option of going to the call center and then to their local office. When a call is received, the caller is directed through a menu of options until reaching the specific question he or she wishes to ask. Texas has operated under this approach for several years. Callers to the 800 number can obtain payment and case status information, dates, and other information by entering a customer identification number. It is estimated that on an annual basis 60% to 80% of all calls are payment-related. If the VRU cannot answer custodial parent questions, they can request a transfer to the call center and then to a field office. Calls transferred to a field office will be placed into a queue and each receiving office may establish different procedures for handling these calls. An automated call distributor in each office automatically routes the caller to the predetermined call response point.

A wide range of calls and callers are transferred to, or direct their calls to, the various local offices. These offices can all be accessed through the VRU. They are then routed to the local offices, each of which is equipped with an automatic call distributor (ACD). An ACD is a device for distributing incoming calls to office staff in a manner that will automatically route the caller to the next available service person. ACDs allow the caller to designate the type of individual he or she needs to contact.

The Division is attempting to provide the capability for non-custodial parents to access VRU information regarding payments received and disbursed, as well as other financial information. When operational, this will enable non-custodial parents to access automated information 24-hours a day, seven days a week.

The Division's customer service center maintains an on-site financial specialist to answer difficult fiscal questions, utilizes e-mail to field offices for follow-up, and provides immediate verification of any locate information provided by a caller.

Of the 368,300 callers who attempted to get through to the call center in May 1998, only 51,800 calls were handled by the call center staff. Under a new system implemented May 18, 1998, more than 20,300 calls were handled while 90,100 callers gave up waiting. Under the old call center system in use prior to May 18, roughly 214,000 callers got a busy signal, while 12,400 gave up after waiting in queue, and 31,500 were answered.

Discussions with Federal Child Support Enforcement Officials

Because federal officials offer a broad view of SDU implementation and offer familiarity with the SDU implementation and customer service experiences of many states, and are able to provide insight into the specific expectations of the federal mandate and time-lines, the PPC consulted with several federal officials and staff.

Others Who Were Consulted

A number of other discussions were conducted and information gathered from selected consultants, and other national stakeholder organizations, who offered particular expertise in and experience with child support customer service systems.

National Conference of State Legislatures. The National Conference of State Legislatures is the premiere legislative organization for state policymakers. They have been active in collecting, synthesizing, and disseminating data on the response and impact of the federal mandate.

Policy Studies, Inc. Policy Studies, Inc. is a private, for-profit consulting organization that has provided consultation and administered child support-related services to states and municipalities throughout the country.

Data Point Research, Inc. Data Point Research, Inc. has developed and conducted customer satisfaction studies for the State of Iowa's child support system.

Lockheed Martin. Lockheed Martin is a private, for-profit consulting organization that has provided consultation and administered child support-related services to states and municipalities throughout the country.

V. PRIVATE SECTOR CUSTOMER CALL-IN CENTERS

As part of the Implementation Project, we researched the Internet and relevant business literature on customer service units, and the use of VRU systems by private companies. Two utility providers, Lincoln Electric System and Peoples Natural Gas/Energy One, were also interviewed regarding the operation of their customer support call-in centers. Although not involved in child support issues, the problems faced by private companies and utility providers in providing customer service are similar to the potential problems faced by a centralized SDU customer support center.

Literature Search

The literature reflects some generally accepted disadvantages of using a VRU. These disadvantages include the public's perception that such systems are impersonal, that as more options become available waiting time increases, and that some people are reluctant to use voice mailing or other automated features.

There are, however, definite advantages to using a VRU system which most companies find outweigh the disadvantages. Advantages include the convenience of extended hours of service for customers, the option of providing back-up service when the main call center is overwhelmed with calls, and the ability to leave detailed messages for a person who is busy or out of the office. VRU customer service is also considered a less expensive option than staffing a call center to personally handle all incoming calls.

Internet research found a number of private companies that specialize in call center consulting services. Many of these companies host a web site, some of which provide information on articles, books, and directories of vendors, services and trade shows. An example of such a web site is the ACD Online Learning Center located at <http://www.call-center.net>.

Based on the results of this research, there appears to be some general recommendations for the successful operation of a VRU system in the private sector, including:

- Programming the VRU menu to be user-friendly, effective, and fast.
- Offering callers an opportunity to review the message they leave and re-record it.
- Setting a goal of a 10-second response time. If there is as 45-60 second wait during peak usage, give customers a "messaging callback" option.
- Providing a toll-free number with 24-hour access.
- Using the VRU primarily for routine communications.
- Limiting the menu options to seven or eight options.
- Setting up narrowly defined, clear options (e.g., don't play the options too fast, make the choice between options clear).
- Initiating the transition to a VRU in a limited capacity and adding more options later.
- Planning the system with the future in mind as technology advances rapidly.
- Ensuring privacy, reliability, and trust.

With or without a VRU system, the literature suggests that support of call center staff is critical to maintaining quality of service. Successful call centers work to reduce staff turnover by providing good initial training

and continuing education and benefits. Quality assurance is often measured by: regular performance evaluations by an independent quality assurance department; allowing supervisor access for random silent monitoring; and providing a readily available manual that lays out the ground rules of customer interaction. When a call is received by a customer service representative at privately held corporations, he or she usually has immediate access to the customer's file, preferably by a computer screen that shows the customer's case history.

Lincoln Electric System

Lincoln Electric System (LES) takes a unique view of their customer support services and deliberately avoids using a VRU. LES wants each customer's phone call to be answered by a human. The emphasis for the LES customer support staff is to find out exactly what the customer wants done, and then attempt to solve the problem. The LES customer call-in center services 109,509 metered customers in and around Lincoln. The center employs approximately thirteen people who answer from 5,000 to 16,000 calls per month. The staff answers about 98% of these calls within 20 seconds. Training of new staff is done in-house by the more experienced staff. Staff retention is good, with a 10-year average retention time. LES attributes the high rate of staff retention to an excellent employee benefit package. LES also operates a web page (www.les.com) with a customer service option for e-mailing in changes in electric service for landlords, tenants, title companies, and homeowners. LES averages about three to four e-mails per day from this web site.

Peoples Natural Gas/Energy One

Peoples Natural Gas/Energy One's customer call in center in Lincoln services approximately 850,000 customers in a five state region. The goal of the center is to provide accurate, friendly customer service. Calls are first answered by a VRU which presents four options to the caller, including the option to stay on the line to talk to a customer representative. About 80% of these calls are answered by a customer service specialist within 20 seconds. The company provides employees with accurate and responsive computer systems, has an extensive 6 week training program for new employees, and provides a benefits package including competitive wages, paid holidays, 401(k), and health, dental, vision and disability insurance. Peoples Natural Gas acknowledges that the stress level of the job is substantial and finds that any "fun" type of activity that can reduce the on the job stress level is appreciated.

VI. THE NEBRASKA SYSTEM

Nebraska Ranking and Program Costs

Nebraska ranks 38th in total population among states. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Preliminary Data for 1998*, Nebraska ranked 36th among the states in the number of Title IV-D cases (121,421 cases), and 32nd in the amount of Title IV-D monies handled (\$117,127,490). See Appendix G for Nebraska's comparative ranking in these and other program indicators. Nebraska collected on approximately 19.62% of child support cases (the national average is 22.96%). Approximately 89% of 1998 collections were for non-TANF custodial parents (nationally non-TANF families account for 82% of collections). From 1993 through 1997, Nebraska's collections increased 33.98%, tracking almost precisely to the national increase of 33.35%. During the same time period (1993 through 1997), Nebraska's total administrative expenditures increased 41.41%, slightly higher than the national average increase of 34.70%. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Statistical Program Status FY 1998 (*Preliminary*) as of June 4, 1999, Nebraska's child support enforcement program will collect approximately \$4.66 for every dollar expended in the program, greater than the national average of \$4.00 collected for every dollar expended.

Fiscal Year	Net Nebraska Share of Program Expenditures	Net Federal Share of Program Expenditures	Total Expenditures to Administer the Nebraska Child Support Program
1995	\$6,490,187	\$19,693,045	\$26,183,232
1996	\$10,171,630	\$20,007,495	\$30,179,125
1997	\$9,898,469	\$19,461,531	\$29,360,000
1998	\$8,433,800	\$16,675,029	\$25,108,829

Figures provided by the Nebraska Child Support Enforcement Agency. Please note that, while not expected, figures may be adjusted for two years following a fiscal year end.

The federal government reimburses (on average) 66% of eligible costs for states' child support enforcement programs, and provides additional incentive dollars and other funding programs and grants. States, then, pay approximately 34% of costs to administer child support programs (minus states' share of retained child support collections from families receiving TANF and other assistance). In past years, many states experienced a net profit in administering the child support program because federal assistance totaled more than states own allocation of funds for program administration. Recently, however, states are beginning to experience a net program cost to administer the child support program. Much of this is attributable to the shrinking of retained collections.

By 1997, like many states, Nebraska experienced a net cost to administer the program. That is, the state expended \$3,409,424 more to administer the program than it received in federal reimbursements, federal incentive funds, and state share of retained collections.

No exact numbers are available on the amount of non-Title IV-D child support cases, but state child support staff estimate that Title IV-D (including income-withholding cases) account for approximately 70% of all child support cases in Nebraska. Thus, non-IV-D cases comprise approximately 30% of all child support payments.

Nebraska Child Support Participants

There are hundreds of people in Nebraska who are currently involved in making sure child support is collected, including staff of the Clerks of the District Court offices; child support specialists, caseworkers, and attorneys working under the auspices of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and its Child Support Enforcement/IV-D agency; employees of the individual county attorneys offices; and outside contract attorneys. These people are responsible for many functions, some of which include: keeping track of payments and arrearages, finding and contacting delinquent payors, documenting case information, initiating wage withholdings or garnishments, providing certified copies of records for court purposes, and, where appropriate, prosecuting delinquent parents. In addition, this staff provides information and customer support services to custodial parents, non-custodial parents, attorneys, and judges throughout the state.

Clerks of the District Courts

With the exception of some direct parent-to-parent payments, most parents who pay child support in Nebraska currently pay it directly to the clerks of the district court. Fifty-three district court clerks enter the receipting and disbursement information into the State Court Administrator's JUSTICE computer system. (See Appendix H for a listing of district courts currently using the JUSTICE system.) The JUSTICE system is used as the court filing system and keeps track of the payment and disbursement of court orders, including child support orders. The system has sorting capabilities and is capable of printing out approximately 12 different reports. However, the system does not sort by a "child support" field but only by the type of legal action involved.

With the exception of Douglas County, which uses its own mainframe computer system, the remaining 39 counties without access to JUSTICE enter the receipting and disbursement information in other computer- or paper-based filing systems. Currently, courts not using JUSTICE provide court order information to Nebraska Health and Human Services staff, who enter the information directly into the child support enforcement's information data system, CHARTS (see below). It is planned that all district court clerks (with the exception of Douglas County) will be on the JUSTICE system by the end of year 2000.

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

When a custodial parent applies for public assistance, he or she agrees that any past, present, or future support will be assigned to the state. In these cases, the child support monies received by the clerk's office goes to HHS to pay back costs associated with the assistance provided to the family.

The “Children Have a Right to Support” (CHARTS) information data system supports all aspects of the HHS/Child Support Enforcement program. CHARTS holds all Nebraska IV-D orders, as well as most non-IV-D orders. CHARTS has an integrated case management/fiscal management structure that will maintain official child support records when the SDU is implemented. The CHARTS case management module is designed to automate tasks for child support staff and support such functions as paternity establishment, court order establishment, review and adjustment of orders, income withholding, and enforcement of orders. CHARTS allows for the monitoring of cases to see that actions are taken within required federal time frames, automatically logs all actions taken on the system, and sends new Social Security Numbers to the federal Social Security Administration for verification.

CHARTS automatically interfaces with the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Nebraska Employment Information System, Nebraska New Hire, Nebraska Family On-Line Client User System (“NFOCUS”), State Employer/Wage file, Unemployment Insurance Benefits file, University of Nebraska, Nebraska Bar Association, and the Postal Service. The system also interfaces with the Federal Case Registry which includes Social Security Administration, Enumeration Verification System, Federal Parent Locator Services, Internal Revenue Service form 1099, and National Directory of New Hires.

CHARTS interfaces with the JUSTICE and Douglas County computer systems through daily “uploads” to update collection and arrearage information. CHARTS cases are cross referenced with the clerks office by an internal case number and the court’s docket and page number. Support payment assigned to the state (i.e., for those orders in which the custodial parent receives TANF or other assistance) are sent directly from the clerks to the state. The state subtracts these payments from federal reimbursement assistance. For the counties that do not have an automated interface with CHARTS (counties without JUSTICE or the Douglas County system), batch information is sent to the state by the clerks on a monthly basis.

The CHARTS system is available to all State of Nebraska child support enforcement workers, county attorneys, and private contract attorneys who are authorized to perform child support enforcement work. There are approximately 300 such people in Nebraska. Access to view the information and make notes to the file is given to all enforcement workers but only a “case owner” has the right to change the information in the system. However, even the case owner’s access is limited. For example, certain fields such as amount owed or paid are “read-only” fields and there is no access to change these items.

County Attorneys

The county attorney offices in most of Nebraska’s counties handle all litigation involving child support enforcement either in-house or by contract with an outside legal firm. The county attorney offices that handle child support litigation have access to CHARTS and either JUSTICE or the Douglas County automated system. In 18 counties, child support enforcement litigation is handled by HHS staff attorneys. County attorneys report that they, too, answer customer service-type questions, with one urban county attorney estimating that his office spends approximately 30-40% of their work day on customer service queries that average 100 per day.

Customer Service Structure

A Nebraska resident requesting information will initially have contact with either county or state agency personnel (or a county VRU). The correct agency for the contact will depend on where that person lives, the type of information being requested, and whether the custodial parent is receiving some type of public assistance. If the individual making the inquiry is not satisfied with the response, or if the agency contacted is unable to answer the inquiry, the individual can either try to contact the correct agency, the State Ombudsman's Office, the HHS System Advocate, or his or her elected representatives. Appendix I includes a graphical representation of the Nebraska child support enforcement customer service structure.

Because records about requests for customer service are not kept by district court clerks, county attorneys, or HHS child support enforcement workers, the total number and types of phone calls and inquiries regarding child support orders in Nebraska is not known. Although local district court clerks probably receive the majority of the phone calls regarding child support payment and disbursement, county attorneys and HHS attorneys who are involved in enforcement actions also receive numerous inquiries regarding the legal status of an individual case. Approximately 40 HHS personnel, including Child Support Specialists and Central office employees, field calls from parties requesting (or providing) information regarding Title IV-D parental support orders. In addition, HHS child support enforcement workers in 16 field offices across the state take calls from parents and others regarding particular aspects of an individual case. (See Appendix J for a map of the HHS Child Support Enforcement field offices and a table of population of counties where field offices are located.) Nebraska child support enforcement workers with whom we spoke estimated they spend upward of 85% of their time responding to customer service requests, and that each request typically takes 45 minutes to one hour to resolve.

Although HHS takes overall responsibility for enforcement of Title IV-D child support obligations, the clerks of the district court currently still have the responsibility for receipting and disbursement, and for providing payment information (and related customer support services) for both the custodial and non-custodial parents and for any attorneys involved in litigation of the case. The clerks offices are reimbursed for this effort on Title IV-D orders by the state at the rate of 66% of total allowable costs. In addition, some county's offices also receive incentive funds for collections rates. The clerks also have sole responsibility for the customer service aspects of non-Title IV child support orders.

Voice Response Units

Douglas, Lancaster, and Sarpy County District Courts have automated Voice Response Units (VRU) telephone answering systems to screen child support-related phone calls. In Nebraska's remaining counties, employees of the clerks office answer the phones manually. Douglas County District Court uses a VRU system that interfaces with Douglas County's mainframe computer system. The Douglas County VRU system runs 24-hours per day, seven days per week (24/7) to answer questions regarding payment receipt, payment distribution, and general information. In addition, the system has the capability of handling some types of electronic fund transfers (after the parent has filled out an application form and been given a personal identification number). Douglas County received 34,798 calls to their system in July 1999.

The Lancaster District Court is currently in the process of replacing and updating their VRU. The new system will be a 24/7 system with the capability to answer questions about monetary receipts only. The

system transfers data from JUSTICE daily, and cross references both by docket and page number and by a JUSTICE-assigned case number. It is projected that this system will handle over 90% of the phone calls the clerk's office receives regarding child support. An April/May 1999 survey of the old VRU system for Lancaster County recorded an average of over 16,000 calls in a seven-day period.

Sarpy County uses a VRU system that is estimated to receive about 3,500 calls per month. This is a 24/7 system that verifies payment receipt, payment delinquency, and provides information on whether the check has been forwarded to HHS. The system has been in place for approximately six years. The Sarpy County system transfers data from JUSTICE daily, and cross references both by docket and page number and by a JUSTICE assigned case number.

Customer Satisfaction in Nebraska

Although there seems to be a general feeling of satisfaction among Nebraskans in regard to the current system of customer support services, there have been no surveys to measure or validate this anecdotal information. None of the three counties with VRU systems in place have conducted any customer satisfaction surveys regarding the VRU or the customer support aspect of their child support services. Some district court clerks occasionally send out surveys on their own initiative; however, the type of questions asked vary from county to county, and where local surveys have been sent out, the questions have not been specifically designed to gauge satisfaction with the handling of child support inquiries, but rather have been written to measure the customer's satisfaction with the overall service provided by the clerks office.

One statewide office that does record information about questions is the Nebraska Health and Human Services System Advocate. The System Advocate was established in 1996, by the Health and Human Services Act. The Act requires a position and toll-free number to respond to questions, concerns, and complaints from consumers, service providers, elected officials, and interested citizens related to the agencies, services, and programs within HHS. According a recent Quarterly Report issued by the Office of the System Advocate (January-March, 1999), child support inquiries to the System Advocate have been sparse. Since January 1, 1997, the System Advocate was contacted a total of 4,135 times, and of this total only 98 contacts (2.4%) were related to child support.

We wonder whether the number of inquiries to the System Advocate is an accurate estimate of the extent of customer concern regarding child support issues. Nationally, child support issues continue to command attention. As was discussed in Chapter IV, customer service inquiries are numerous, and our discussions with state officials from across the country indicated that there is some level of dissatisfaction with child support activities regardless of how responsive systems try to be. According to a legislative expert, state legislators throughout the nation receive more calls about child support issues than any other single issue, including taxes. The upshot is, in light of the lack of data, it is not clear the extent to which child support customers in Nebraska are satisfied or dissatisfied. Empirical documentation of the extent of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) could provide useful barometers to the success of new customer service schemas that will need to be implemented in Nebraska in light of the SDU centralization requirement. The need for data is discussed further in Chapter VIII, *Recommendations, Rationales, and Policy Decisions*.

VII. NEBRASKA STAKEHOLDERS

In this section, we describe the input we received from Nebraskans. As described earlier, the Work Group, comprising stakeholders who are either part of or will be affected by the SDU implementation, guided the overall scope and focus of this project. The Work Group guided the Public Policy Center in its effort to obtain input from a broad range of Nebraska constituencies in order to evaluate the transferability of other states' models to Nebraska, understand the range of opinions about customer services, identify consensus where possible, and learn the possible impact of recommendations. Any mistakes or misinterpretations of stakeholder input, however, is the responsibility of the Public Policy Center and not Work Group members.

Stakeholder Feedback Process

Nebraska stakeholders voiced great enthusiasm for the opportunity to share their experiences and suggestions. Indeed, a number of stakeholders expressed surprise and relief that their opinions had been sought during the process. Feedback from Nebraska stakeholders was solicited through a variety of methods including:

- Convening of two, half-day Child Support Advisory Group meetings
- Presentations and discussions at the Nebraska Child Support Enforcement Association annual meeting
- Personal interviews and correspondence with stakeholders throughout the state
- Several surveys

Advisory Group

The Child Support Advisory Group was formed to garner broad feedback from stakeholders throughout Nebraska, including custodial and non-custodial parents, legislators and legislative staff, clerks of the district court, judges, employers, county/authorized/defense/private attorneys, child support workers, state administrators and policymakers, advocacy organizations, under-represented populations, community members, municipal officials, district court referees, federal officials, information technology developers, and researchers. Approximately 90 people participated in the Advisory Group. (Please see Appendix L for Advisory Group Participants). The Child Support Advisory Group not only provided information about customer service issues, but also served to ensure that the Implementation Project's ideas and preliminary findings made sense to those with extensive expertise and experience in child support matters in Nebraska.

In our invitation to potential Advisory Group members, we informed them we wanted:

to gather information about customer service experiences in other selected states, identify important customer service issues in Nebraska, and make recommendations that will facilitate a successful SDU implementation and preserve -- and perhaps even enhance -- child support payment-related customer service in Nebraska.

Thus, the overall goals and objectives of the Advisory Group will be to provide input on a variety of issues, ranging from regional realities to overarching, stakeholder issues. The Advisory Group

will have an opportunity to make sure we have a sufficient plan for receiving appropriate input from key Nebraska stakeholders. We want to make sure we have identified the localities or regions that might need special or specific attention or that may have special requirements or unique characteristics concerning child support collection and distribution. . . .

The Advisory Group convened for two half-day workshops: on August 18 and September 29, 1999. In order to maximize full attendance, lodging, mileage, parking and other costs to participants were assumed by the PPC.

Nebraska Child Support Enforcement Association Annual Meeting

The Nebraska Child Support Enforcement Association (NCSEA) annual conference, held in Kearney, Nebraska, provided another opportunity to gather stakeholder input. Two sessions were conducted:

- District Court Clerks Session from 8:30-9:45 a.m. on September 23, 1999, with approximately 65 persons in attendance.
- General Session from 10:15 - 11:00 a.m. also on September 23, 1999, open to all conferees, with approximately 125 conferees in attendance

Personal Interviews and Correspondence

Personal interviews and correspondence provided additional insight about the concerns of various constituent groups. The interviews were sometimes at the initiation of the PPC and other times initiated by persons who wanted to voice their opinion about particular aspects of customer service (expectations and experiences) in Nebraska and in other states.

Surveys

A number of surveys of constituent groups were conducted. Some surveys were administered as a part of a conference or meeting, and others were administered independently, through phone or by mail.

Prelude: Legislative Testimony

During this past legislative session, senators heard claims about the superiority of the Nebraska's customer service, but they also heard numerous criticisms. As part of our examination of customer service, it did not seem fruitful to worry about precisely determining the extent to which either position was accurate. It did seem fruitful to focus on learning about the current strengths of Nebraska's customer services in the child support context so that these successes can be preserved in the new system. Similarly, if there are clear weaknesses that could be identified, then the transition to an SDU will provide an opportunity to reduce - and perhaps eliminate -- these weaknesses. In order to identify customer service strengths and weaknesses, it seemed important to hear from a sample of Nebraskans involved in the child support system so that we could learn of their complaints and compliments.

Satisfaction of Stakeholders with Current System

The Work Group initially considered undertaking a survey of customers (i.e., custodial parents and non-custodial parents, but also others who have needs for child support information and problem-solving, including employers, attorneys, judges, and child support professionals). We wanted to inquire into their satisfaction and dissatisfaction with status quo customer services.

We discussed the possibility of conducting a systematic survey of the constituencies of primary concern, i.e., custodial parents and non-custodial parents with the Nebraska Child Support Enforcement/IV-D agency. However, we understood (incorrectly as we later found out), that the centralized database (through CHARTS) housed IV-D and income withholding (IW) cases, but not other cases (non-IV-D and non-income withholding). We understood that information about non-IV-D cases was held in files maintained by district court clerks (in other words, in 93 different counties), and because of the lack of a child support coding system, there was no ability to easily identify which cases involved child support. Given the need to sample from non-IV-D/non-income withholding along with IV-D/income withholding cases in order to conduct a scientifically valid survey, we felt the logistical barriers were insurmountable given the short time frame we had and the limited resources available. Additionally, HHS staff believed that privacy and confidentiality concerns with child support enforcement information might preclude such a survey. Subsequent to these discussions, the PPC has since learned that, contrary to our earlier understanding, the CHARTS system, indeed, does contain nearly all child support enforcement orders, including most non-IV-D. One official estimated 99% of all orders, IV-D and non-IV-D are currently included in CHARTS.

A second alternative would be to closely examine existing research on Nebraskan's satisfaction with the child support system. We learned, however, there have been no surveys to systematically measure these customer service issues in Nebraska, either through HHS or other entities involved in child support. Apparently some district court clerks occasionally send out surveys on their own initiative; however, the type of questions asked vary from county to county, and local surveys have not been designed to gauge satisfaction with the specific handling of child support inquiries. These surveys are intended to measure the customers' satisfaction with the overall service provided by clerks offices, not specifically with the child support system. Thus, these data would not be of use given the needs of the Project.

After further consultation and consideration of other options with the Work Group members, we decided systematic customer satisfaction data would not be available for this Implementation Project. It was decided we would use an Advisory Group and other opportunities to meet with stakeholders, and a variety of surveys and other means to give us insight into customer service issues.

Feedback provided by the Advisory Group and other Nebraskans about the primary strengths and weakness of the current system include:

Strengths

- Having a local contact seems to ensure more timely, personal responses to requests for information.
- There is just one or two places to go to get information.
- Certified copies of payment records are readily available (particularly in small counties) for court use.
- Access directly to child support enforcement workers gives callers immediate, accurate information about the status of a case.
- Cash payments are accepted.
- Changes of address, employer, etc. are easily and immediately made.
- The Clerks provide outstanding service.

- Parents have someone they can vent to and talk to.
- Some clerks disburse payments to custodial parents immediately.
- Clerks know parties involved in cases and can more easily identify checks that are sent in with little identifying information.

Weaknesses

- Some people, particularly in small towns, are reluctant to share personal information with clerks.
- The type of customer service provided varies from county to county (e.g., in some counties clerks refuse to provide even basic payment history information).
- Customers say that VRUs currently in use do not work well and are confusing, and communications about the VRU implementation has been unhelpful.
- There is confusion about who to call for certain types of customer service assistance.
- Custodial parents must navigate between and share information among the clerks, child support enforcement and the county/authorized attorneys.
- Parents are sometimes erroneously referred to child support enforcement offices by clerks or other state agencies.
- County attorneys and child support workers estimate that a significant portion of their work day (ranging anywhere from 30-85% of their time) is spent providing customer service-type information, which prevents them from enforcement work.
- Wage withholding is complicated because employers must send checks to many clerks.
- There is not enough emphasis on and ability to use electronic funds transfers.
- It may be difficult to coordinate information sharing in interstate cases.
- Some clerks delay up to two weeks to disburse payments to custodial parents.

Priorities for the New System

A wide cross-section of stakeholders was asked to identify the key dimensions of a successful customer service system through the completion of the “100-Point Allocation Task” survey (see Appendix M). Participants were asked to allocate 100 points among ten dimensions or to suggest additional dimensions. The purpose of the task was to understand the relative values stakeholders placed on a variety of customer service dimensions. The following suggested customer service dimensions were included in the survey: access (ability to get to the right person for the needed services), accurate (correct information), effective (producing desired outcome), efficient system (reasonable investment for benefit obtained), efficient for user (reasonable investment for benefit obtained), fair (treats all stakeholders the same), feasible (can it be done?), necessary (is this really needed for child support enforcement?), prompt (get information needed quickly), responsive (get information needed when it is expected), and “Other.”

Thirty-eight participants returned the “100-Point Allocation Task” survey. Summary data shows that accuracy, access, effective (producing desired outcome) and responsive are the most important dimensions for Nebraska’s customer service system. In addition, several participants provided additional desired characteristics: the system should be able to measure performance outcomes; it should reflect sensitivity and responsiveness to the racial, ethnic, cultural diversity of each “customer;” it should provide for quick transfer of child support payments; and customer service representatives should be friendly and considerate.

Possibilities and Barriers

Advisory Group members were asked to describe the possibilities and barriers to providing child support customer service in Nebraska. (See Appendix N for complete responses to these and other “Discussion Questions”). Respondents provided the following responses:

Possibilities

- Separate provision of customer service could free workers do more hands-on case work (e.g., prepare documents, locate non-custodial parents, to spend on case load, continue support enforcement, reduce call volume to workers, etc.)
- An advertising campaign could advise how payors and payees can seek to answer questions
- Provide the opportunity for creating a partnership between state and local government and agencies
- Make service more streamlined and less confusing

Barriers:

- Hiring people with no depth of knowledge -- low pay means low quality
- Building in an extra step, which will mean more time in handling a case
- Lack of personal attention and trust-building with clients
- Narratives from previous client contact may be inaccurate/outdated
- Duplication of services (HHS, county, attorneys)
- Uncooperative custodial parents
- Employers not reporting new hires
- Callers need a human person to speak with to vent frustrations
- Long distance
- Government’s reluctance to invest in training
- Motivated and quality staff is vital
- Different procedures by county may cause confusion and make it difficult for customer service representatives to answer questions accurately

Customer Service Standards

A survey was conducted to query what standards should guide the creation of a VRU and customer service structure. (See Appendices O and P for a copy of the survey and complete results.) Twenty-one Advisory Group members completed the survey. The survey found that most respondents believed that:

- The maximum reasonable number of rings for callers to the VRU until the call is picked up was between 1-6 rings.
- The maximum reasonable hold time for a caller to the VRU until receiving a customer service representative was up to 2 minutes at best, and up to 4 minutes on occasion.
- The maximum reasonable time for someone with a complex child support enforcement question to wait before getting an answer or update was up to 3 working days.
- The maximum number of miles someone should travel to speak face-to-face for customer service was 60 miles.

Additional elements suggested by respondents included that callers should be treated with respect, accurate information must be provided, voice mail should be provided to leave a message, caller ID should be provided with reports on demand for supervisor and customer service representative, satisfaction of customers should be tracked, random surveying of customers who call should be conducted and suggestions acted upon, and a -- follow up on their service and follow through with changes to system, and multi-cultural phone service (Spanish, Laotian, Vietnamese) should be offered.

Other States' Models

Project research found four models of customer service provision and SDU structure that other states have utilized. The models reflect states' approaches, but no model was created to explicitly and accurately mirror the state or states with which it is associated. Rather, the models were used to provide "archetypes" to stimulate discussion and assessment, and the states were identified so that it would be easier to refer to each model. In other words, we did not intend to say, "This is how the child support system is organized in [STATE]" but rather "This is similar in many respects to the way the child support system is organized in [STATE] even if in reality there are several differences in how the system is actually structured." The models are:

- Voice Response Unit-Mediated (Wisconsin, Iowa, and adaptations by Michigan and Missouri)
- Order-Differentiated (Arizona)
- Primarily Local With Some Centralized (Florida, Illinois)
- Decentralized (Minnesota, New York)

Graphical copies of each of the four models is provided in Appendix Q. Also included is a graphical representation of Nebraska's current model (Appendix R), as we understand it to currently operate.

Voice Response Unit-Mediated (Wisconsin, Iowa, and adaptations by Michigan and Missouri)

States utilizing the Voice Response Unit-Mediated model (VRU-Mediated) primarily provide customer service through an automated voice response system. The system provides automated responses to payment questions, and pre-recorded answers to frequently asked questions. The majority of calls, states report, are basic questions about payment histories and most calls are resolved through the automated system. Employers, parents, and other states must navigate through the VRU in order to reach a customer service representative. Customer service representatives strive to answer a high percentage of questions, but refer unresolvable questions to local or statewide child support workers. Attorneys may use either the VRU or interact directly with the local or statewide child support worker. The SDU interfaces with the VRU, customer service representatives, and local or statewide child support workers to provide and accept updated information.

Order-Differentiated (Arizona)

Arizona differentiates customer service activities based on the type of child support order. Non-IV-D/non-income withholding cases receive customer service from a local contact (district court clerk in Arizona). Persons with IV-D/income withholding cases utilize a VRU for customer service. As in the previous model, parents, employers, and other states must pass through the VRU system in order to reach a customer service representative. Attorneys may use either the VRU or interact directly with the local or

statewide child support worker. The SDU interfaces with the VRU, customer service representatives, and local or statewide child support workers to provide and accept updated information.

Primarily Local Model (Florida, Illinois)

Florida and Illinois offer a hybrid of local and centralized customer service. Parents, attorneys, judges, and employers may contact their local district court clerk. Their clerk has an interface with the SDU for updated payment information, and may contact local or statewide child support workers for additional information and problem resolution. Parents, employers, and other states may also contact a centralized VRU for payment information, and may navigate through the system for a customer service representative, who also has an interface with the clerks and the SDU. Customer service representatives may refer unresolvable questions to local or statewide child support workers. Child support workers also interface with the computerized system.

Decentralized (Minnesota, New York)

Minnesota and New York rely primarily on local child support workers to answer most child support-related questions. Employers, parents, clerks, judges, attorneys, and others with questions contact their local child support office. The child support workers have an interface to the SDU computerized system, and contact statewide child support workers for policy clarification and technical assistance. A VRU that simply provides updated payment information is available to parents. The VRU has no back-up customer service representatives to answer additional questions.

Nebraska Response

The four models presented were presented to Advisory Group members at the August meeting. Participants were asked to complete a “report card” on their preferred models, rating the model’s ability to meet various dimensions of customer service, suggesting additional dimensions, making other recommendations, listing key strengths and weaknesses of the model, and providing other issues or fears about the model. (See Appendix S for a copy of the Model Report Card survey). Participants were most supportive of having Nebraska’s customer service feature a centralized VRU and customer service representatives, but also allow stakeholders to contact district court clerks who could handle customer service at the local level. In other words, while there was some confusion about the details of the models, we believe that participants advocated for a blending of the Iowa/Wisconsin and the Florida/Illinois models. Participants believed that such a system would take advantage of the efficiencies associated with VRU systems but allow for clerks to continue problem-solving at the local level. (Appendix T includes full summary of responses).

Local Access

Local access, then, was a key dimension of Nebraskans’ preference for accessing customer service. Indeed, most stakeholders suggested that the district court clerks should continue in their role of providing customer service in the SDU system.

June Survey of District Court Clerks

A survey (see Appendix U) conducted by the PPC in June suggested that the Clerks were divided in their interest in undertaking customer service responsibilities. Thirty-six of the 93 clerks returned surveys to the

Public Policy Center. Out of the 36, twenty seven stated that they preferred maintaining some form of customer service at the local level. Seven of the 36 indicated that they did not want to maintain any customer service responsibility when the SDU is implemented. Two respondents stated that more information is needed to determine a preference.

Size of county appeared to be an important variable in clerks' interest in maintaining customer service activities. From the group of clerks responding from the 27 counties with populations up to 20,000, only two clerks responded that it should be the state's/contractor's responsibility to handle the entirety of customer service. From the group of clerks responding from the five counties with populations over 20,000 (with Douglas being the most populous at 444,000), four stated the desire to let the state handle customer service issues. (Four anonymous answers have not been included because it is not possible to reference their county populations).

While it appears that the clerks overwhelmingly supported local customer service options in the June survey, those options varied as follows:

- Several counties wanted to see the collection and disbursement stay with the clerks. However, realizing this is not a possibility, two out of those three noted that they would like to have access to records and pay histories to answer customers' questions.
- Eleven clerks responded with the desire to have access in some form or another to payment information and records.
- Six stated they would like everything but receipting and disbursement to remain as it currently stands.
- Twenty one expressed the need to be connected to the SDU through a computer network.
- Ten specifically mentioned not having an automated phone system—customers must be able to access live personnel.

When asked about the impact changing to a SDU would have on their office, responses were again varied:

- Thirteen expected to receive complaints about the state's handling of customer service.
- Six expected to eliminate one or more employees.
- Four predicted less effective collection of payments.

In general, clerks had a negative response about Nebraska's move to an SDU. Only one clerk out of the 36 appeared to have an expressly positive outlook on the change.

There were other concerns that individual clerks expressed. Situations mentioned included the need to have adequately trained personnel and a competitive wage to limit high turnover rates. Other concerns mentioned included the need to make decisions about: who will have authority to certify payment records; the continuing belief that there exists duplicative county-to-county case numbering on JUSTICE (however, CHARTS and JUSTICE administrators have assured us that an internal numbering system differentiates cases); and that personal knowledge of cases that clerks currently have will be lost which will be frustrating to the customers.

While most clerks stated preference that the current system be maintained, most realized that this was not an option. Given that impossibility, most preferred to see the next best option be implemented—keeping customer service with the local clerks of the district court.

September Survey of District Court Clerks

It seemed, then, that further understanding of the receptivity of District Court Clerks would be valuable given the overwhelming unanimity regarding the participation of the clerks at the August Advisory Group meeting. The Work Group undertook a second survey of the district court clerks. This survey was undertaken to share the interest of stakeholders in retaining district court clerk expertise, and to get additional information from clerks about the types of customer service they would be willing to provide. The survey was conducted by the President of the District Court Clerks Association and Work Group member, Marlene Vetick.

This second survey revealed a much greater antipathy by the clerks regarding providing customer service than the June survey. The survey included all district court clerks, except one who was unavailable due to illness. All the clerks agreed that they would be willing to provide and certify copies of payment records, forward change of addresses to the SDU, and provide other limited services such as referrals. However, the clerks overwhelmingly indicated they do not wish to problem solve beyond those tasks. Eighty-three of the 92 district court clerks responding to the survey were willing to provide limited customer service only (i.e., that they did not wish to be involved in problem solving). Nine of the 92 district court clerks (primarily from rural counties) indicated willingness to assist in problem solving for customers. (Appendix V includes a map illustrating the distribution of responses).

Among the 83 clerks who did not want to be involved in customer service (beyond providing records, forwarding changes of address, etc.), the primary reasons were:

- Clerks do not want to be placed in a position of having to hear customer complaints and concerns without the ability to actually solve problems.
- Clerks are concerned that the separation of receipting and disbursing would result in a loss of accountability and increased difficulty in problem solving.
- Clerks believe that they do not have sufficient staff to perform additional problem-solving responsibilities.
- Clerks are concerned that having multiple points for problem solving will be more confusing to clients than would having a central VRU with good service and knowledgeable customer service representatives.
- Because clerks offices receive only 66% reimbursement for their IV-D activities, clerks are concerned that their counties will experience a fiscal deficit through their participation in providing customer service.

All clerks responded positively to the idea of having a dedicated phone in their offices (“red phone” model) that customers could use to contact a regional child support customer service center. Clerks also responded that they desire having a separate toll-free line to contact the SDU for resolution of problems such as errors or modifications to court records or judgments.

Other issues raised by the clerks concerned what would be done regarding: tracking visitation credits, direct payments, child care payments, insurance coverage, and medical reimbursements; handling early emancipation; certification of records; making address changes; and managing set-off or reciprocal credit orders of support.

NCSEA Conference - Clerks Session

The Nebraska Child Support Enforcement Association (NCSEA) annual conference provided another opportunity to assess clerks' input about their role as the state moved to an SDU. We were particularly interested in why clerks had come to an overwhelmingly negative response to providing customer service to child support clientele and coming to a better understanding of what clerks considered included in providing "customer service."

General feedback from the group indicated that clerks are cautious of the State Treasurer's participation in the receipting function. Clerks are willing to provide information, but do not want to be put in a situation in which they are another roadblock to customers wanting to resolve problems. Clerks said that as they have a better understanding of how the SDU will work, they may change their minds about participation, but as the system has been described to them, they have significant reservations about their involvement.

Child Support Enforcement Offices

It seemed important, then, to identify other possibilities for providing local access. In some states local child support enforcement offices provide customer service. Many, but not all, of these states have child support enforcement offices in every county. In Nebraska there are 16 child support enforcement field or regional offices throughout the state (see Appendix J for map). These field or regional offices are situated in counties that comprise approximately 69% of the total population of Nebraska (see Appendix K for listing of counties and their populations). That is, only 31% of Nebraska's population lives in a county where there is not a child support enforcement office. Additionally, state child support enforcement staff estimate that 86% of all child support cases are located in counties where a child support enforcement office is located.

Providing local customer service at the child support enforcement offices is a possibility, particularly with the clerks' suggestion that a "red phone" be located in the district court clerks offices in counties that did not have a local child support enforcement office. Therefore, persons preferring local access could choose to visit their local child support enforcement office or, could visit their district court clerks office and utilize the "red phone."

Other Local Versus VRU Customer Service Concerns

A number of persons shared anecdotes about other states' systems and the difficulty of getting access to someone who knew and cared about a particular case. There was discussion that determining how to allocate child support workers' time was a key policy decision, because their time spent providing customer service is time away from their job of enforcement.

Functional Task Distribution

An exercise was conducted of stakeholders to understand how Nebraskans would array functional tasks in the new SDU system. Participants were provided a table of customer service functions and potential providers of those functions marked with an “X.” Tasks ranged from straight-forward functions (e.g., Case Setup--a clear-cut function of the district court clerks), to much more complex functions (e.g., child support problem solving). Clerks, the SDU, the central HHS office, and regional/local child support enforcement offices were suggested as possible providers of the functions. Stakeholders were asked to circle their preferred provider(s) of each customer service function. The survey was distributed to Nebraska Child Support Enforcement Association conferees attending sessions conducted by the PPC. Responds revealed a broad dispersion of ideas about which entities should assume which functions. (See Appendix W for results).

In order to focus responses on customer service functions, a second functional task distribution survey was distributed to the Advisory Group for completion. Because only two persons returned the survey, it is difficult to place much significance to the results; however, the two responders did have similar responses regarding customer service roles. (Please see Appendix X for a summary of these responses).

Proposing a Nebraska Hybrid of the Centralized and Local Model

A hybrid of the Iowa/Wisconsin and the Florida/Illinois models was presented to the Advisory Group. The model featured a strong VRU with knowledgeable customer service representatives having access to child support enforcement activity narratives through a computerized system, and a local access through child support enforcement offices either in person or through a “red phone” connection from distant district court clerks offices. The model proposed that customer service representatives (not child support enforcement workers) be placed in each regional or field office to provide customer service, thus, freeing child support enforcement workers to spend more time in enforcement.

When presented with the “red phone” model, the parent representatives, district court clerks, and employers thought the model offered a reasonable compromise to providing local access. There was some satisfaction that the “red phone” would enable customer service contact for persons without a phone in their home.

In contrast, concerns and cautions were voiced by legislative, judicial, attorney, and child support enforcement worker representatives. They believed that the use of a “red phone” would be demeaning to parents, unreliable in access (if other parents were using it or if there were busy signals), duplicative (routing “red phone” users to local offices when all other calls would be placed through the VRU), costly, and too public (discussing private matters in an open office). Child support enforcement personnel expressed concern that additional staffing and facilities would be necessary to adequately provide customer service at their offices, and they expressed doubt that adequate staffing would be provided (e.g., for walk-in and phone requests, and to cover breaks, vacations, etc.).

Further, there was a concern that the model worked for cases that were essentially “trouble-free,” but that more complex cases and more rural persons would have barriers to and frustrations with using the system. There was a concern that in more complicated child support enforcement cases, local customer service representatives will be unable to answer questions appropriately and will be one more barrier to resolving

questions. There was also a concern that some persons might be unwilling to use the “red phone” or the VRU, and that there would be no customer service alternative available to them. In the current system, clerks notice and resolve problems immediately. There is a concern that no one will notice problems and notify parents when a problem occurs.

Conversely, there was agreement that the use of local customer service representatives, who were not child support enforcement workers, would free workers to spend more time on establishment and enforcement activities. There was also a feeling that the “red phone” model may enable wider access to customer service. Several stakeholder groups suggested that the “red phone” model may provide an interim solution to providing some local access, however, and that usage and satisfaction of the system be evaluated after a period of time.

It is strongly felt that customer service representatives must be trained to deal with sensitive, emotional issues, and that many times parents need someone to tell their story, regardless of the person’s ability to effectuate change. Customer service representatives, whether local persons or through the VRU, should be trained to treat all customers equally, that is, obligors currently believe that they are sometimes treated badly.

There were continuing concerns that courts would be unable to obtain certified payment records locally, and, concern about who would have the authority to change address records and with what documentation.

Other Customer Service Elements

Beyond the overall structural models of delivering customer service, other states’ experiences provided additional elements in customer service. Among these elements were the inclusion (or exclusion) of non-IV-D orders in the SDU collections, disbursement, and customer service model; the use of private, public, or public/private partnerships; the use of separate toll-free numbers; the depth of information (e.g., payment information only, payment and enforcement updates, etc.) and other options provided by VRU customer service representatives. It became clear that states have approached these elements successfully in different ways. Nebraska stakeholders provided feedback about these and other customer service elements.

Including IV-D and Non-IV-D

Through the Advisory Group and in discussion with other stakeholders, we found clear consensus in Nebraska that there should not be a distinction between IV-D and non-IV-D cases in Nebraska. That is, that the SDU and customer service should handle both IV-D and non-IV-D orders, and handle them in the same way.

Public Agencies, Private Vendors and Partnerships

We did not find clear consensus on the question as to whether customer service activities should best be handled by a public agency, a private vendor, or through some cooperative partnership. Some Nebraska stakeholders felt strongly that a public agency could not efficiently and effectively provide services. Other stakeholders doubted that private vendors could provide services. Still others had no opinion as to what

type of organization should provide the customer service. A common theme beyond who should provide customer service, was that Nebraska stakeholders wanted standards for acceptable customer service, on-going evaluation of the effectiveness of the customer service, and modification of customer service activities and providers based on this on-going evaluation. Stakeholders wanted assurance that there would be accountability, competent management and oversight, responsiveness, and adequate and effective staff selection, training and monitoring.

Independent 800-Access Numbers

It was suggested that independent 800-access numbers be established for custodial and non-custodial parents, Nebraska child support enforcement workers and district court clerks, employers, and child support enforcement workers from other states.

Depth of Knowledge of Customer Service Representatives

Stakeholders strongly urge that customer service representatives should be provided with accurate, up-to-date information to provide to customers. There was a strong belief that customer service representatives should be able to adequately answer the majority of callers questions. For example, representatives should be able to answer payment questions, read case narratives to give case updates, answer policy questions, give information about upcoming scheduled events, etc. Nebraskans want to avoid situations in which callers must place numerous calls to in order to receive answers to questions. Conversely, stakeholders wanted to assure that customer service representatives were trained to only answer questions within their ability, that is, customer service representatives should not conjecture possibilities, guess on time frames and provide other information to callers that is beyond the scope of their ability. It is necessary, therefore, that a system be developed for customer service representatives to be able to quickly refer questions they are unable to answer for timely response.

Other Options

Stakeholders were impressed with options other states offer to make their VRUs more accessible by using technology. For example, stakeholders were interested in the ability to use e-mail to ask questions, the use of secure Internet sites to access case information through a password, and the ability to use voice messaging (and receive a temporary voice mailbox to retrieve the response).

On-going Communication about Payments

Nebraskans felt strongly that there should be an on-going system of communicating with stakeholders and the SDU system. That is, Nebraskans suggested that coupon books or tear-off payment stubs be made available to non-custodial parents with direct pays. Others suggested that custodial parents be notified immediately if there was a problem in receipting, distributing, or disbursing the expected funds.

Child Care Support

Several Nebraskans voiced concerns that getting answers about payments will become more complicated, regardless of how well customer service is implemented, because the SDU will not handle child care support. Previously, the clerks of the district court were responsible for both child support and child care. With the new centralized SDU, clerks remain responsible for child care support, but not, obviously, for child support.

Employer Feedback

One key constituency from which input was solicited was the employer community. As mentioned previously in this report, employers (through income withholding) are responsible for over 60% of all child support enforcement collections. Additionally, employers are responsible for reporting information about all new employees through the New Hire system.

In Nebraska, the employers consulted concretely saw the importance of fair, fast, equitable resolution of child support enforcement cases. Employers recounted that it was their employees who were distracted from work worrying about money to pay their rent or groceries because a child support check had not been sent. Employers talked of employees needing to spend work hours on the phone to resolve child support enforcement questions, and of employees wrongly spending a night in jail because of incorrect arrearage information. Employers expressed concern that the implementation of the SDU might result in another expensive government bureaucracy in which no one is responsible or accountable. Within the following topic areas, employers had strong feelings and practical suggestions for how employers should be considered as the SDU is implemented.

Employer Customer Service

Employers suggested that there be one, separate toll-free number for employers to call to receive customer service. The customer service representatives answering the toll-free line should be specifically trained in employer issues. Employers believe that their questions require a person to talk to in order to sort out the problems they may be facing (i.e., an automated system is ineffective for them). Employers do not want to be at the mercy of a system where there are too few customer service representatives answering too many questions. They suggest that there be a number of caller-directed options available if all employer customer service representatives are busy with other calls, such as voice messaging and a queue message that accurately estimates hold time. As an alternative, employers should be able to e-mail questions. In most cases, employers need responses within 24 hours. However, there should be flexibility for “non-emergency” questions where a 24 hour time frame is not necessary. Customer service representatives should be kind, have a customer service attitude, and be well trained. Employers want to be treated with dignity and respect and believe that customer service representatives will be treated reciprocally.

Forms and Statements

Employers want a minimum of forms and other on-going correspondence from the SDU. The existing forms should be streamlined, and made easier to understand and use. Employers are not convinced that they need monthly statements from the SDU. They suggested that there be an option of accessing the statements, when prompted by e-mail that there is a change, through an Internet site. The site could also be used to retrieve and send other forms (e.g., make forms available as PDF files). Employers suggested using e-mail for employment terminations, also. They also voiced that they should receive the same information that a parent receives, otherwise, they are placed in a position of income withholding without complete information to do it correctly.

Withholding System

Employers want the SDU/CHARTS to be able to calculate arrearages based on payroll cycle. That is, some employees with income withholding are continually in arrears, simply because the employee is paid every two weeks instead of monthly.

Employer Outreach

Employers suggest that an informational campaign should be developed to update employers about the changes with the SDU system. Employer outreach could be achieved through public service announcements, mailings, a World Wide Web site, and other means. Because there will be likely resistance to the change, employers believed that it is important to keep the benefits of the centralized system squarely in the forefront of all communications with employers, with information about how to get answers to questions. The transition from the former system to the SDU system will likely be confusing. Employers need to know from whom they should expect to receive the initiating court order, from whom and how often adjustments may be made, who to contact for questions, etc. Information should be provided to employers up-front about how to get help and what alternative are available to them.

Employers unanimously agreed that being sent series of booklets is not helpful: the booklets will be thrown away. Seminars and trainings through the local chambers of commerce and other associations (e.g., American Payroll Association, Society of Human Resource Managers) should be conducted. Visits and presentations should also include information about customer service, possibly presented by one of the customer service representatives.

Outreach and training activities should take into account the size of the company. For example, personal visits should be made to the largest employers and efforts should be made to use their existing payroll system for SDU receipting. Medium and small companies might receive letters and software to assist them in preparing SDU receipts. Small companies might be given the choice of using software or a more manually-based system.

Employee Outreach

Employers suggested that they be provided copies of informational pamphlets to share with their employees as they are often asked for information by employees. The VRU handling parents' questions should have extended hours beyond normal business hours to enable parents to contact the VRU on non-work hours. Information for employees should be multi-lingual.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS, RATIONALES, AND POLICY DECISIONS

Overview: 10 Recommendations for Successful Customer Service Planning and Implementation in Nebraska

- ✓ *We recommend the establishment of an on-going, intergovernmental and key **stakeholder team(s)** to monitor and participate in the selection, implementation, and on-going evaluation of the customer service system in Nebraska.*
- ✓ *We recommend the extensive use of a **toll-free, Voice Response Unit (VRU)/automated telephone system with customer service representatives** as the primary means of obtaining customer service in Nebraska.*
- ✓ *We recommend there be access to a local person with whom the **customer can speak face-to-face for service**; however, given the difficult problems specifying who would be responsible such services, this may not be possible.*
- ✓ *We recommend there be customer services specifically for **employers and** to address **employment issues**.*
- ✓ *We recommend that **all child support cases be included** both in the collection and disbursement of monies and in the provision of customer services, regardless of whether the case is covered by the federal mandate (i.e., IV-D and income-withholding cases).*
- ✓ *We recommend there be **adequate staffing and infrastructure expenditures** to ensure the successful implementation of the SDU system and to ensure that customer service needs will be met; we further recommend **incremental implementation** of major changes to the current child support system.*
- ✓ *In order to be able to accurately assess the successes and failures of customer services as Nebraska changes its child support system, we encourage specification of **performance indicators** and the conduct of **customer satisfaction studies**.*
- ✓ *We recommend the new customer service system in Nebraska make use of **new technologies** to expand access to information and to allow innovative means for interactions between customers and customer service providers.*
- ✓ *We encourage the introduction of **innovative social programs** (e.g., father support programs, mediation programs) and **collaboration with existing programs** designed to further the goals of the child support system.*
- ✓ *We encourage **stakeholders to exercise patience** as the SDU is implemented and as customer services are changed in Nebraska, and we encourage the **CSE/IV-D agency to be proactive** in its educational efforts to inform stakeholders of upcoming changes.*

Background

In this section we offer ten recommendations intended to preserve existing customer service strengths and to reduce or eliminate customer service weaknesses as the SDU is implemented in Nebraska. We define customer service broadly: Customer service involves providing information to customers (e.g., “Was my payment received?”, “How much in arrears am I?”, or “When is my court date?”), and it also involves solving customers’ problems (“My account does not reflect the payment I sent directly to the SDU on December 31, 1999.”, or “My ex says he sent a check but he says he probably did not include the coupon, and I have not yet received a check this month.”). Also, because the SDU (and its successful implementation) is inextricably intertwined with customer service, we comment on decisionmaking related to the SDU.

The recommendations we offer are based on the variety of information we obtained during the study period, which began in June 1999 and continued through the end of September. To reiterate, we received input from numerous sources. We received input from the Advisory Group members during August and September stakeholder meetings conducted by the Public Policy Center. Additional input was received from Advisory Group members as well as other Nebraskans outside of the two meetings.

We also were briefed by state Child Support Enforcement staff and officials from many states around the nation, although we concentrated to a great degree on jurisdictions in our region. We received input from numerous federal child support staff and officials. We met with leaders and staff from private companies working in child support around the country. We also conferred with national experts. The authorities we consulted provided us with their perspectives as part of conference presentations, in face-to-face meetings during conferences, in subsequent telephone conversations and via e-mail communications, and as part of visits to child support facilities in Iowa and Wisconsin.

We also used myriad child support materials obtained from the Internet and libraries. We also relied on materials we received from Nebraska staff and officials and from other experts, staff, and officials from throughout the country.

Finally, we received a great deal of information and guidance from Work Group members. Work group members represented the Unicameral, the Child Support Enforcement/IV-D agency, the Governor’s office, the State Court Administrator’s Office, and the District Court Clerk’s Association. The Work Group members were extraordinarily generous with their time and advice.

It is important to reiterate that the recommendations which follow are the Public Policy Center’s, and they do not necessarily reflect the views of any particular person or agency, inside or outside of Nebraska. Rather these recommendations reflect our interpretations and judgments based on the input we received from so many people over the four month project period. Others may disagree with our recommendations, and we trust those who disagree will let the Executive Board know of their points of disagreement and the reasons for any disagreements.

In order to ensure that Senators are informed about the bases for our recommendations (and in recognition of the large amount of background information provided in the rest of this Report), we follow each recom-

mentation with a discussion of the rationales that support the recommendations we offer. We also point out matters which we think require policy choices to be made by the legislature and by the Department of Health and Human Services and its Child Support Enforcement/IV-D agency. In line with the primary recommendation in this Report, we urge the legislature and the executive agency to work together, collaboratively, in making these policy decisions.

1. STAKEHOLDER TEAMS

We recommend the establishment of an on-going, intergovernmental and key stakeholder team(s) to monitor and participate in the selection, implementation, and on-going evaluation of the customer service system in Nebraska.

Although the Child Support Enforcement/IV-D agency (hereinafter CSE/IV-D) in Nebraska must take the leadership role for child support matters – as IV-D agencies do in each of the states we studied – we cannot overemphasize the benefits of a **stakeholder team**. Later in this section, we discuss the size of the team and issues related to one team versus multiple teams. The important point we wish to stress is that the presence of a strong stakeholder team(s) seems to be **the key** to successful implementation of customer service structures and plans in the states we examined.

We recommend, at a minimum, the stakeholder team comprise partners from the Nebraska CSE/IV-D agency, officials from other Nebraska governmental units (particularly the Legislature, the Governor's Office, the District Court Clerks' Association, and the State Court Administrator's Office), and representatives from key stakeholder constituencies (particularly employers and custodial and non-custodial parent representatives). We discuss the composition of the stakeholder team in more detail below.

At this point, we want to focus on the stakeholder team's authority and focus. To the extent practical, we recommend the team be involved in making recommendations for as much of the complex *decisionmaking* regarding the selection and implementation not only of customer services but also overarching issues related to SDU selection (e.g., should the SDU be privatized? should customer services be coordinated by the same vendor/entity that does the SDU or is it okay to have separate entities?), as many customer service matters are inextricably connected to the SDU.

We want to take a moment to acknowledge the separation of powers issue as it relates to the stakeholder team. We do not envision the stakeholder team exercising primarily executive or administrative functions. Rather we envision the stakeholder team working together in an advisory capacity, making recommendations that the CSE/IV-D agency or the legislature is free to adopt or reject. Other states have addressed the separation of powers doctrine in various ways. Some state legislatures have worked with other governmental stakeholders in establishing legislation that clearly delineate team authority and responsibility as an advisory group, thus enabling all branches of government to participate (as we recommend). Others, Michigan for example, have created a team with representatives from the courts and CSE/IV-D, but not with legislative participation (legislative representatives may attend meetings but do not serve in an official capacity on the team). Thus, separation of governmental responsibilities poses a barrier, but a barrier that can be overcome *with creativity and with intergovernmental cooperation*.

The goal is not usurpation of powers appropriately vested in governmental entities (e.g., in the legislature, in the CSE/IV-D agency), but rather it is a push for collaborative decisionmaking. At the risk of stating the obvious, we want to emphasize that collaborative decisionmaking means that stakeholders *work together to make consensus recommendations*. Sometimes conclusions will be reached that are less than optimal, but are ones that “everyone can live with.” It is easier to live with a decision if you have been part of making the decision, and if you have been privy to the myriad trade-offs and competing interests that have been weighed before the final determination is made. Public hearings, briefings, and contractual relationships, even if involving many stakeholders, do not exemplify collaborative decisionmaking. Groups that are convened to gather input from a particular segment of stakeholders focused on providing feedback on a narrow issue, while also very useful and groups that we would strongly recommend using periodically, are different from the type of cross-stakeholder, collaborative team we are recommending in this section. Our use of the term collaborative decisionmaking implies on-going, scheduled opportunities for a diverse group of continuing stakeholders to, on an equal basis, evaluate data, share opinions, make recommendations, and monitor changes under the aegis of a governmental body. As we will discuss below, the successes other jurisdictions have had typically involved true *partnerships*, not symbolic gathering of stakeholders or other types of relationships. In developing a truly collaborative working relationship, consideration may be given to using a trained, outside facilitator who could assist the group in determining communication strategies, meeting frequencies, member responsibilities and duties, and other group process issues.

Partnership is especially critical during the SDU/customer service planning and implementation stages, in our opinion. During this critical period, many policy choices and practical decisions will have to be made which will have long-standing and far-reaching implications for such important aspects of the child support system as customer service structures, staffing, and so on. For example, will district court clerks continue to be responsible for monitoring and documenting child support visitation credits, release of liens, and so on? If the district court clerk has one address for a case, and the SDU has another, which address takes precedence? What can be done to detect the presence of multiple addresses before a problem erupts? It will be useful to have an on-going procedure in place that will allow stakeholders to have input – and thus to have investment – in the choices that are made.

States reporting successful SDU/customer service systems counsel there are benefits to continuing with stakeholder input, even after successful implementation. The reason for continuing stakeholder teams is on-going teams already have learned how to work together to make complex decisions, and the on-going team is in an excellent position to advise the child support enforcement agency about how best to resolve issues as these issues manifest themselves over time. Such advice was directly given to us by numerous child support staff and officials, who told us about some specific, positive outcomes that resulted from on-going stakeholder input. For example, the special customer service center for employers in Iowa was an outgrowth of a task force group created to address employers’ concerns and dissatisfactions. Had employers been involved earlier in the process, it is possible that the center may have been implemented prior to vocal employers expressing their dissatisfaction. Time and again, we heard about states in which initial rocky roads were replaced with successful movement ahead to compliance with the federal mandate once stakeholders were brought into the decisionmaking process. Thus, we received consistent advice regarding the benefits of stakeholder input at the planning and implementation stages, and such input continues to be valuable even after changes to the child support system have been successfully introduced. We think the advice to involve stakeholders makes sense for Nebraska.

Indeed, we go even further. It is our opinion that what is *key* about the successful customer service models being used by states *is not the particular customer service choice that states have made*. It is a “Baskins and Robbins” world – there seem to be virtually “31 flavors” of customer service models which work well across the country. In our investigations we found examples of SDU/customer service done by the IV-D agency itself, done with the participation of other governmental units (customer service as part of the SDU system run by a governmental unit other than the IV-D agency), done by private companies, and done in various combinations. Specifically, highlights include centralized customer services provided by private companies in Iowa (Policy Studies, Inc.) and Wisconsin (Lockheed Martin); centralized customer services provided by centralized child support enforcement agency staff in Arizona and Maine; county-based customer services provided by clerks in Illinois and Florida; and, county-based customer services provided by child support enforcement agency staff in Minnesota and New York.

We were surprised, at first, that reports of success or problems did not seem to be associated with the customer service model used. Upon further reflection, we realized that it was not the model selection that was as important as the model selection process.

The key, apparently, is not what structure or model is selected by a state. Rather, what seems to be *critical* is that the choices made are *endorsed by the vast majority, if not all, of the key stakeholders involved in child support matters*. Based on our research, we conclude it is much easier to have stakeholder endorsement if the stakeholders have actively participated in the decisionmaking from the outset.

Thus, in Nebraska, **we recommend the establishment of a stakeholder team to guide future customer service (and SDU) decisionmaking**. There already is a foundation for a stakeholder team in Nebraska. The Work Group, which was so valuable to this Implementation Project, had **representatives from the Child Support Enforcement Agency, the Unicameral, the Governor’s Office, the District Court Clerk’s Association, and the State Court Administrator’s Office**. The same persons, or other representatives, could continue on as the core of a stakeholder team. Given the responsibilities of the stakeholder team (as opposed to the Implementation Project), we see no need for on-going participation by University members. In place of the University members, we urge inclusion of **representatives from the employer community and from custodial and non-custodial parents**. Based on our study of other states and in light of values important to Nebraskans, we believe the participation of these other groups will allow critical constituent input that otherwise will be missing. For example, there needs to be **sensitivity to the diversity** of Nebraskans – not all persons in Nebraska involved in the child support system speak English as their native language, and many in the child support system have unique or special needs. Cultural sensitivities and individual differences are important, and citizen input via custodial and non-custodial parent representatives can aid government in being responsive to the needs of all Nebraskans.

POLICY DECISION POINT: Stakeholder Teams

A determination must be made whether to use stakeholder teams and, if so, which constituencies should be represented and how many team members should be included? Further, there is an issue of whether there should be just one team to address planning, implementation, and on-going concerns, or should there be multiple teams?

Whether to Use Stakeholder Teams. We are sensitive to the presence of decisionmaking inefficiencies when groups comprising various stakeholders are asked to join in complex policy and complex practice determinations. In general, we realize, there are benefits in efficiency and accountability if an agency sets its own course.

However, despite the cumbersome aspects of stakeholder input and coalition decisionmaking, we think it is advisable for the CSE/IV-D agency to work collaboratively with other stakeholders. In part, we come to this conclusion based on our understanding that there are stakeholder collaborations in virtually all the other states which seem to be in the midst of, or have completed, a successful transition to centralized receipting and disbursements and associated customer services. Still, the decision to create and involve a stakeholder team is a policy choice.

Even beyond the fact that we received specific advice to this effect from national child support officials and experts, we are independently convinced that collaborations are necessary in the context of child support matters. Child support issues are the kinds of intergovernmental, bipartisan issues that cry for collaborative decisionmaking. This is true we believe in general, and we believe it to be sound advice for Nebraska. The risk is that without all important parties on-board as Nebraska undertakes a major change to its child support system in response to the federal mandates of PRWORA, there is tremendous vulnerability to pervasive complaining and second-guessing as the SDU system and associated customer services inevitably go through the ups-and-downs associated with implementation of a new, complex system. The first year, particularly, is very challenging. Even with coalition decisionmaking there are likely to be numerous complaints received by the Unicameral, the Governor's office, and HHS. If there is a coalition of stakeholders serving as partners in the SDU/customer service decisionmaking process, then we believe the CSE/IV-D agency will be able to devote its time to the job of implementing the new child support payment and customer service system rather than spending inordinate amounts of time answering queries from other governmental officials. There is a greater likelihood of ensuring that dissatisfactions will not turn into insurmountable barriers to successful implementation if key stakeholders have agreed to the model(s) to be used in the child support system. In other states, we learned dissatisfied stakeholders effectively delayed or prevented successful deployment of a centralized system. We believe Nebraska already has experienced delay that is due, in no small part, to a lack of stakeholder buy-in, and we think future impediments can be reduced or eliminated through collaborative decisionmaking.

Child support issues are high on the radar screen of state legislators and governors, and members of Congress also frequently hear about child support matters from their constituencies. The high visibility and importance of child support issues along with the fact that billions of dollars are involved in the child support system has resulted in the close monitoring of child support developments by the National Conference of State Court Legislators (for state lawmakers) and the National Center for State Courts (for judicial officials), just to name a few of the national organizations actively involved in the topic. Congress, too, maintains a high degree of involvement in child support matters. In other words, the social and political realities of child support matters mean that child support matters compete with tax issues as key socioeconomic issues in our society. Coalition decisionmaking is quite valuable in such contexts.

It is important to keep in mind the current level of satisfaction that exists in Nebraska. People generally are pleased with the district court clerk-based system of child support collections, disbursements, and customer services. The desire for change in Nebraska's child support system did not stem from a state-governmental or grass-roots push for change; rather, change in Nebraska resulted from outside pressures (that is, the federal PRWORA mandate). Nebraskans have not been shy about expressing their feelings of frustration at having to change the child support system (negative opinions were strongly reflected in the 1997 Governor's Child Support Collection Task Force's inability to come to consensus, the 1999 floor debate over LB 637, and adverse feelings continue to this day, as reflected by communications Implementation Project staff have received from numerous Nebraskan stakeholders). There are many potent voices across the state who raise concerns about the economic impact they perceive on district court clerk offices as the state moves to a centralized collection/disbursement system. Even many of those who do not feel satisfied with the current district court clerk-based system and do not believe the district court clerks provide stellar customer service, nonetheless express upset (even outrage) at change imposed by the federal government. At this point, we believe many of Nebraska's stakeholders are at least somewhat convinced of the desirability of the federal mandate or are resigned to the implementation of the SDU and the move away from district court clerks' participation in the handling of child support monies. However, there is not deep nor heart-felt support for changes in Nebraska. In such an environment, changes can be easily undermined and, based on what previously has taken place in Nebraska, we counsel not moving ahead without the strong participation of key stakeholders.

The advantages of cross-governmental teamwork was emphasized by the child support leadership with whom we spoke in many states, as well as by the national experts with whom we consulted. We are persuaded not only by the sheer number of states that have established cross-governmental teams to develop and monitor implementation strategies and to continue to resolve potential and existing problems after implementation, but we also are impressed by the reports about the creation of stakeholder teams intended to help ensure that policy choices are not undermined by other political or philosophical considerations. Stakeholder teams, in some states, have been legislatively mandated. Stakeholder teams sometimes have been started at the behest of the IV-D agency in other states. Teams could be created by the Governor. The genesis of the team seems to be less important than the existence of a group authorized to make decisions on behalf of their constituencies (or with quick access to such authority). In those instances in which we learned of failures in the operation of a state's child support system, it invariably seemed that the state did not have an intergovernmental team in place.

We found that in jurisdictions where a government team does not exist, there seems to be greater risk for intergovernmental tensions and complaints about the child support system. On the other hand, in jurisdictions where there is an intergovernmental team in place that provides real (as opposed to symbolic) participation in decisionmaking, there seemed to be a greater likelihood that the officials to whom we spoke would express satisfaction about the operation of their system.

Composition of Stakeholder Team. In addition to a core group comprising governmental and citizen stakeholders we identified above, we believe serious consideration should be given to including representatives who can express the interests and needs of county attorneys and authorized attorneys, judicial officers (district court judges, referees), and field child support workers. These professionals are

extensively involved in child support enforcement issues; their professional activities will be affected by the customer service-related (and SDU-related) decisions that are made in Nebraska. We also encourage the participation of a representative from the Health and Human Services System Policy Cabinet, particularly in the early stages of implementation, as there will be policy and fiscal decisions, possibly requiring Policy Cabinet-level coordination, leadership, and quick and informed action.

The problem with representing so many stakeholders is that the size of the group can become too large and unwieldy to allow effective group decisionmaking. Group size is discussed in greater detail, below. A major advantage to not excluding stakeholders is that if the “buy-in” of various constituencies is obtained, then it likely reduces the opposition to the decisions that are made.

The ultimate composition and size of the stakeholder team is a policy choice that should be made deliberately. It should balance the advantages of stakeholder input values versus other concerns.

One Stakeholder Team, or Multiple Stakeholder Teams? The functions of SDU/customer service planning, implementation, and on-going system monitoring can be seen as one or multiple functions. Should there be one stakeholder team that traverses all three functions, or should there be multiple teams?

As noted previously, we take a strong stance that a stakeholder group should continue even after successful implementation. Other states’ experiences point to the advantages of continuing to monitor child support matters and to serve as an issue-identification, problem-solving group, and advisory group. This will ensure that weaknesses can be quickly identified and addressed, and strengths can be identified and preserved. For example, in Iowa the on-going employer task force led to the understanding of the value of a separate employer customer service center, staffed by employer customer service specialists and located in a city other than the one where the SDU and general customer service is located.

In fact, although an on-going group will certainly be valuable in the customer service domain, it also could help with other child support matters as well. For example, a coalition of stakeholders might agree on new programs for Nebraska and come up with suggestions for the additional resources required for these programs. The point is that there are probably significant opportunity costs *not* to have stakeholder groups in place in the child support arena, where political and policy dimensions are so great as are the attendant economic issues.

But the question of whether there should be one team for SDU, one for customer service, one for development, one for implementation, one for on-going concerns, and so on is a question that needs to be considered. Certainly, some of the issues that need to be considered are different across these domains. Probably a core group will be involved in all the teams. But it may be that the legislative and gubernatorial representatives will be most needed at the planning and implementation stages, but not for on-going evaluation and modification of the system. Thus, it seems reasonable to decide to empanel different groups as needed rather than appoint one group that will continue ad infinitum.

Size of the Stakeholder Team. The size of the stakeholder team is of concern, and in some ways is an issue that is related to the “one versus multiple groups” issue discussed above. There must be a balance

between a group that is too large and a group that fails to reflect the perspectives of key stakeholders. We would cautiously urge that Nebraska err on the side of over-inclusion rather than under-inclusion, as recent history has demonstrated the vulnerabilities of under-inclusion.

However, the size of the stakeholder team is in part a policy and political decision that should be at least be weighed against other values. For example, there are strong arguments, as we have just indicated, for including many stakeholders. There are equally compelling arguments to limit the size of the stakeholder team. For example, in the planning stages, it may be that decisionmaking efficiency is compromised by a large group. An argument could be made that including legislative and gubernatorial representatives in an on-going team is a poor use of limited personnel resources; when warranted and/or needed, legislative and gubernatorial stakeholders could be appraised of issues and their input solicited. Part of the issue is a matter of trust; if there is trust that important stakeholders will be consulted when necessary, then there may be less of a need for on-going participation in (and monitoring of) activities.

There is a difficult decision to be made about the group size, which must be made in light of the group composition and the existence of a single, or multiple teams. In an ideal situation, one might want to rely on the core of the stakeholder team – that is those representatives from the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial (including the clerks) branches of government – to be the arbiters of group size and composition. The core group members might decide, for example, that a smaller group meet bi-weekly and the entire group might convene once every four or six weeks. In an environment of trust, it may make more sense to allow a core group of participants to make these determinations. In an environment of mistrust, policymakers may wish to explicitly express their desires.

2. VOICE RESPONSE UNIT (VRU) AND VRU-CONNECTED CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES

We recommend the extensive use of a toll-free, Voice Response Unit (VRU)/automated telephone system with customer service representatives as the primary means of obtaining customer service in Nebraska.

Every state we consulted that has implemented an SDU also uses an automated, Voice Response Unit (VRU) linked to its SDU. It appears that the establishment of a VRU is a logical and necessary means of providing customers information about child support payments (monies receipted and disbursed). In those states where data are available, the data consistently revealed that over 90% of parents' inquiries concern simple payment information. It is less expensive, more efficient, and possibly faster for the caller, to provide information through a VRU than it is to have a person provide the same information. The experience of other states is that most questions (e.g., dates of payment receipts and disbursements) are effectively handled via VRU contacts.

It is imperative, however, that the information provided by the VRU be accurate, and it is imperative that the VRU itself be accessible (in other words, the VRU should not be inaccessible because of technology failure of the VRU system, because there are too few phone lines established, because there are not accommodations for significant special populations, etc.). Experience of other states (e.g., Iowa, Mon-

tana, Wisconsin) indicate people will grow increasingly comfortable using a VRU customer service system. At first, we were told, most people want to talk to a person, but within three to five months after VRU implementation, requests for access to customer service representatives decrease dramatically. We know of no reason to believe Nebraska's experience will differ from other states' experiences.

As we discussed previously, there are ways to make VRUs a success (see Chapter V, *Private Sector Customer Call-In Centers*). These include user-friendly VRU menus, clear instructions and limited options to reduce confusion, opportunity to leave voice-messages when customer service representatives are not quickly available for personal service, and reliability and accuracy in the information provided. We recommend the entire list of suggestions found in the VRU literature.

In addition, we recommend there be several **independent, 800-access numbers**. A minimum would be three separate numbers, one for custodial/non-custodial parents, one for child support enforcement workers and district court clerks, and one for employers. Additional lines to be considered would include a separate numbers for the district court clerks and a number for out-of-state child support workers. We believe it is important that each VRU number have a sufficient amount of trunk lines to support the volume of calls it will receive and that each VRU number have sufficient number of staff to provide personal customer service when the VRU does not have the information needed by the caller.

We found clear consensus for there to be sufficient numbers of **customer service representatives who are accessible through the VRU and who are available to answer queries intended for personal, not automated, customer service**. These customer service representatives need to have, or have immediate access to someone who has, **the authority to respond to and resolve customers' problems**. Other states' experiences suggest that these customer service representatives will handle the vast majority of child support customer service needs. In other words, if the system works properly, 90% of calls will be handled by the automated VRU, and of the remaining calls another large amount (perhaps upwards of 9 out of the 10 calls not handled by the VRU) can be expected to be handled via the customer service representative (although the customer service representative may need to be in contact with others to resolve the problem).

Thus, it is critical that customer service representatives have access to a sufficient depth of information (excluding information requiring research by a child support worker or official) so that the customer does not need to call or visit elsewhere to obtain the desired information. In Nebraska this means that the customer service representative should have the ability to access the CHARTS and JUSTICE systems, both of which contain case-related information required by customers.

Most states attempt to have sufficient lines so that there are few busy signals for callers (except, perhaps, during the high volume periods of Monday mornings) and so that the maximum waiting time for custodial and non-custodial parents to speak to a customer service representative is kept to between three and five minutes. We believe Nebraskans deserve the same consideration and that Nebraska's VRU system should strive to keep parents on the phone no longer than two minutes after the first year of VRU operation and should have waits of less than one minute for professionals (e.g., employers, clerks, and child support workers) who call.

The number of independent numbers should range between three and five. As this decision is being deliberated, we again caution erring on the side of having too many lines rather than having too few lines in the beginning. Other states' officials counsel over and over again that the initial implementation is the key time period, and dedicating too few resources (whether it be telephone lines or the number of customer service representatives who back up those lines for personal customer service inquiries) can cost the system considerably down the road should customers find that they are unable to access the system to answer their queries or find that the information they are being provided is inaccurate or find that only partial information is available.

POLICY DECISION POINT: Privatization

A determination must be made whether customer services, including the VRU itself and the VRU-linked customer service representatives, should be privatized or should be handled by the CSE/IV-D agency?

Privatization or outsourcing of governmental functions implicates major policy considerations that transcend child support. We offer no recommendation whether privatization should be used in the child support context. We do note, however, that privatization is a national trend and is one means to reduce the size of government. Moreover, we also want to state unequivocally that privatization of child support functions seems to work well in many states. Whether child support privatization is the best choice for Nebraska is a fundamental policy choice that needs to be made.

Privatization has several advantages, including the provision of expertise do various tasks. We learned about several of these advantages in our visits to other states. For example, in both Iowa (Policy Studies, Inc.) and Wisconsin (Lockheed Martin), private vendors have developed procedures to strategically select, train, and monitor child support customer service representatives who are hired to respond to customer service calls. Both companies have developed extensive training programs and closely work with new staff to make sure that customers are being appropriately and accurately served. Both companies seem to efficiently manage the numbers of staff needed, and the contract with the respective states requires certain performance standards to be met. When customer service employees fail to do their jobs well, it is easier for a private company to fire such employees than it is for the state to do so. And, it may be easier for a private company to reward good work through incentive programs. Indeed, it seems to be the trend, in most states, to privatize child support customer services *and* the SDU. Several child support officials explained to us that privatizing functions such as customer service (and receipting/disbursing) allows the agency and its workers to focus on enforcement rather than on providing information (or worrying about "accounting" matters).

It is important to note, however, that there are many states which continue to offer customer services because they believe to do so is part of the state's responsibility. We heard from state officials who contended that if customer service provision is subject to a business "bottom line," there is too much risk for cutting corners at the customer's expense. Moreover, there are confidentiality concerns with allowing private companies, and their often young employees, to have access to very sensitive information about citizens. The risk of misuse and error is too great, several officials argued.

We think there are numerous advantages and disadvantages to privatization. The key, it seems to us, is not whether customer service (or the SDU) is privatized but whether the decision to do so, or not, is a consensus that has been arrived at by careful consideration of the stakeholder team.

We do believe that *if* privatization is used, there should be a clear rationale for privatizing. That is, is the intention to save money, is it to enhance services, and/or is it to provide flexibility? Careful attention should be paid to making sure the vendor contract includes a specification of performance standards and other expectations. Most states have indicated that a successful relationship with a vendor is predicated on mutually accepted goals and measurable, obtainable standards so that expectations and standards are clear. Such standards may include numbers of calls fielded per day or percentages of calls resolved without needing referral to others within the child support system, and so on. Regularly scheduled meetings should be convened to refine protocols, make quick policy decisions, standardize answers to frequently asked questions, trouble-shoot, exchange information, and measure success. Although the contract should refrain from over-prescribing means of achieving goals, it should describe outcome measures and other expectations. States have found that three to five year contracts, renewable each year, are reasonable in bidding contracts. The CSE/IV-D agency needs to devote adequate staff time, particularly at the beginning of the contract, to monitor vendor implementation and administration of the services. Indeed, whether a private vendor is used, or whether a public agency performs the functions, delineating these types of goals, standards, and processes at the start are invaluable for on-going monitoring, modification of systems, problem-solving, and development of protocols.

POLICY DECISION POINT: Background of the Customer Service Representative

What should be the background of the customer service representatives who are linked to the VRU and SDU? Should these persons have child support background and expertise?

Child support customer service seems to have some features of social services and some features of business problem-solving. Some states emphasize the business side more than the social services side of child support customer service (e.g., Iowa). Other states focus on the social services side of customer service (e.g., Missouri).

To understand the business focus, it is useful to consider a credit card company's customer service approach. A customer service representative working for a credit card company is (ideally) trained to be sensitive and compassionate, but nevertheless is there to provide customers with information and to solve problems without providing additional therapeutic or social "services." Although credit card customers may have financial concerns which have social dimensions (e.g., "I am unable to make a payment because I was in an automobile accident, and I am unable to pick up my check from my work because my boss won't give my check directly to my girlfriend so I will pay late, after I receive my paycheck in the mail."), or "I don't know why a payment isn't reflected on my account, I sent a check in two weeks ago and my bank indicates the check was cashed."), most of us recognize the credit card's customer service representative will simply collect the information and/or solve the problem. We do not expect any additional services.

On the other hand, when we contact our physician's office for service, we expect something more. For example, most of us would feel slighted if our call to a physician's office was met with the comparatively cold, business-like response we expect to receive from a credit card company.

Should child support customer services be more like a credit card company's services or more like a physician's office's services? The bottom line is that employees at a physician's office are expected to provide a different level of services and have a different level of knowledge and problem-solving ability than employees working for a credit card company, and the pay at a physician's office reflects their greater level of expertise. How much knowledge and expertise do we want from our child support customer service representatives? How much are we willing to pay our child support customer service representatives?

It is important to point out that even at a physician's office there needs to be cost containment. The person who schedules appointments does not have the same level of training or expertise as does the medical staff, and inquiries that require medical knowledge are referred from the receptionist to a physician or nurse.

The same model could be used in child support customer service. It would be reasonable to establish a system in which front-line customer service representatives are expected to possess a higher level of customer service skills but a lesser level of child support expertise. In such a system, existing child support workers could continue to focus on enforcement, rather than customer service efforts.

It would be equally reasonable to establish a system in which front-line customer service representatives are expected to possess a high level of child support expertise. It would be reasonable to decide that a Nebraskan who requires child support customer service deserves to speak with someone who knows and understands child support matters and is a child support professional, not a lower-paid, lesser-trained customer service representative.

The resolution of this issue is not only a matter of a cost-benefit assessment. It also entails a social services determination about the best way to provide and deliver child support services in the state.

3. A LOCAL CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE WITH WHOM TO SPEAK, FACE-TO-FACE

*We recommend there be access to a local person with whom the **customer can speak face-to-face for service**; however, given the difficult problems specifying who would be responsible such services, this may not be possible.*

In many states, face-to-face customer service remains available, but other states have opted to eliminate access to face-to-face customer services. Both decisions, as we explain in this section, seem reasonable and defensible. A difficult decision will have to be made regarding whether, in light of the challenges face-to-face customer service will present, it makes sense to continue access to a local person with whom customers can speak, face-to-face. However, it is important to point out that the Nebraska *parents* (both custodial and non-custodial) to whom we spoke were firm in their desire to preserve face-to-face customer service. Those who would have to provide such service or would have to coordinate face-to-face customer services – that is, district court clerks or field child support workers – were not in favor of preserving access to face-to-face customer services.

As we noted, several states do provide access to face-to-face customer service. In some states (e.g., Florida, Illinois), local district court clerks provide face-to-face customer services. Local clerks are available to supplement the customer services provided via the toll-free, VRU number attached to the SDU. In other states (e.g., Minnesota, New York), face-to-face customer services are available from local child support workers. Local workers are available to supplement the customer services provided via the toll-free, VRU number attached to the SDU.

Other states have eliminated or drastically curtailed access to face-to-face customer services. In Iowa, for example, once their transition is completed neither district court clerks nor child support workers will provide face-to-face customer service. Iowa's Child Support Enforcement/IV-D agency discourages face-to-face customer services. The Iowa CSE/IV-D agency's rationale is that Iowans are best served by not having face-to-face access. The rationale in Iowa for not having district court clerks provide the function is that clerks are judicial officers, and they should provide judicial services, not social services. Thus, when clerks have *judicial* responsibilities related to child support (e.g., scheduling court hearings or entering a judicial order), they should be involved in child support matters. In other circumstances, district court clerks should not have involvement in child support issues. Several other states (e.g., Missouri) have adopted the same approach viz-a-viz district court clerks as Iowa. Iowa's rationale for not having child support enforcement officials provide face-to-face (or telephone accessed) customer services is that Iowa's child support officials are trained in child support enforcement and best equipped in undertaking financial enforcement activities. The CSE/IV-D agency officials to whom we spoke in Iowa feel it would be a waste of child support workers' training and unique skills to saddle them with customer service responsibilities.

What about Nebraska? The Nebraska custodial and non-custodial parent representatives to whom we spoke expressed a **strong preference for access to a person with whom they can speak to face-to-face and who can solve customers' problems**. Indeed, this was true not only for custodial and non-custodial parents themselves: there was strong sentiment among most Advisory Group members for there to be a **local person** with whom custodial and non-custodial parents can speak, in-person, and who is empowered to resolve the problems that inevitably occur in the child support context (e.g., when checks are lost, payments issued are not received, records are inaccurate, etc.). Other interested parties, for example employers and attorneys, do not seem to be concerned about face-to-face access.

Nebraska's district court clerks have long been involved in child support matters, and many Nebraskans appear to be comfortable with the personal services provided by the district court clerks' offices. Although not uniformly praised (there seems to be a correlation between county population and criticisms directed towards clerks; the smaller the population of a county, the greater the likelihood of praise about the clerks' services), most Nebraskans seemed satisfied with the child support services district court clerks have been providing.

In the August meeting of the Advisory Group, the district court clerks were specifically identified by the Advisory Group members as those who should continue to provide local customer services. It may have been that the reason Nebraskans want clerks to provide the services is simply because of the historical practice of clerks providing such services. In any event, because there are district court clerks in every county in Nebraska, we might have suggested that the legislature use district court clerk for local customer

service, with the proviso of researching practical and/or state constitutional barriers to having the clerks change records that are controlled by HHS/CSE and the SDU. However, surveys of and discussions with district court clerks subsequent to the August meeting clearly revealed that the vast majority of clerks preferred not to provide more than minimal child support customer services after the state ceases to use clerks for receipting and disbursing child support payments. The major concern we heard was that clerks will not have the responsibility or authority to maintain payment records; therefore, the clerks do not want to be placed in the position of needing to correct mistakes when they are not the ones who have made the mistakes and/or do not have the authority to resolve the mistakes that have been made. In light of these considerations, it seemed quite reasonable for clerks to want to restrict their services to court-related matters.

An alternative, we thought, would be for customer services to be handled through HHS/Child Support Offices. The idea would be that customers could walk-in, or call, their local or regional child support office for contact with someone who would respond to their needs. Although there are local or regional child support offices in only 16 counties in Nebraska, these counties cover 69% of the population in Nebraska and, it is estimated by HHS staff, between 85-90% of the child support cases in the state. To address the void for the Nebraskans who did not live close to an office (and/or for those without phones), district court clerks expressed willingness in having a phone in the clerk's office that would directly connect to the closest local or regional child support office. The phone also could have direct access to the centralized VRU/customer service unit associated with the SDU. This suggestion was termed the "**red phone**" option to indicate that the phone would be easily recognizable and distinct from other services offered through the district court clerk's office.

Utilizing child support workers for face-to-face customer service and installing dedicated phones in clerk's offices seemed like a viable alternative to district court clerks in terms of preserving face-to-face, customer service access for *most* Nebraskans. The idea seems more palatable if it could be ensured that there would be a specific customer representative assigned to a case so that a caller could expect to speak to the same person each time s/he called or stopped in at the local or regional child support office.

We posed this idea at the September meeting of the Advisory Group. We explained why the clerks did not want to provide customer services, and we inquired what Advisory Group members thought about using child support offices for access to face-to-face customer services and about using the red phones for access to child support offices for those who did not live close to an office. Many Advisory Group members thought this option reasonable in light of the fact that district court clerk access did not seem possible. Specifically, custodial and non-custodial parent representatives, employers, and district court clerks found the red phone option to be a viable solution given the changes which will take place after the SDU is successfully implemented. On the other hand, child support enforcement staff, judicial officials, legislative representatives, and attorneys were most vocal in their opposition. Child support workers were quite concerned, in fact. They noted they are already understaffed and have difficulty in fulfilling their current responsibilities. They told us most child support offices have too few resources (facility, staffing resources, etc.) to allow them to work efficiently as-is, much less with the addition of more customer service responsibilities for the office. They were sympathetic to the interest of Nebraskans for face-to-face customer service, but they did not see their offices as solutions (even if new customer service representatives were to be hired).

This is a complex problem. There is no easy solution to the differences in opinions. Despite the consensus from most of the stakeholders that there be access to a local customer service representative with whom the customer can speak face-to-face, we cannot offer a definitive recommendation for face-to-face customer service because of the difficulty in specifying who would be responsible such services. We offer a tentative recommendation for using child support offices as a site for face-to-face customer services *provided* additional resources are allocated to allow such services to be successfully offered. If such an option is adopted, we suggest there be an evaluation of how well the red phone solution is working, and if it is not doing what it was intended to do, then other solutions need to be determined.

Thus, should it be decided Nebraskans should have access to face-to-face customer service, we then would endorse **the use of child support offices for face-to-face access** for most Nebraskans, coupled with the proposal developed by the District Court Clerk's Association, the "red phone" option. The proposal to **place a (red) telephone that is easily identifiable in district court clerks' offices and is directly connected to regional child support offices** seems like a possible solution to a difficult problem. Our understanding is that district court clerks would be available to assist customers, if needed, should there be a problem in a customer's understanding of the child support worker's counsel, but we doubt this would be required often. The clerk's red phone option means that individuals who do not have a telephone would nonetheless have special and free access to customer service child support worker. Although we realize this does not directly address the interest in having face-to-face contact for all Nebraskans, we believe it does encompass most Nebraskans. It seems a reasonable compromise, assuming adequate staffing and space resources, if it is decided that the value of allowing customers face-to-face access to a child support office where there is a representative who can provide customer service outweighs the costs of such a structure.

We have other, related suggestions, too, should it be decided child support offices be a contact point for face-to-face customer service. We recommend the employment of customer service specialists in the regional child support offices rather than relying exclusively on existing child support workers. This would allow child support enforcement to be the focus of current child support workers, and the hiring of customer service specialists would allow face-to-face customer service without diluting enforcement efforts.

We further recommend that preference be given to district court clerk staff, currently involved in child support customer service, whose jobs are in jeopardy due to the removal of child support receipting and disbursing functions from clerks' offices. We recommend preference for those who have been providing child support customer services as part of their district court clerk duties for several reasons. First, we encourage preference for these district court clerk staff because they deserve the state's support. Several district court clerk staff who have long worked in child support may face loss of employment (over time) in jurisdictions where the staff person's position has been funded from federal and state, child support monies. Such financial assistance will no longer be available or will be available to a lesser extent after Nebraska complies with the PRWORA mandates. Second, we think it makes sense to hire these staff members because they already are knowledgeable about the child support customer service business. Even should their salaries be more than others who might be trained to do child support customer service, we believe Nebraskans deserve the benefit of the expertise they have been relying on for years. Over time, as attrition naturally occurs, it will be possible to hire less costly employees to provide face-to-face child

support customer service (and customer service needs may reduce as the VRU system skims off most of the problems and successful automation in the state helps to reduce incidents of human error).

POLICY DECISION POINT: Face-to-Face Customer Service

Can Nebraska afford to retain face-to-face customer service? Can Nebraska afford not to?

Several of the policy issues related to face-to-face, child support customer services overlap with the customer service issues discussed in the previous section (VRU Customer Service Representative). The level of training issues are applicable in this context, too, but will not be repeated in this section.

Nebraskans desire a system in which there are customer service representatives who have the authority to resolve customers' problems and who are accessible through the VRU for centralized assistance, and child support personnel or district court clerks for local assistance. Nebraskans' desire for local customer service presents a policy dilemma for the state.

The type of person chosen to provide customer service may have implications for enforcement rates. If child support workers are expected to provide customer service, in addition to enforcement activities, less time will be available for enforcement. However, if child support workers are freed from customer service work, more time will be made available for enforcement. This is why some states have opted to shield child support enforcement workers from having to deal directly with customer service concerns. In other states, child support enforcement workers are required to research a question, but they provide their answers (typically electronically) to a customer service representative who then contacts the person who made the inquiry. Their distraction from enforcement activities is kept to a minimum.

How important is to have face-to-face customer service? Clearly the choice to have a person accessible to speak with face-to-face comes at a cost. Estimating the cost will be difficult, in part because the pattern of face-to-face contact varies across jurisdictions. For example, in the larger counties, it appears there are few face-to-face customer services provided. Virtually all service is rendered via telephone conversations. Indeed, even in many of the smaller counties, upwards of 90% of problems and inquiries are handled via telephone. Despite the small number of times face-to-face contacts are utilized, custodial and non-custodial parent representatives felt the opportunity for face-to-face contact continues to be an important value because such contact helps resolve problems successfully and expeditiously.

Given the thousands of transactions that take place related to child support matters (we did not obtain a precise estimate of how many there are in Nebraska, but we learned from other states that each year there are hundreds of thousands of events taking place such as child support establishments, receipts, disbursements, modifications, arrearage calculations, address changes of custodial and/or non-custodial parents, non-custodial parent job change, checks received without adequate indication concerning on whose account payment is made, etc.), it would be astonishing if there were *not* vast numbers of mistakes made. A system with 100,000 events could have an accuracy rate in the 99th percentile, and there still would be 1,000 errors taking place, ranging from minor ones to major problems.

Most Nebraska stakeholders we heard from indicated their strong preference for face-to-face access, despite the costs associated with such access. They want a child support-savvy worker, with access to information and authority to correct errors, who can be personally visited by those with child support customer service needs. To paraphrase one parent, “I want to talk to someone so I know that my needs are going to be taken care of. I feel I have the right to have someone sitting across from me, listening to me, and assuring me that I will be helped.” Based on the input we received from the two meetings, Nebraskans prefer district court clerks but do not balk at the possibility of receiving face-to-face customer services from child support workers or from customer service representatives who operate out of child support offices.

A question, then, is how much does Nebraska want to invest to make sure that everyone has access to a person who can be looked in the eye and asked to provide assistance and correct errors? What should be the professional training and level of such a person: Should it be a district court clerk, a local child support field worker (in Nebraska, there is not a child support worker in every county, so new staffing would be required), a regional child support worker (in Nebraska, this might require a customer to drive hours to reach the regional office), a customer service specialist without child support expertise? Should district court clerks be forced to provide customer services even though they do not believe they have the authority to effectively provide the services? Is it acceptable for the clerks to opt out of customer service activities in light of the fact they no longer will have the same kind of authority to correct mistakes as they had in the past? Should child support offices have to undertake customer service responsibilities when these offices are already short-staffed and under-resourced? Or should Nebraskans forego face-to-face access with a customer service representative, despite the clear desire voiced to us by most Advisory Group members?

Should the legislature decide the trade-offs are worth providing face-to-face customer service as part of preserving Nebraska’s tradition of excellence in child support customer service, then we make the tentative recommendation that child support offices be used as the point of access, provided sufficient resources (staff, facilities, etc.) are given to make sure that face-to-face access actually is possible. Given the fact that customer service representatives would have to be available to staff incoming telephone lines as well as walk-in customers, the legislature must be prepared to provide resources for some number (one? two?) of customer service representatives in the smallest offices, and probably many times that in the larger offices.

POLICY DECISION POINT: Contact with Local Child Support Enforcement Workers

How will access to local child support enforcement workers be altered under a new system of face-to-face local contact?

One of the clear benefits of developing a customer service system that relies on persons other than child support enforcement workers is it frees up child support enforcement workers to do the work of enforcing child support. The extent to which to “protect” child support enforcement workers from customer service-type activities is a policy decision that must be made.

Some states (e.g., Iowa, Montana) have essentially eliminated access to local child support enforcement workers. All queries are handled through central call centers, and if customer service representatives are

unable to answer questions, the customer service representatives contact the appropriate local child support enforcement worker. In some states, we understand that local child support enforcement office phone numbers are not even available in local phone books. Other states (e.g., Maine, Wisconsin) attempt to minimize contact to local child support offices, but do not prohibit persons from calling their child support enforcement worker.

The policy question, then, is to what extent does Nebraska wish to protect child support enforcement workers from impromptu customer service requests? There is in Nebraska (and in other states, too, we understand) a sentiment among custodial and non-custodial parents that no one but their child support enforcement worker is able to adequately answer their questions. States that have limited, or curtailed access to local workers, have strategically addressed this concern in a number of ways, such as: giving customer service representatives access to and training about what types of case narrative information to share and how to appropriately share it, developing expedited communication procedures between customer service representatives and child support enforcement workers so that information may be relayed back to parents quickly, minimizing the perception that callers are talking to a customer service representative possibly located at a great geographical distance from the child support enforcement worker, and hiring customer service representatives who will courteously provide needed information.

The benefit, of course, to limiting calls to child support enforcement workers is that more of their time may be spent producing collections. We were told that, on a daily basis, child support workers may spend up to 85% of their time providing customer service. (We are aware of no time studies that would substantiate the estimates we were given by workers.) And, a number of persons shared with us that much of this time may simply be allowing frustrated clients to vent and tell their story. That is, the time spent providing customer service may not have enforcement return. We understand from states with trained customer service representatives that one of the skills they learn is how to assess when they may end a call and how to do so politely.

It is also reasonable to encourage use of customer service representatives, rather than child support workers, to handle most calls. Customer service representatives will be able to handle most calls they receive. They will be selected, trained, and monitored to assure customer satisfaction, likely in a more cost-efficient manner for the state (since it is likely that customer service representatives will be paid at a lower rate than child support enforcement workers).

However, there is likely to be vocal opposition in Nebraska to any plan to limit access to local child support enforcement workers. Workers, themselves, may be suspicious of a customer service representative's ability to take care of their clients. Clients may stubbornly refuse to call customer service representatives. If local customer service representatives are housed in the same offices as child support enforcement workers (i.e., one element of the "red phone" model), it may be very difficult to prevent client access. And, it may be equally difficult to turn away a client who has stopped by a local office with questions (regardless of whether there are customer service representatives available).

Should the policy decision be made that there will be a limit on access, it would seem useful to rely on stakeholders to participate in implementation of the policy. That is, a stakeholder group comprising custo-

dial and non-custodial parents, local child support enforcement workers, customer service representatives, and others should be convened to implement a system that best suits the realities of Nebraska.

4. CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES WHO SPECIALIZE IN EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

*We recommend there be customer services specifically for **employers and** to address **employment issues**.*

The successful **involvement of the business community** as the SDU becomes operational is so critical and fundamental that we think there is not a policy determination to be made. We received the same advice from officials from a myriad of other states: If employers interact effectively with the SDU (i.e., properly indicating payment information), then there will be fewer needs for problem-solving (e.g., non-identified payment problems). Jurisdictions which did not work closely with their business communities at the outset do so now, and the child support officials place the failure to do so at the top of their “If I had to do it over again this is what I would do differently” list. Thus, customer service demands will be reduced if employers are effectively participating in the child support payment part of the process.

Employment issues are likely to appear early in the SDU implementation process. Thus, this is another area where early resource investment will prevent problems from manifesting themselves. The recommendation to include employer representatives as part of a stakeholder team is one means to ensure that employers’ perspectives are heard early. But even if there are reasons not to involve employer representation on a stakeholder team, there is no reason for there not to be a task force devoted to employer issues. It is critical to learn what employer concerns might be and what can be done to reduce or eliminate barriers to full employer participation. There are so many pieces of the SDU and the SDU-linked customer service system that are beyond the ability of the legislature and the CSE/IV-D agency to control, there is no reason we can think of not to take control of the employment piece to ensure the business community is part of the solution, not part of the problem.

There does not appear to be a need for a local customer service person to be physically accessible for employers. We recommend that customer service representatives be accessible via telephone, we recommend that there be a separate, toll-free number reserved for employers, and we further recommend that outreach efforts be developed to help ensure the effective participation of employers in the SDU system.

5. INCLUDE ALL CHILD SUPPORT CASES

We recommend that all child support cases be included both in the collection and disbursement of monies and in the provision of customer services, regardless of whether the case is covered by the federal mandate (i.e., IV-D and income-withholding cases).

We heard a clear preference to **include all child support cases** into the SDU. There is no federal mandate to centralize receipting and disbursement of payments in those child support cases without governmental financial assistance, where there is no enforcement assistance, and in which no income withhold-

ing is involved. Such cases would be ones in which a non-custodial parent is ordered by the judge to make the custodial parent so that it can be directly monitored by the court (i.e., through the district court clerk's office).

In these cases, often called "non-IV-D cases," it would be permissible for the clerk's office to remain involved in receipting and disbursing payments. However, neither clerks nor others in the Nebraska child support system felt it would be worthwhile for there to be different methods of handling one type of child support payment versus another. The recommendation is for all payments to be sent to, and disbursed from, the centralized SDU. If all child support cases are to be receipted and disbursed via the SDU, a logical corollary is to have customer service responsibilities also unified.

Thus, although some states continue to process non-IV-D orders separately because of concern about and problems posed by faulty information in these cases (versus IV-D cases), a nearly unanimous opinion was expressed by Work Group and Advisory Group members and other Nebraskans to the effect that both IV-D and non-IV-D cases should be included in the SDU receipting and disbursement system and the customer service system. We endorse their preference. We see no increased costs or potential decrease in services associated with this preference to maintain unity in the child support system, and the CCFL/BBR study discussed earlier (see Chapter III, above) documents significant cost-savings when payments are collected and disbursed at a centralized location.

6. RESOURCE INVESTMENTS AND TIMING

We recommend there be adequate staffing and infrastructure expenditures to ensure the successful implementation of the SDU system and to ensure that customer service needs will be met; we further recommend incremental implementation of major changes to the current child support system.

It is important to adequately fund and staff the elements of the SDU and customer service systems. These two systems are inextricably linked, and the success of any customer service plan adopted in Nebraska will depend on an effectively functioning SDU system. If there are glitches in the SDU system, customer service demands will be high. The more glitches, the more *additional* demands on customer service (to find out why a payment has not been credited, to demand a payment be credited, to find out why a payment has not been received, misdirected, misapplied, etc.).

Lessons learned from other states are that early mistakes have long-term consequences for stakeholder acceptance of and participation in the system. Several states have indicated that it has taken years for their systems to begin regaining the trust of stakeholders, particularly when missteps were in two key areas: staffing adequacy and information accuracy.

An appropriate implementation plan must provide for **adequate and appropriate staffing**. There needs to be adequate staffing of the customer service system. Many states have underestimated the staffing required to adequately provide customer service. These mistakes have burdened the system in the long run, because inadequate staffing undermines confidence in the system and impedes access to the system.

These failures result in even more stress on the system, according to several state officials who witnessed the problems first-hand. Staff time must be devoted to initiate, manage, and improve customer service activities. Customer service workers should be adequately and appropriately trained in customer service techniques.

The provision of customer service through call centers is a unique function. Staff performing this function must have a customer service orientation and attitude. This type of orientation may be a very different orientation than that of a child support enforcement worker, or, indeed, any person with a social work/social service background. Those states that appear to have the most successful centralized customer service call centers carefully select customer service-oriented applicants; provide intensive, graduated training for new hires in customer service work, providing education in computer screen navigation and child support issues; monitor calls and provide feedback to employees; and make extensive use of protocols to guide the problem solving activities of customer service representatives.

Customer service activities do not exist in a vacuum. The operation of a VRU or the staffing of local customer service offices should not be considered as the only responses to the customer service challenge. Customer service should not be segmented into two or three discrete activities. Rather, staff throughout the system should understand the overarching customer service goals and their role in achieving those goals. Many states have set standards, such as two-day response goals, that all persons within the system should understand and then strive to meet by engaging in such activities as researching and sharing information.

The information provided to stakeholders by the person providing customer service must be accurate. The accuracy of information provided will impact directly on customer satisfaction. In most cases, states have relied on highly-integrated computer systems that have the ability to send requests or referrals for assistance (from customer service representatives to child support enforcement field workers and/or CSE/IV-D staff and officials) in resolving questions. The computer system linked to the SDU data also needs to be able to provide customer service representatives case narrative information so that customers can be helped. Issues regarding whether case records are modifiable and by whom is something that needs to be determined. There need to be standards and protocols for the kind of documentation required when changes are made to the system and the security access level required to make changes to the record in a timely manner with minimal impediments and inconveniences to the person making changes.

In Nebraska's current system of child support enforcement receipting and disbursing, payment records may be modified by staff at the 93 district court clerks' offices. With the new SDU and related customer service activities, several computer systems (JUSTICE, CHARTS, and the SDU's system to name only a very few) will share information. Clearly more than 93 offices will need to access records (perhaps with security profiles that control access to levels of records). However, thought must be given to whom should be given authority to change fields of which records in which systems, and with what substantiation. A system in which any clerk, worker, or customer service representative could change payment records, addresses, or other significant information about a case, with little standardization of information substantiation, is likely to deteriorate into an unreliable system. Serious thought must be given to determining who may change what records and with what evidence to initiate the change. Others in the system may be given the ability to simply request that a change be made, but not have the ability to actually key a change into the

system. Clearly these decisions must be made in the context of record purity, confidentiality, substantiation standardization, and ease of making needed changes as quickly as possible.

SDU information must be accurate. Inaccurate information will negatively impact the system's credibility for years, we were told by several officials from other states who said they learned this lesson the hard way.

In order to assure accuracy, the SDU implementation must be done well, done carefully, and piloted on a small scale. Credibility issues are paramount. If the CSE/IV-D agency says that "such and such" will occur, it must. It is better to be cautious and exceed expectations than to try to deliver too much, too quickly. Based on suggestions we received from other jurisdictions, we offer two different approaches, both of which seem to have succeeded.

One way is for SDU implementation and its associated customer services to be phased in, with smaller county demonstrations prior to larger counties, and finally the largest Nebraska counties. This suggestion is not to imply smaller counties are less important, but one option is to start slow and small so that mistakes are more circumscribed.

Another option is to make changes gradually according to type or function. For example, all income withholding cases could be brought into the SDU before other cases. Then another type or function could be transitioned to the SDU. Non-IV-D cases probably would be brought into the system last. Again, the gradual change approach limits the problems that could interfere with successful implementation.

The above two options should not be viewed as "pure" types. In fact, some combination of the two approaches may be useful. The important point is to make sure changes occur systematically and with safety-nets to make sure there will not be widespread problems nor widespread dissatisfactions with the new SDU/customer services.

Another implication of the "go slow" advice is that clerks' activities and functions probably will not change substantially for the short-term. Given a tiered implementation plan and the fact that we understand there currently are not plans to transfer clerks' historical payment records to the central systems (in the long run, however, centralized information should be the ultimate goal in Nebraska), it is likely that clerks' activities (and reimbursements for IV-D work) will change slowly in the coming years. This should provide district court clerks (and others in the child support system) ample time to plan for any changes that will be required as the state complies with the PRWORA requirements.

POLICY DECISION POINT: Resource Allocation

How much funding should the legislature provide for the SDU and customer service systems?

Increasing budget allocations to any state agency requires the balancing of many inter- and intra-governmental interests. However, when the public understands and supports the need for increased funding, the decision may be easier. States that appear to have been most successful in garnering widespread public and political support for child support enforcement programs are those that have clearly articulated a child

support enforcement vision and communicated the attainment of indicators toward reaching the vision. Child support enforcement issues, as described earlier in this report, have high political visibility at the state and federal level. Indeed, many experts have commented that child support enforcement is one of a few truly non-partisan, high-profile issues. The issue of promoting child support enforcement appears to be an issue with great political salience. Americans find the presence of millions of children living in poverty because their parent(s) refuse to provide adequate support to be untenable. Most Americans are dissatisfied with the simple solution of taxpayers' providing support for children whose parents are able, but unwilling, to care for their needs. The vision of children deserving support and adults taking responsibility for their families is one that seems to particularly resonate at this time. One indicator many states have used to reinforce public interest in their programs is the amount of increased collections. This is a particularly attractive indicator, as nearly all states have seen increased collections over the past decade. Much of this is attributable to the creation of more cost-efficient means of receipting and disbursing payments, the exploitation of technological innovations, increased application of deterrents (e.g., license revocation, passport confiscation, etc.), and the use of sophisticated national data-matching computer systems. Other states have garnered public interest in publicizing collections of large arrearages, or in documenting the numbers of children who have received owed support. Child support enforcement is a ripe issue of great interest that requires true political leadership and cooperation.

The specifics of financing the customer service system, like any government financing, is a complicated matter. Nonetheless, we encourage that policymakers keep in mind the advice we heard often: Child support enforcement activities should be viewed as an investment, not a typical, governmental expenditure. Dollars invested in a well-run, efficiently operating child support system will yield a return in the investment through increased child support collections and decreased in-state expenditures in other programs that provide financial support to children and custodial parents. According to child support officials around the country, much of a state's investment in child support activities reportedly results in increases in child support collections and reductions in other state-aid expenditures. The rationale is that enhanced system efficiencies free up child support professionals to spend their time on collections and child support-related programs -- such as those that promote a strong bond between fathers and children or help non-custodial parents obtain work -- are correlated with child support payments. Although collections are going up across the country, officials from other states have documented increased in collections over and beyond what would be expected given national trends. We understand an increase of 25% or more in collections can be expected after the SDU is successfully implemented and child support enforcement activities are intensified. Thus, it seems to be the case that investment of state dollars in child support is not only right and benefits children, it also is related to decreased state costs.

We think serious consideration should be given to the costs of too little funding. Insufficient funding seems to redound to the detriment of collections or results in complaints. The complaints are unlikely to stop at HHS, but rather are likely to be heard by Senators and by the Governor and his staff.

We are concerned because we think there is perception of a fiscally conservative climate in Nebraska which, if accurate, seems to be a misplaced stance in the child support context. For example, the initial version of LB 637 requested funding for too few customer service representatives to staff SDU-linked customer services, in our opinion. Our opinion is based on the customer service staffing levels at other

states, adjusted for the population and amount of child support activity in Nebraska. We believe the request was low because of a belief the legislature would be unreceptive to a more realistic personnel request. We do not know whether the legislature would have been supportive of a budget request that was greater, but the point is that there needs to be serious balancing of current expenditures in light of opportunity costs and the likelihood of greater costs to fix a system that is broken as opposed to creating a working system that will reduce in costs over time.

Had there been too little funding of Nebraska's child support system, it would not have been a situation unique to this state. Officials from several states told us about their sad experiences with too little funding for their customer service systems, due either to an insufficient agency request or an insufficient appropriation from the legislature. For example, in Iowa, years ago the legislature mandated the CSE/IV-D agency to increase enforcement collections but did not provide additional resources to compensate for customer service needs. At that time in Iowa, enforcement personnel provided customer services. So customer services were scaled back and enforcement efforts were intensified. Although collections increased dramatically, the legislature was unhappy because dissatisfied customers complained loud and long to their elected officials. It was in the wake of this experience that Iowa's CSE/IV-D agency received increased funding from the legislature for its child support enforcement operations. The agency maintained child support enforcement activities and invested in a new (privatized) customer service system.

If Iowa's experience truly is reflective of what will happen in states like Nebraska, there really is little policy choice to be made other than to "pay now" or "pay later." We urge serious consideration be given to paying now.

Moreover, there is a great likelihood that the federal reimbursement rate (currently 66% of eligible expenditures) will be reduced to 50%. This possibility of a reduction presents a budgetary question for financing new customer service systems. Will Nebraska, based on the possibility of a future reduction in federal reimbursement, allocate sufficient budget appropriations during the coming few fiscal years to purchase customer service-related equipment and supplies outright (rather than finance or ask a vendor to carry costs)? These expenditures might include customer service-related computers, software, phone infrastructure and other systems, equipment, and so on. If purchased while the federal reimbursement rate remains at 66% the state then essentially pays for 34% of the costs, but pays for it all within the coming year or two. The other alternative, then, is to finance (or rent, or ask a private vendor to carry and annualize the costs) the equipment and supplies, understanding that the state may in the future assume 16% additional of the costs for part of the payment period.

7. PERFORMANCE DATA

In order to be able to accurately assess the successes and failures of customer services as Nebraska changes its child support system, we encourage specification of performance indicators and the conduct of customer satisfaction studies.

There is nothing as forceful as **empirical data** to show the strengths and weaknesses of any system. In the case of child support matters, the socio-economic implications are so great that performance indicators

ought to be adopted so everyone knows beforehand what is expected from the child support customer service system, and there ought to be on-going efforts to document and monitor the successes and failures of the system. It is difficult to know how well a system is functioning without specifying from the outset criteria which are measurable and the measurement of which will allow assessment of whether goals have been achieved.

The use of performance standards is becoming a nationwide practice. There is sensitivity to the fact that every statistic is a snapshot of the state caseload at a particular moment in time and that states face varying challenges (across states and within states over time). Thus, the purpose of performance standards is not to establish a rigid set of criteria that can be used as the basis for inter- or intra-jurisdiction comparisons. Rather, the standards are used as a guide. As a recent report issued by the National Conference of State Legislatures, *Accurately Evaluating State Child Support Program Performance* (Myers, 1999, p. 1) noted:

State officials nationwide agree that the new performance criteria will present a more accurate record of state child support performance. In fact, many child support directors have been using criteria like these for internal evaluations for many years. They point out that these performance criteria permit greater depth of evaluation, while still retaining the simplicity necessary for easy evaluation and analysis.

States like Oregon, Texas, and Florida have adopted performance-based matrices to help gauge the performance of their programs. Adoption of performance standards assists in clearly setting program goals. Although it is evident that performance standards, of some sort, should be set when working with a private vendor, many states are finding that performance standards are key to evaluation of internal services, as well. Some very basic standards that other states have used effectively include numbers of calls fielded per day, percentages of calls resolved without needing referral to others within the child support system, length of calls, and so on. Simply, customer service activities may suffer unless there are programmatic standards to acknowledge the importance of customer service and to gauge its success. And, it is important for the performance standards to be an appropriate measure for the outcomes desired by the agency in order to achieve customer service goals.

In the customer service arena, customer satisfaction surveys, albeit costly, provide a means of understanding what is working and what is not. The federal Office of Child Support Enforcement has developed a customer service survey that may be used or adapted in Nebraska. Baseline data would provide a basis to monitor the consequences of implementation of a new system. Results from evaluations should be utilized in modifying and improving the system. Administrators should expect the customer service process to evolve and change as experience is gained and customer input is actively incorporated. Although customer services are not always part of the focus, we see no reason why they should not be. Iowa has made substantial and striking use of customer satisfaction data to reform their customer service practices and to prioritize changes. For example, Iowa's CSE/IV-D agency found that there were several major problems as identified in its large survey of 2,000 custodial and non-custodial parents. Some of the problems were easier to fix, some were more difficult. Based on the survey data, the agency was able to undertake

strategic planning efforts and target some problems for short-term fixes and some problems for long-term changes.

Customer satisfaction surveys also assist others (e.g., the legislature, the Governor's office) to effectively monitor how well child support customer services are working. Thus, rather than depending on anecdotal information or "squeaky wheels" to inform them about customer service strengths and weaknesses, state officials have quantitative documentation of how effectively the agency is operating.

POLICY DECISION POINT: Research and Data

When there are limited resources, does it make sense to invest in information acquisition and analysis at the expense of spending monies on funding new social programs, funding efforts aimed to increase collections, and/or funding customer services?

The decision about how to spend monies is a complicated one. In a context of fixed and limited resources, it is difficult to authorize expenditures on activities that are not part of the basic program in question.

We understand these concerns. We think, however, in the absence of data there is only conjecture. Nebraska is proud of its "excellent customer service system," but there are no data documenting what "excellent" means. How will we know whether the new system is better or worse if we do not have the data informing us of how the current system is functioning and data that reveals whether the new system has made any differences? But should funds be allocated to support research when there is not a guarantee that core customer services will be funded adequately?

8. TECHNOLOGY

*We recommend the new customer service system in Nebraska make use of **new technologies** to expand access to information and to allow innovative means for interactions between customers and customer service providers.*

Technological advances provide an opportunity to expand customer service options beyond what could have been offered even a couple of years ago. As customer service options are explored, it would be advantageous to the state to **evaluate new technologies that could contribute to providing better service to customers.**

Because of time constraints, it is not possible for this Report to address the various types of technologies available and make recommendations on specific options that might enhance customer service. However, some of the obvious options are the use of the Internet for obtaining information, electronic funds transfers, and e-mail for communication. These, at a minimum, should be considered as vehicles for providing customer service. For people who do not have computers or Internet access in their homes, public access stations should be considered for places like the District Court Clerk's offices to supplement current availability in public libraries. Technological advances also allow for innovative uses of phone systems, such as voice messaging (receiving a temporary voice mailbox to retrieve a confidential response), immediate fax-back services, and voice mail bundling of informational requests. Policy makers should look

beyond the “traditional” ways of providing customer service and be as innovative as possible. We believe child support customer service contexts provide Nebraska with a valuable opportunity to further the ability to make e-government concepts a reality in the state, to the benefit of both the government as well as to customers.

POLICY DECISION POINT: Security

Do the security risks associated with new technologies outweigh the advantages of easy access to government and its resources?

Some people express concerns about security vulnerabilities associated with new technologies. We urge caution, of course, but suggest that many of the technologies are already being used successfully elsewhere. For example, financial transactions are done routinely by banks and even securities transactions can be made via the Internet. Several states are moving toward providing Internet access to financial information and for customer service purposes. Indeed, one of the innovations that occurred from Iowa’s employer task force was the use of e-mail as a way of communicating between employers and CSE officials and the agency’s use of a web-site to post downloadable forms for employers to use.

Thus, although we understand the need for careful consideration and deliberation before rushing to use new technologies, we think the balance, on the whole, favors use. We believe the advantages of e-government in a state like Nebraska where distances are so great outweigh the potential disadvantages and risks.

9. INNOVATION AND COLLABORATION OPPORTUNITIES

We encourage the introduction of innovative social programs (e.g., father support programs, mediation programs) and collaboration with existing programs designed to further the goals of the child support system.

The development and implementation of new ways of conducting the business of child support enforcement provides an opportunity to simultaneously **implement a few, carefully-chosen programs to improve the state’s ability to facilitate economic support for children** and their families. For example, it has been suggested that mediation programs might help to reduce the emotional barriers that sometimes develop as parental relationships dissolve. Some have advocated programs to support fathers’ on-going participation in their children’s lives. Child access and other visitation programs also might be useful.

Some of these programs, if successful, **could reduce customer service demands** even as they address economic objectives. Take mediation services, for example. Mediation services have been promoted both for their economic impact as well as their socio-emotional implications. There is belief that exposure to mediation services during the period of divorce or at the time of paternity establishment results in a greater likelihood of a father’s staying engaged in his child’s life. There is research literature that suggests engaged fathers are more likely to make their child support payments than fathers without emotional attachment to their children. So, assume that Father, who was a participant in a trial mediation program in Nebraska, attaches to his child as a result of participation the mediation program. Assume that Father subsequently moves out of state but nonetheless pays his child support regularly and timely, despite his departure from

the jurisdiction. In this scenario, the successful social and economic program has implications for child support customer service because Father's emotional connection with Child results in regular and timely child support payments, which means that Mother is not one of those custodial parents calling the VRU for payment information or speaking with a customer service representative to solve her payment problem or figure the whereabouts of Father.

It is beyond the scope of the Implementation Project to make specific program recommendations. The state's CSE/IV-D agency has sponsored and been otherwise involved in various innovative programs. It will be important to capitalize on efforts that already have been taking place. But it also will be useful to take advantage of having various stakeholders together. While people are gathered together to consider collections, disbursements, and customer services, it would be useful at the same time to consider social and economic programming options and program resource issues. If program innovations are part of the agenda, then there is a greater likelihood that something actually will get done than if program issues are not on the table.

Presently, federal funds are available for child support, program innovations. It would be unfortunate to miss the opportunity to take advantage of federal funding. But since the federal program support is intended to provide seed and trial monies but is not intended to provide funds for continuing program operations, it is important to make sure that programs are effective in achieving the specified goals as the state ultimately will shoulder the program costs. Thus, innovation opportunities should be coupled with ongoing research so that we know "what works" and what is worth making permanent parts of the state's arsenal.

We also urge the child support program to actively find means of collaborating with existing social services programs in ways that benefit both programs. Officials and staff from many other states shared with us successful education and outreach programs they had developed with programs such as Head Start, TANF, and other programs. Because these types of social service programs may already be serving many of the same clientele, joint efforts will benefit all programs and provide more a more holistic approach to assisting families achieve economic independence.

10. TRANSITION ISSUES

We encourage stakeholders to exercise patience as the SDU is implemented and as customer services are changed in Nebraska, and we encourage the CSE/IV-D agency to be proactive in its educational efforts to inform stakeholders of upcoming changes.

Patience will be required by the legislature, the Governor's office, and so on. The first year is always tumultuous, we learned from other states. It is incumbent on the CSE/IV-D agency to move cautiously and effectively. It is incumbent on other governmental units to be patient with the ups-and-downs of the first year of an appropriate implementation plan.

The onus is not only on stakeholders, however. The CSE/IV-D agency should be proactive in its efforts to ensure successful transitions and implementations. The CSE/IV-D agency should set realistic standards

and achieve them to reinforce that the time-frames they set will be met. The agency should also clearly outline the benefits and drawbacks of the new system. For example, custodial parents who have been accustomed to receiving a personal phone call as soon as support checks are receipted by the clerk and to picking up the check the same day, will face time delays in receiving their support checks. For other custodial parents, living in jurisdictions that have delayed payment up to two weeks, the new system will expedite their receipt of support. The agency will need to educate all stakeholders about the operation and customer service components of the new system.

Regardless of the customer service system developed, it is likely that some people will not use the system or will not use it in the most efficient manner. The experience of other states is that some customers will likely always go to the district court clerk to find out payment information, even if clerks are no longer actively involved in providing child support customer service. Other persons may use the VRU, but will always choose to speak with a customer service representative, even if their question could be more easily answered through the automated system. Although it does not make sense to develop a system around these persons, as the system develops it is worthwhile to remember that the presence of non-users does not necessarily condemn a system either.

We encourage the development of outreach and marketing plans. Such plans, targeted towards parents and towards employers, have been an integral part of other states successful implementation activities. However, it is not sufficient to import other states' strategies. Other states have some models that perhaps will be worthy of replicating, but the particular strategies need to be part of a comprehensive, implementation plan that is joined in by the myriad stakeholders representing constituencies across Nebraska.

For example, other states have used booklets to inform employers of income withholding programs and procedures. Our Nebraska employers were quite explicit in discouraging the use of such booklets, as these are regularly discarded without being read. It will be important to undertake systematic efforts to determine, for the various target groups, which strategies will work in Nebraska. There is no substitute for understanding the various target groups involved in child support. In fact, understanding how to reach these target groups also has implications for enforcement. One state, Minnesota, studied their non-custodial parents who were not making child support payments. They found that targeting communications based on the five identified types of non-payers (Ready to Pay, Uninformed About Their Responsibility, Unable to Pay, Reluctant to Pay, and Active Evaders) was more effective than methods which treated all non-payers the same.

POLICY DECISION POINT: Bringing Other Child Support Matters into the Centralized System

There are other child support matters that are, from a parent's point of view, probably not dissimilar to child support payments. Should there be only one system to deal with child support issues? If so, when should the transition be made?

For many custodial and non-custodial parents, the centralization of child support payments will complicate, rather than simplify, their child support-related problems because child *care* payments will continue to be billed, receipted, and disbursed by district court clerks. Before centralization, parents only had to go to the district court clerk for both child support and child care payments. These payments, and related

customer services, will now be bifurcated. When parents have a child support issue, they will access the new customer service structure that will be implemented during the coming year. When parents have a child care issue, they will continue to go to their district court clerk. As one parent commented, this makes little sense on the face, since the money all goes to providing for the child.

Should there be multiple systems? Should a study should be conducted to investigate whether and how child care should be included in the SDU and related customer service activities?

At least two complicating factors must be evaluated. First, child care expenses may change dramatically from month to month (e.g., summer months versus months when school is in session, if a new child care provider is selected, etc). In the current system, custodial parents present receipts to the district court clerk for billing to the non-custodial parent. There are significant questions to how this would be incorporated into a SDU-based system. Second, HHS currently enforces child support, but not child care. Should and can a non-HHS-enforceable payment be included in the SDU and customer service system?

IX. CHALLENGES TO SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

The existence of a **successful inter-governmental partnership** that will collaboratively make important decisions is, we believe, key to successful implementation of an SDU/customer service system in Nebraska. In contrast, the lack of inter-governmental partnership will be the biggest barrier to successful implementation. The partnership cannot be symbolic; rather, the partnership needs to be a real collaboration and needs to allow actual input by stakeholders. In other words, stakeholders must be true partners in SDU/customer service decisionmaking. Unilateral change to any major portion of the child support system is virtually impossible because of the complexity of the system, the many constituencies impacted, and the scope of the program. The CSE/IV-D agency, the legislature, and/or the Governor's office need to facilitate a coalition of inter-governmental partners and other stakeholders. New, affirmative efforts must be made. It should be begun immediately. And it should include SDU-related decisionmaking as well as all customer service decisionmaking.

We are encouraged that key stakeholders have voiced interest in continuing to work collaboratively together toward a mutually acceptable structure for the child support customer service system; however, we fear the coalition of stakeholders is a fragile one. Sustained efforts by key stakeholders is needed to build a **climate of trust**. A pervasive, continuing climate of mistrust will impede the political consensus that are needed in order to select and effectively implement the SDU and its related customer services. Perhaps some mistrust of the CSE/IV-D agency is endemic to how many governmental agencies are viewed. Moreover, there is often built-in skepticism regarding any governmental change or initiative, whether warranted or not. Therefore, it did not surprise us to hear complaints from numerous stakeholders about their frustrations in working with the Department of Health and Human Services, in general, and the CSE/IV-D agency, in particular. We also heard criticisms about the Legislature, the Governor's Office, and even the University of Nebraska. We also heard praise of HHS and CSE/IV-D (and the Legislature, Governor's Office, and the University). The important point is not the fairness of the accusation: It is important to recognize the presence of negative perceptions and address them. We believe the CSE/IV-D agency should take the leadership role in the SDU/customer service contexts and should undertake active efforts to reduce or eliminate mistrust about the child support system.

One important way the CSE/IV-D agency can earn the trust of others is to **implement changes effectively**. For example, if the SDU is advertised as operational, it must be, and must operate accurately. If a VRU is advertised as operational, it must be, and it must be useful for customers. If a customer service representative is supposed to be available, a representative should be, and should have the ability to answer questions. The experiences of other states teach us the importance of effective implementation. Devoting necessary technical resources and sufficient numbers of staff to ensure the child support system is operating correctly as it is launched is of utmost importance. A failure in implementation, even if remedied in short order, is likely to result in substantial loss of trust. It takes a long time to build trust again, once it is lost.

Based on our understanding of the level of support of other IV-D agencies around the country, we believe that Nebraska's CSE/IV-D agency is over-burdened with the number of cases it must handle given the resources it has been allocated. An inadequately resourced agency will provide barriers to successful

implementation, and it is hard to imagine how these hurdles will be overcome. We believe some of the problems plaguing the existing child support system would be remedied with a greater **investment in child support activities by the state**. And although the CSE/IV-D agency must be the leader in child support activities, it is the responsibility of other parts of government to partner with the CSE/IV-D agency to ensure that the CSE/IV-D agency succeeds.

Finally, **strong leadership** is vital for the successful implementation of the SDU and successful changes to child support customer services. There are many stakeholders involved, and each has a strongly held interest in how the child support system operates. Leadership can come from the Unicameral, it can come from the Governor's Office, it can come from Health and Human Services System officials, it can come from the director of the CSE/IV-D agency. Ideally, leadership will take the form of collaboration of all these governmental stakeholders, and it would be optimal to extend the partnership to clerks, court officials, employers, and parents. The problems Nebraska has had complying with the federal mandate have been the responsibility of many government officials. We fear, in the absence of effective leadership, we can again expect the kind of stakeholder clashes that resulted in a stalemate of the 1997 Governor's Child Support Collection Task Force and the turmoil and ill-will that characterized the legislative debate surrounding LB 637 in the Spring of 1999. It is time to work together, to move on, and engage in an effective decisionmaking process that will result in positive outcomes for Nebraska's children and families. We are optimistic that it will happen.

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Appendix A. Federal Legislative History of Child Support Enforcement

22nd Annual Report to Congress, 1999 Edition

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement

1950

The first Federal child support enforcement legislation was Section 402(a)(11) of the Social Security Act [42 USC 602(a)(11)], which required State welfare agencies to notify appropriate law enforcement officials upon providing Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with respect to a child who was abandoned or deserted by a parent.

Also that year, the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws and the American Bar Association approved the Uniform Reciprocal Enforcement of Support Act (subsequent amendments to this Act were approved in 1952, 1958, and 1968).

1965

Public Law (P.L.) 89-97, the Social Security Amendments of 1965, allowed a State or local welfare agency to obtain from the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare the address and place of employment of an absent parent who owed child support under a court order for support.

1967

P.L. 90-248, the Social Security Amendments of 1967, allowed States to obtain from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) the addresses of absent parents who owed child support under a court order for support. In addition, each State was required to establish a single organizational unit to establish paternity and collect child support for deserted children receiving AFDC. States were also required to work cooperatively with each other under child support reciprocity agreements and with courts and law enforcement officials.

1975

P.L. 93-647, the Social Security Amendments of 1974, created, inter alia, Part D of Title IV of the Social Security Act [Sections 451, et seq.; 42 USC 651, et seq.]. The key child support enforcement provisions, which reflect three years of intense Congressional attention, are as follows:

- The Secretary of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (now the Department of Health and Human Services or DHHS) has primary responsibility for the Program and is required to establish a separate organizational unit to operate the program. Operational responsibilities include (1) establishing a parent locator service; (2) establishing standards

for State program organization, staffing, and operation to assure an effective program; (3) reviewing and approving State plans for the program; (4) evaluating State program operations by conducting audits of each State's program; (5) certifying cases for referral to the Federal courts to enforce support obligations; (6) certifying cases for referral to the IRS for support collections; (7) providing technical assistance to States and assisting them with reporting procedures; (8) maintaining records of program operations, expenditures, and collections; and (9) submitting an annual report to the Congress.

- Primary responsibility for operating the Child Support Enforcement Program is placed on the States pursuant to the State plan. The major requirements of a State plan are that (1) the State designate a single and separate organizational unit to administer the program; (2) the State undertake to establish paternity and secure support for individuals receiving AFDC and others who apply directly for child support enforcement services; (3) child support payments be made to the State for distribution; (4) the State enter into cooperative agreements with appropriate courts and law enforcement officials; (5) the State establish a State parent locator service that uses State and local parent location resources and the Federal Parent Locator Service; (6) the State cooperate with any other State in locating an absent parent, establishing paternity, and securing support; and (7) the State maintain a full record of collections and disbursements made under the plan.
- Procedures were set out for the distribution of child support collections received on behalf of families receiving AFDC.
- Incentive payments to States for collections made on AFDC cases were created.
- Monies due and payable to Federal employees became subject to garnishment for the collection of child support.
- New eligibility requirements were added to the AFDC program, which required each applicant for, or recipient of, AFDC to make an assignment of support rights to the State; to cooperate with the State in establishing paternity and securing support; and to furnish his or her Social Security number to the State.

The effective date of P.L. 93-647 was July 1, 1975, except for the provision regarding garnishment of Federal employees, which was effective upon enactment. However, several problems were identified prior to the effective date and Congress passed P.L. 94-46 to extend the effective date to August 1, 1975. In addition, P.L. 94-88 was passed in August 1975 to allow States to obtain waivers from certain program requirements under certain conditions until June 30, 1976 and to receive Federal reimbursement at a reduced rate. This law also eased the requirement for AFDC recipients to cooperate with State child support enforcement agencies when such cooperation would not be in the best interests of the child. It also provided for supplemental payments to AFDC recipients whose grants would be reduced due to the implementation of the child support enforcement program.

1976

P.L. 94-566, effective October 20, 1976, required State employment agencies to provide absent parents' addresses to State child support enforcement agencies.

1977

P.L. 95-30, effective May 23, 1977, made several amendments to Title IV-D:

- Provisions relating to the garnishment of a Federal employee's wages for child support were amended to (1) include employees of the District of Columbia; (2) specify the conditions and procedures to be followed to serve garnishments on Federal agencies; (3) authorize the issuance of garnishment regulations by the three branches of the Federal Government and by the District; and (4) define further certain terms used.
- Section 454 of the Social Security Act (42 USC 654) was amended to require the State plan to provide bonding for employees who receive, handle, or disburse cash and to insure that the accounting and collection functions be performed by different individuals.
- The incentive payment provision, under section 458(a) of the Social Security Act [42 USC 658(a)], was amended to change the rate to 15% of AFDC collections (from 25% for the first 12 months and 10% thereafter).

P.L. 95-142, the Medicare-Medicaid Antifraud and Abuse Amendments of 1977, established a medical support enforcement program, under which States could require Medicaid applicants to assign to the State their rights to medical support. State Medicaid agencies were allowed to enter into cooperative agreements with any appropriate agency of any State, including the IV-D agency, for assistance with the enforcement and collection of medical support obligations. Incentives were also available to localities making child support collections for States and for States securing collections on behalf of other States.

1978

P.L. 95-598, the Bankruptcy Reform Act of 1978, repealed section 456(b) of the Social Security Act [42 USC 656(b)], which had barred the discharge in bankruptcy of assigned child support debts. (Note: this section of the Social Security Act (now 546(h)) was restored by P.L. 97-35 in 1981.)

1980

P.L. 96-178 extended Federal Financial Participation (FFP) for non-AFDC services to March 31, 1980, retroactive to October 1, 1978.

P.L. 96-265, the Social Security Disability Amendments of 1980, increased Federal matching funds to 90%, effective July 1, 1981, for the costs of developing, implementing, and enhancing approved auto-

mated child support management information systems. Federal matching funds were also made available for child support enforcement duties performed by certain court personnel. In another provision, the law authorized the use of the IRS to collect child support arrearages on behalf of non-AFDC families. Finally, the law provided State and local IV-D agencies access to wage information held by the Social Security Administration and State employment security agencies for use in establishing and enforcing child support obligations.

P.L. 96-272, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, contained four amendments to Title IV-D of the Social Security Act. First, the law made FFP for non-AFDC services available on a permanent basis. Second, it allowed States to receive incentive payments on all AFDC collections as well as interstate collections. Third, as of October 1, 1979, States were required to claim reimbursement for expenditures within two years, with some exceptions. The fourth change postponed until October, 1980, the imposition of the 5% penalty on AFDC reimbursement for States not having effective child support enforcement programs.

1981

P.L. 97-35, the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1981, added five amendments to the IV-D provisions. First, IRS was authorized to withhold all or a part of certain individuals' Federal income tax refunds for collection of delinquent child support obligations. Second, IV-D agencies were required to collect spousal support for AFDC families. Third, for non-AFDC cases, IV-D agencies were required to collect fees from absent parents who were delinquent in their child support payments. Fourth, child support obligations assigned to the State no longer were dischargeable in bankruptcy proceedings. The law imposed on States a requirement to withhold a portion of unemployment benefits from absent parents delinquent in their support payments.

1982

P.L. 97-248, the Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 1982, included the following provisions, affecting the IV-D program:

- FFP was reduced from 75 to 70 %, effective October 1, 1982. Incentives were reduced from 15 to 12%, effective October 1, 1983. The provision for reimbursement of costs of certain court personnel that exceed the amount of funds spent by a State on similar court expenses during calendar year 1978 was repealed.
- The mandatory non-AFDC collection fee imposed by P.L. 97-35 was repealed, retroactive to August 13, 1981. States were allowed to elect not to recover costs or to recover costs from collections or from fees imposed on absent parents. Another provision allowed States to collect spousal support in certain non-AFDC cases.

- As of October 1, 1982, members of the uniformed services on active duty are required to make allotments from their pay when support arrearages reach the equivalent of a 2-month delinquency.
- Also beginning October 1, 1982, States were allowed to reimburse themselves for AFDC grants paid to families for the first month in which the collection of child support is sufficient to make a family ineligible for AFDC.

P.L. 97-253, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1982, provided for the disclosure of information obtained under authority of the Food Stamp Act of 1977 to various programs, including State child support enforcement agencies.

P.L. 97-252, the Uniformed Services Former Spouses' Protection Act, authorized treatment of military retirement or retainer pay as property to be divided by State courts in connection with divorce, dissolution, annulment, or legal separation proceedings.

1984

P.L. 98-378, the Child Support Enforcement Amendments of 1984, featured provisions that required critical improvements in State and local child support enforcement programs in four major areas:

- **Mandatory Practices**

All States must enact statutes providing for the use of improved enforcement mechanisms, including (1) mandatory income withholding procedures; (2) expedited processes for establishing and enforcing support orders; (3) State income tax refund interceptions; (4) liens against real and personal property, security or bonds to assure compliance with support obligations; and (5) reports of support delinquency information to consumer reporting agencies. State law must allow for the bringing of paternity actions any time prior to a child's 18th birthday and all support orders issued or modified after October 1, 1985, must include a provision for wage withholding.

- **Federal Financial Participation and Audit Provisions**

To encourage greater reliance on performance-based incentives, Federal matching funds were reduced by 2% in FY 1988 (to 68%) and another 2% in FY 1990 (to 66%). Federal matching funds at 90% became available for the development and installation of automated systems, including computer hardware purchases, to facilitate income withholding and other newly required procedures.

State incentive payments were reset at 6% for both AFDC and non-AFDC collections. These percentages can increase to as much as 10% for both categories for very cost-effective States, but a State's non-AFDC incentive payments are limited by the amount of

incentives received for AFDC collections. The law further required States to pass incentives through to local child support enforcement agencies where these agencies have participated in the costs of the program.

Annual State audits were replaced with audits conducted at least once every three years. The focus of the audits was altered to evaluate a State's effectiveness on the basis of program performance as well as operational compliance. Penalties for noncompliance are from 1 to 5% of the Federal share of the State's AFDC funds. The Federal government may suspend imposition of a penalty based on a State's filing of, and complying with, an acceptable corrective action plan.

- **Improved Interstate Enforcement**

The proven enforcement techniques discussed above must be applied to interstate cases as well as intrastate cases. Both States involved in an interstate case may take credit for the collection when reporting total collections for the purpose of calculating incentives. Special demonstration grants were authorized beginning in FY 1985 to fund innovative methods of interstate enforcement and collection. Federal audits will focus on States' effectiveness in establishing and enforcing obligations across State lines.

- **Equal Services for Welfare and Nonwelfare Families**

The Social Security Act was amended to show that Congress intended the Child Support Enforcement Program to aid both nonwelfare and welfare families. Several specific requirements were directed at improving State services to nonwelfare families. All of the mandatory practices must be made available for both classes of cases; the interception of Federal income tax refunds is extended to nonwelfare cases; incentive payments for nonwelfare cases became available for the first time; when families are terminated from the welfare rolls, they automatically must receive nonwelfare support enforcement services without being charged an application fee; and States must publicize the availability of nonwelfare support enforcement services.

- **Other Provisions**

States were required to (1) collect support in certain foster care cases; (2) collect spousal support in addition to child support where both are due in a case; (3) notify AFDC recipients, at least yearly, of the collections made in their individual cases; (4) establish State commissions to examine, investigate, and study the operation of the State's child support system and report findings to the State's governor; (5) formulate guidelines for determining appropriate child support obligation amounts and distribute the guidelines to judges and other individuals who possess authority to establish obligation amounts; (6) offset the costs of the program by charging various fees to nonwelfare families and to delinquent absent parents; (7) allow families whose AFDC eligibility is terminated as a

result of the payment of child support to remain eligible to receive Medicaid for 4 months; and (8) seek to establish medical support orders in addition to monetary awards. The Federal Parent Locator Service was made more accessible and effective in locating absent parents. Sunset provisions are included in the extension of Medicaid eligibility and Federal tax offsets for non-AFDC families.

P.L. 98-369, the Tax Reform Act of 1984, included two tax provisions pertaining to alimony and child support.

- Under prior law, alimony was deductible by the payor and includible in the income of the payee. The 1984 law revised the rules relating to the definition of alimony. Generally, only cash payments that will terminate on the death of the payee spouse qualify as alimony. Alimony payments, if in excess of \$10,000 per year, generally must be payable for at least 6 years and must not decline by more than \$10,000. The prior law requirement that the payment be based on a legal support obligation was repealed and payors are required to furnish to the IRS the social security number of the payee spouse. A \$50 penalty for failure to do so will be imposed. The provision is effective for divorce or separation agreements or orders executed after 1984.
- The 1984 law also provided that the \$1,000 dependency exemption for a child of divorced or separated parents generally will be allocated to the custodial parent unless the custodial parent signs a written declaration that he or she will not claim the exemption for the year. Each parent may claim the medical expenses that he or she pays for the child, for purposes of computing the medical expense deduction. The provision is effective for taxable years beginning after 1984.

1986

P.L. 99-509, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1986, included one child support enforcement amendment prohibiting the retroactive modification of child support awards. Under this new requirement, State laws must provide for either parent to apply for modification of an existing order with notice provided to the other parent. No modification is permitted before the date of this notification.

1987

P.L. 100-203, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1987, required States to provide child support enforcement services to all families with an absent parent who receives Medicaid and have assigned their support rights to the State, regardless of whether they are receiving AFDC.

1988

P.L. 100-485, the Family Support Act of 1988, emphasized the duties of parents to work and support their children and, in particular, emphasized child support enforcement as the first line of defense against welfare dependence. The key child support enforcement provisions, in brief, include:

- Guidelines for Child Support Awards

Judges and other officials are required to use State guidelines for child support unless they are rebutted by a written finding that applying the guidelines would be unjust or inappropriate in a particular case. States must review guidelines for awards every four years. Beginning five years after enactment, States generally must review and adjust individual case awards every three years for AFDC cases. The same applies to other IV-D cases, except review and adjustment must be at the request of a parent.

- Establishment of Paternity

States are required to meet Federal standards for the establishment of paternity. The standard relates to the percentage obtained by dividing the number of children in the State who are born out of wedlock, are receiving cash benefits or IV-D child support services, and for whom paternity has been established by the number of children who are born out of wedlock and are receiving cash benefits or IV-D child support services. To meet Federal requirements, this percentage in a State must: (1) be at least 50%; (2) be at least equal to the average for all States; or (3) have increased by 3 percentage points from fiscal years 1988 to 1991 and by 3 percentage points each year thereafter.

States are mandated to require all parties in a contested paternity case to take a genetic test upon request of any party. The Federal matching rate for laboratory testing to establish paternity is set at 90%.

- Disregard of Child Support

The child support enforcement disregard authorized under the Deficit Reduction Act of 1984 is clarified so that it applies to a payment made by the noncustodial parent in the month it was due even though it was received in a subsequent month.

- Requirement for Prompt State Response

The Secretary of DHHS required to set time limits within which States must accept and respond to requests for assistance in establishing and enforcing support orders as well as time limits within which child support payments collected by the State IV-D agency must be distributed to the families to whom they are owed.

- Requirement for Automated Tracking and Monitoring System

Every State that does not have a Statewide automated tracking and monitoring system in effect must submit an advance planning document that meets Federal requirements by October 1, 1991. The Secretary must approve each document within nine months after submission. By October 1, 1995, every State must have an approved system in effect. Federal 90% matching rates for this activity expire September 30, 1995.

- Interstate Enforcement

A Commission on Interstate Child Support was created to hold national conferences on interstate child support enforcement reform and to report to Congress no later than October 1, 1990 on recommendations for improvements in the system and revisions in the Uniform Reciprocal Enforcement of Support Act.

- Computing Incentive Payments

Amounts spent by States for interstate demonstration projects are excluded from calculating the amount of the States' incentive payments.

- Use of INTERNET System

The Secretaries of Labor and DHHS required to enter into an agreement to give the Federal Parent Locator Service prompt access to wage and unemployment compensation claims information useful in locating absent parents.

- Wage Withholding

With respect to IV-D cases, each State must provide for immediate wage withholding in the case of orders that are issued or modified on or after the first day of the 25th month beginning after the date of enactment unless: (1) one of the parties demonstrates, and the court finds, that there is good cause not to require such withholding; or (2) there is a written agreement between both parties providing for an alternative arrangement. Prior law requirements for mandatory wage withholding in cases where payments are in arrears apply to orders that are not subject to immediate wage withholding. States are required to provide for immediate wage withholding for all support orders initially issued on or after January 1, 1994, regardless of whether a parent has applied for IV-D services.

- Work and Training Demonstration Programs for Noncustodial Parents

The Secretary of DHHS is required to grant waivers to up to five States to allow them to provide services to noncustodial parents under the JOBS program. No new power is granted to the States to require participation by noncustodial parents.

- **Data Collection and Reporting**

The Secretary of DHHS is required to collect and maintain State-by-State statistics on paternity establishment, location of absent parent for the purpose of establishing a support obligation, enforcement of a child support obligation, and location of absent parent for the purpose of enforcing or modifying an established obligation.

- **Use of Social Security Number**

Each State must, in the administration of any law involving the issuance of a birth certificate, require each parent to furnish his or her social security number (SSN), unless the State finds good cause for not requiring the parent to furnish it. The SSN shall not appear on the birth certificate, and the use of the SSN obtained through the birth record is restricted to child support enforcement purposes, except under certain circumstances.

- **Notification of Support Collected**

Each State required to inform families receiving AFDC of the amount of support collected on their behalf on a monthly basis, rather than annually as provided under prior law. States may provide quarterly notification if the Secretary of DHHS determines that monthly reporting imposes an unreasonable administrative burden. This provision is effective 4 years after the date of enactment.

1989

P.L. 101-239, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1989, made permanent the requirement that Medicaid benefits continue for 4 months after a family loses AFDC eligibility as a result of collection of child support payments.

1990

P.L. 101-508, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990, permanently extended the Federal provision that allows States to ask the IRS to collect child support arrearages of at least \$500 out of income tax refunds otherwise due to noncustodial parents. The minor child restriction is to be eliminated for adults with a current support order who are disabled, as defined under OASDI or SSI. The IRS offset can be used for spousal support when spousal and child support are included in the same support order.

P.L. 101-508 also extended the life of the Interstate Child Support Commission from July 1, 1991 to July 1, 1992, required the Commission to submit its report no later than May 1, 1992, and authorized the Commission to hire its own staff.

1992

P.L. 102-521, the Child Support Recovery Act of 1992, imposed a Federal criminal penalty for the willful failure to pay a past-due child support obligation with respect to a child who resides in another State that has remained unpaid for longer than a year or is greater than \$5,000. For the first conviction the penalty is a fine of up to \$5,000 and/or imprisonment for not more than six months; for a second conviction, a fine of not more than \$250,000 and/or imprisonment for up to two years.

P.L. 102-37, the Ted Weiss Child Support Enforcement Act of 1992, amended the Fair Credit Reporting Act to require consumer credit reporting agencies to include in any consumer report information on child support delinquencies provided by or verified by State or local CSE agencies, which antedates the report by 7 years.

1993

P.L. 103-66, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, increased the percentage of children for whom the State must establish paternity and required States to adopt laws requiring civil procedures to voluntarily acknowledge paternity (including hospital-based programs).

P.L. 103-66 also required States to adopt laws to ensure the compliance of health insurers and employers in carrying out court or administrative orders for medical child support and included a provision that forbids health insurers to deny coverage to children who are not living with the covered individual or who were born outside of marriage.

1994

P.L. 103-383, the Full Faith and Credit for Child Support Orders Act, requires each state to enforce, according to its terms, a child support order by a court (or administrative authority) of another state, with conditions and specifications for resolving issues of jurisdiction.

P.L. 103-394, the Bankruptcy Reform Act of 1994, protects child support from being discharged in bankruptcy. Among many other provisions, the new law includes child support as an exception to automatic stays, for judicial liens, and to discharge of debts in bankruptcy. It also provides protection against trustee avoidance, facilitates access to bankruptcy proceedings, and assigns child support a priority for collecting claims from debtors.

P.L. 103-403, the Small Business Administration Reauthorization and Amendments Act, requires that recipients of financial assistance not be more than 60 days delinquent in paying child support.

P.L. 103-432, the Social Security Amendments of 1994, requires state IV-D agencies to periodically report parents who are at least two months delinquent in paying child support to credit bureaus, modifies the benchmarks under Paternity Establishment Percentage formula used to determine the states' substantial compliance, and requires DHHS to provide free access for the Justice Department to the Federal

Parent Locator Service in cases involving the unlawful taking or restraint of a child and/or the making or enforcing of a child custody determination.

1996

P.L. 104-193, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996

On August 22, President Clinton signed into law “The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996,” a comprehensive bipartisan welfare reform plan that will dramatically change the nation’s welfare system into one that requires work in exchange for time-limited assistance. The bill contains strong work requirements, a performance bonus to reward states for moving welfare recipients into jobs, state maintenance of effort requirements, comprehensive child support enforcement, and supports for families moving from welfare to work.

The new law includes the child support enforcement measures President Clinton proposed in 1994--the most sweeping crackdown on non-paying parents in history. Under the new law, each state must operate a child support enforcement program meeting federal requirements in order to be eligible for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grants. Provisions include:

o National new hire reporting system. The law establishes a Federal Case Registry and National Directory of New Hires to track delinquent parents across state lines. It also requires that employers report all new hires to state agencies for transmittal of new hire information to the National Directory of New Hires.

- Streamlines paternity establishment. The new law streamlines the legal process for paternity establishment, making it easier and faster to establish paternities. It also expands the voluntary in-hospital paternity establishment program and requires a state form for voluntary paternity acknowledgment.
- Uniform interstate child support laws. The new law provides for uniform rules, procedures, and forms for interstate cases.
- Computerized state-wide collections. The new law requires states to establish central registries of child support orders and centralized collection and disbursement units. It also requires expedited state procedures for child support enforcement.
- Tough new penalties. Under the new law, states can implement tough child support enforcement techniques. The new law expands wage garnishment, allows all states to seize assets, allows states to require community service in some cases, and enables states to revoke drivers and professional licenses for parents who owe delinquent child support.
- Families First. Under a new “Family First” policy, families no longer receiving assistance will have priority in the distribution of child support arrears.

- Access and visitation programs. In an effort to increase noncustodial parents' involvement in their children's lives, the new law includes grants to help states establish programs that support and facilitate noncustodial parents' visitation with and access to their children.

1997

P.L 105-33, the Balanced Budget Act of made a number of amendments to the Social Security Act, including creating the Children's Health Insurance Program in title XXI to help provide medical coverage to children of working poor families who are not eligible for private health insurance, and who are earning too much to receive Medicaid. The Balanced Budget Act also amended section 454 of the Social Security Act regarding cooperation/good cause, and the FPLS language in section 453 to clarify the authority permitting certain re-disclosures of wage and claim information.

Appendix B. Legislative Bill 637

Approved by the Governor May 26, 1999

Introduced by Brown, 6, Beutler, 28; Jensen, 20, Wehrbein, 2

AN ACT relating to child support; to define terms to create a State Disbursement Unit, to provide for a study; to provide for reimbursement of certain costs; to require use of a statewide system for support orders; to create a fund; to provide for rules and regulations; and to declare an emergency.

Be it enacted by the people of the State of Nebraska,

Section 1. For purposes of sections 1 to 7 of this *act*:

- (1) Business day means a day on which state offices are open for regular business;
- (2) Child support has the same meaning as found in section 43-1705;
- (3) Department means the Department of Health and Human Services;
- (4) Medical support has the same meaning as found in section 43-512;
- (5) Obligee means a person to whom a duty of support is owed pursuant to a support order;
- (6) Obligor means a person who owes a duty of support pursuant to a support order;
- (7) Spousal support has the same meaning as found in section 43-1715;
- (8) State Disbursement Unit means the unit established in section 2 of this act;
- (9) Support has the same meaning as found in section 43-3313;
- (10) Support order has the same meaning as found in section 43-1717; and
- (11) Title IV-D Division means the Title IV-D Division of the department.

Sec. 2. There is hereby created a State Disbursement Unit, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. 654b, for the statewide collection and disbursement of support order payments. The State Disbursement Unit shall be administered and operated directly by a public or private entity or state officer as designated by the Title IV-D Division. The designation shall be subject to confirmation by a majority of the members of the Legislature. The entity or officer as designated shall be directly responsible to the Title IV-D Division.

Sec. 3. The Executive Board of the Legislative Council shall oversee a study to determine a method by which the State of Nebraska can comply with the federal requirements regarding the collection and disbursement of support order payments. The Executive Board shall select the person or group to conduct the study. The study shall determine a method which complies with federal law most effectively and efficiently while retaining the high enforcement rates and superior customer service which characterize the present Nebraska support collection and disbursement system. The study shall not delay implementation of wage withholding procedures.

Sec. 4. Until the State Disbursement Unit established in section 2 of this act becomes operative, the Title IV-D Division shall reimburse counties for unrecovered costs associated with the processing and disbursement of support order payments based upon insufficient funds checks received from obligors. Support order payments shall be disbursed within two business days after receipt.

Sec. 5. For purposes of the establishment, modification, or enforcement of a support order, all district courts shall utilize the Title IV-D Division's statewide automated data processing and information retrieval system. The Title IV-D Division may withhold IV-D funds from any county whose district court is not in compliance with this section.

Sec. 6. The Title IV-D Support Payment Cash Fund is created. The fund shall be used for the collection and disbursement of support payments as provided in sections 1 to 7 of this act.

Sec. 7. The Title IV-D Division shall adopt and promulgate rules and regulations to carry out sections 1 to 7 of this act.

Sec. 8. Since an emergency exists, this act takes effect when passed and approved according to law.

**Appendix C. Nebraska Child Support Collection and Disbursement System:
Implementation Project Work Group Members**

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Appendix D. Public-Private Partnerships Between IV-D Agencies and Private Contractors

Hand-Out of Mary Ann Wellbank, Montana IV-D Director (406) 444-3338
NCSL Symposium on Child Support - Public Private Partnerships in Child Support
September 18, 1999- Snowmass, Colorado

ARREARAGE COLLECTIONS collects designated arrearages
CASE CLEAN-UP SERVICES reviews cases to ensure appropriate actions have been taken and data is reliable, usually in conjunction with special project or preparation for conversion to new automated system
CENTRAL CASE REGISTRY maintains and updates centralized records of child support orders
CREDIT BUREAU REPORTING credit bureau electronically accepts and reports delinquencies from IV-D agency
CUSTOMER SERVICE UNITS (CSU) responds to phone calls/customer inquiries
ELECTRONIC FUNDS TRANSFER (EFT)/ELECTRONIC DATA INTERCHANGE (EDI) develops and handles electronic funds transfers from state to state, customer to state, or state to customers
ESTABLISHMENT SERVICES takes all necessary steps to establish orders for support
FEASIBILITY STUDIES explores options and related costs of given project
FULL IV-D SERVICES performs full range of IV-D services (location, establishment, enforcement, modification) for designated case load
FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS DATA MATCH (FIDM) works with in-state financial institutions (banks, credit unions, insurance companies, brokerage houses, etc.) to initiate contracts and to process data necessary to match delinquent parents with accounts held in their names
GENETIC TESTING arranges for blood drawing/tissue sampling at various sites around the state, conducts testing to determine genetic markers and probability of paternity, notifies child support agencies of results
GUIDELINES REVIEW studies and recommends changes in formula used to establish and modify monthly child support obligations
HEARINGS OFFICERS private attorneys act as hearing officers for child support issues
LEGAL SERVICES private attorneys provide designated legal or mediation services to IV-D agency
LOCKBOX SERVICES receipts incoming payments
INTERACTIVE VOICE RESPONSE (IVR) automated system provides updated payment information and responses to frequently asked questions
MANAGEMENT STUDIES /PROJECTS performs research or studies designated by management, or provides technical assistance for implementation of a project
MEDICAL INSURANCE performs functions necessary to establish or enforce medical insurance requirements
MODIFICATION SERVICES performs all necessary steps to have child support orders modified
NEW HIRE REPORTING provides employer outreach services and works with employers to coordinate reporting and data processing of information
PATERNITY ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND ESTABLISHMENT works with hospitals, birthing centers, midwives to facilitate paternity acknowledgments of out-of-wedlock births, contractor may conduct intensive interviews with mother to obtain information necessary to establish paternity in out-of-wedlock cases
PUBLIC AWARENESS develops materials and/or conducts publicity campaign to improve public awareness of child support-related issues
SERVICE OF PROCESS ensures parties are properly notified of legal proceedings and opportunity for due process
SKIP TRACING AND LOCATE SERVICES specializes in hard-to-locate cases requiring intensive research and investigation
STATE DISBURSEMENT UNITS (SDU) operates centralized collection unit responsible for receipting, processing and distributing child support payments
SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT AND/OR MAINTENANCE develops and/or maintains automated, certified child support enforcement system
TRAINING provides initial and/or on-going training for child support workers
TRANSLATIONS translates documents necessary to provision of child support services by U.S. or foreign country
VOICE RESPONSE UNIT (VRU) see Interactive Voice Response (IVR)

Appendix E. State/Private Contracts for Human Services

States that have contracted with private providers for a range of human services:

State	Description of Services Provided Under Contract
Type of Contract	
Alabama	
State	Child support collection for welfare arrears in 17 counties
State	Medicaid claims processing
State	Implementation of an integrated child support system
Arkansas	
State	Implementation and support of the state's Medicaid management information system
State	Child support collection and enforcement in 4 counties
Arizona	
State	Child support enforcement systems
State	Process child support payments
State	Process information for Arizona Tracking and Location Automated System (ATLAS), designed to collect overdue child support payments
State	Operate child support enforcement operations in 2 counties
California	
County	Welfare crisis and case management in 1 county
County	Consulting in 2 counties for Self-Sufficiency Centers (separate contracts)
County	Job search workshops, orientation and appraisal for GAIN (Greater Avenues for Independence), a training and placement program for welfare participants, in 1 county
Local	Consulting for Self-Sufficiency Centers
County	Consulting for Self-Sufficiency Centers in 8 other counties (separate contracts)

State	Description of Services Provided Under Contract
Type of Contract	
County	Development and implementation of the Automated Fingerprint Image Reporting and Match (AFIRM) system in 1 county
State	Operation of case management, information, and payroll system for In-Home Supportive Services Program
County	Assistance finding child support obligors in 1 county
State	Medicaid managed care enrollment
County	Operation of GAIN (Greater Avenues for Independence), a training and placement program for welfare recipients, in 3 counties
State	Automation of state welfare system
County	Automation of eligibility determination for public assistance in 1 county
Colorado	
State	Child support collection for current welfare recipients, and welfare and non-welfare arrears in 4 counties
County	Job training programs in 1 county
State	Development of family support registry
County	Management of child support collection and enforcement in 1 county
State	Managed care enrollment broker contract
Connecticut	
Local	Job training programs for welfare recipients
State	Child support collection for closed welfare cases
State	Child-care benefits for families on welfare
Delaware	
State	New Hire contract to find obligors
State	Managed care enrollment

State	Description of Services Provided Under Contract
Type of Contract	
District of Columbia	
	Software development to automate child support services enforcement
	Social services restructuring
	Development and installation of bilingual voice response system, and installation of child support enforcement system
Florida	
State	Child support collection for welfare and non-welfare arrears
State	Development of Recipient Data Access System
Federal grant	Opening of job connection offices in 4 counties
	Job training for welfare recipients in 1 county (1-year contract)
	Counseling, training, education and jobs for welfare recipients in 5 counties
	Welfare-to-Work program in 1 county
State	Track down child support obligors
State	Run TANF program in 3 counties
State	Consulting on FLORIDA project (Florida Recipient Data Access System)
State	Child support collection for welfare arrears
Georgia	
State	Child support locate only services
State	Child support collection for welfare arrears
State	Non-welfare child support collection and enforcement in 3 counties
Hawaii	
State	Child support enforcement

State Type of Contract	Description of Services Provided Under Contract
Idaho	
State	Child support collection for welfare arrears
Illinois	
State	Child support collection for welfare and non-welfare arrears
County	Child support enforcement
Indiana	
State	Job training services to welfare recipients in 1 city
State	Job placement for welfare recipients in 4 cities
State	Job placement for welfare recipients in 4 counties
State	FutureWorks program
State	Child support locate-only services in 1 county
Iowa	
State	Child support collection and enforcement in 17 counties
Kansas	
State	Child welfare services
State	Child support collection
State	Operation of Job Start, program for TANF recipients
Kentucky	
State	Medicaid claims processing

State	Description of Services Provided Under Contract
Type of Contract	
Maryland	
Local	Job placement and employment services in 1 city
State	Child support collection for welfare and non-welfare arrears
Local	Job center for welfare recipients in part of 1 city
State	Child support enforcement and collection in 2 counties
County	Job training for displaced and low-income workers
	Employment services for welfare recipients in 2 counties
Massachusetts	
State	Value-based assignment program
State	Child support collection for welfare and non-welfare arrears
State	Child support enforcement collection
Michigan	
State	New Hire program to track down child support obligors
Local	Implementation of Work First program including case management and job search skills
State	Medicaid managed care enrollment
State	Automated case management system for children and adult services in 1 county
State	Automation of eligibility determination for public assistance
Minnesota	
State	Child support collection for interstate welfare and non-welfare arrears
State	New Hire program to track down child support obligors

State	Description of Services Provided Under Contract
Type of Contract	
Mississippi	
State	New Hire program to track down child support obligors
State	Child support collection and enforcement activities
Missouri	
State	Child support collection for welfare arrears
Montana	
State	New Hire contract to track down child support obligors
Nebraska	
State	Three separate welfare contracts
State	Job training program for TANF and food stamp recipients in 6 districts
County	Child support collection and enforcement
Nevada	
State	Child support collection for welfare arrears
New Hampshire	
State	Child support locate-only services
New Jersey	
Local	Job training program for general assistance recipients in 2 cities
County	Job training program for general assistance recipients in 2 counties

State	Description of Services Provided Under Contract
Type of Contract	
New Mexico	
County	Find jobs for welfare recipients in 1 county
State	Child support collection for welfare arrears
State	Computer reprogramming for welfare program
New York	
State	Job training and placement program
County	Job training and placement for welfare recipients
State	Staff training at Job Clubs for Home Relief Program and TANF recipients
Local	Job search workshops
Local	Job training in 5 New York City Boroughs
Local	Child support locate-only services in 1 city
State	Process and distribute child support payments
	Medicaid managed care enrollment
North Carolina	
State	New Hire contract to track down child support obligors
State	Child support collection for welfare and non-welfare arrears in 16 state offices
North Dakota	
State	Job training for Food Stamp recipients
State	Case management, job search and training for TANF recipients

State Type of Contract	Description of Services Provided Under Contract
Ohio	
State	Job training program
State	Draft welfare reform plan
State	New Hire program employing welfare recipients to track down child support obligors
County	Job placement and training for welfare recipients in 1 city
	Child support collection for welfare and non-welfare arrears in 4 counties
County	Job placement program for welfare recipients
County	Job placement for TANF participants
County	Child support enforcement
State	Vocational rehabilitation services
Oklahoma	
County	Child support collection and enforcement in 4 counties
Pennsylvania	
	Child support collection for welfare and non-welfare arrears in 1 county
State	Design and integration of a case management system for employment security, job training, vocational rehabilitation, workers' compensation and disability programs
Tennessee	
State	Implementation of child support enforcement systems
State	New Hire program to track down child support obligors
	Child support collection in 2 counties
State	Child support collection in at least 4 counties

State	Description of Services Provided Under Contract
Type of Contract	
Texas	
State	Maintain welfare program and design new Child and Adult Protection System (CAPS)
State	New Hire program to track down child support obligors
State	Redesign delivery of services for TANF recipients
	Job training for disadvantaged youth and adults
	Job search assistance program
County	Job training for Job Training Partnership Act programs
State	Child support collection for welfare and non-welfare arrears
Local	Consultant on job-training center
Utah	
State	Child support collection for welfare arrears
Vermont	
State	Medicaid managed care enrollment
Virginia	
State	Human Services Redesign project
State	Child support collection for welfare and non-welfare arrears
	Child support enforcement offices in 2 cities
County	Employment services for VIEW participants
State	New Hire program to track down child support obligors
State	Development of automated project to allow workers to search all departmental systems and databanks relating to FS, Medicaid, TANF, child support and fuel assistance

State	Description of Services Provided Under Contract
Type of Contract	
Washington	
State	Child support collection for welfare arrears
West Virginia	
State	Design and plan Statewide Automated Child Welfare System (SACWIS)
State	Child support enforcement services for part of state
Wisconsin	
State	New Hire program to track down child support obligors
County	Operation of W-2 (TANF) Agency in 1 county
County	Case management, job search workshops, orientation and assessment, intake, work experience, work supplementation, OJTs, ESL, post-secondary, and remedial education monitoring for TANF and General Relief, Food Stamp, and E&T program recipients
County	General assistance medical program
State	Job placement services, including assistance in creation of 2 job centers
County	Operations of W-2 (TANF) agency
Local	Job training, placement, and welfare-to-work programs in two centers in 1 city
County	Operation of W-2 (TANF) agency
Wyoming	
State	Implementation of child support enforcement systems
State	Operation of a motivational job training program for long-term welfare recipients
	Child support collection and enforcement in 5 districts

Appendix F. Summary of States' SDU and Customer Service Configurations

September 27, 1999

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OP – Operating, DEV – Development on-going

SDU			CUSTOMER SERVICE		
STATE	CONTRACTED	IN-HOUSE	W/I SDU CONTRACT	SEPARATE	IN-HOUSE
Region I Boston					
Connecticut	OP		OP		
Massachusetts	OP				OP
New Hampshire	OP				OP
Vermont	OP				OP
Maine		OP			OP
Rhode Island		DEV			DEV
Region II New York City					
New York	OP		Partial		Partial
New Jersey	DEV		Unknown		
Puerto Rico		OP			OP
Virgin Islands		OP			OP
Region III Philadelphia					
Delaware		OP			OP
Maryland	DEV Collections	DEV Disbursement			DEV
West Virginia	Lockbox				OP
Washington DC		OP			OP
Pennsylvania	OP		OP		
Virginia		OP			OP
Region IV Atlanta					
Alabama	DEV				DEV
Florida	DEV				DEV
South Carolina	Waiver				

Tennessee	Dev Tier Tech			DEV Maximus	
Georgia	OP		OP		Op Temp Began operation 7/99--in house sharing heavy CS workload
Kentucky	DEV				DEV
North Carolina	DEV				DEV
Mississippi		DEV			DEV
Region V Chicago					
Michigan	Time Limited Waiver				
Minnesota	OP Collections	OP Disbursement			OP
Indiana	Nothing definite at this time				
Wisconsin	OP		OP		
Ohio	Nothing definite at this time				
Illinois		DEV will use Dupage County Clerk of District Court as Vendor			DEV
Region VI Dallas					
New Mexico		DEV			DEV
Oklahoma		OP		Has bid the CS separately twice and received bids too high; may attempt again with a stripped-down version	
Texas	DEV				DEV
Arkansas	OP		OP		OP
Louisiana	DEV				DEV

Region VII Kansas City					
Iowa		OP		OP	OP
Missouri	DEV			?	
Kansas	DEV		DEV		
Nebraska	DEV			?	
Region VIII Denver					
Wyoming	Nothing definite at this time				
North Dakota		OP			OP
South Dakota		OP			OP
Utah		OP			OP
Montana		OP		OP	
Colorado	OP		OP		
Region IX San Francisco					
Arizona	OP				OP
Hawaii		OP		OP	
Guam		OP		OP	
Nevada	Will locate the state's SDU in Clark County	DEV			DEV
California	Nothing definite at this time				
Region X Seattle					
Idaho	OP			OP	
Oregon		OP			OP
Washington		OP			OP
Alaska		OP			OP

¹Note: Mr. Aerts has graciously allowed us to use this table for this report, but he has not had the time to verify all the information. This is a work in progress and any errors are not the responsibility of Mr. Aerts or the Federal Administration for Children and Families.

**Appendix G. Comparative Ranking of
Nebraska and Other States' Child Support Enforcement Programs**

The following tables compare Nebraska's standing in comparison to the United States and its Territories. Rankings are based on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Administration for Children and Families) *preliminary data* for fiscal year 1998.

Ranking of each states child support caseload (defined as a non-custodial parent who is now or may eventually be obligated under law for the support of one or more dependent children).

State Caseload (Thousands)

1	California	2,093
2	Michigan	1,721
3	New York	1,295
4	Texas	1,235
5	Florida	982
6	Ohio	942
7	Pennsylvania	876
8	Illinois	746
9	Georgia	531
10	North Carolina	520
11	Tennessee	498
12	New Jersey	483
13	Wisconsin	475
14	Virginia	415
15	Missouri	406
16	Washington	404
17	Alabama	366
18	Indiana	344
19	Louisiana	333
20	Arizona	328
21	Maryland	320
22	Kentucky	315
23	Mississippi	289
24	Minnesota	268
25	Oregon	268
26	Connecticut	254
27	Massachusetts	239
28	Puerto Rico	227
29	Arkansas	224
30	South Carolina	219
31	Colorado	216

32	Iowa	207
33	Kansas	145
34	Oklahoma	134
35	West Virginia	124
36	Nebraska	121
37	Utah	109
38	District of Columbia	107
39	Idaho	87
40	Nevada	84
41	New Mexico	78
42	Rhode Island	72
43	Maine	70
44	Hawaii	68
45	Delaware	61
46	Alaska	59
47	Wyoming	59
48	New Hampshire	51
49	Montana	41
50	North Dakota	41
51	South Dakota	33
52	Virgin Islands	28
53	Vermont	27
54	Guam	10

State rankings in terms of the total Title IV-D money collected from non-custodial parents.

Total State IV-D Collections (Millions)

1	California	1,372
2	Michigan	1,152
3	Ohio	1,151
4	Pennsylvania	1,043
5	New York	834
6	Texas	685
7	New Jersey	582
8	Florida	507
9	Wisconsin	499
10	Washington	474
11	Minnesota	395
12	Maryland	357
13	North Carolina	312
14	Georgia	301
15	Illinois	300
16	Missouri	287
17	Virginia	277
18	Massachusetts	275
19	Indiana	227
20	Oregon	209
21	Tennessee	188
22	Kentucky	186
23	Iowa	185
24	Alabama	172
25	Louisiana	171
26	Connecticut	154
27	South Carolina	154
28	Puerto Rico	145
29	Arizona	144
30	Colorado	40
31	Kansas	122
32	Nebraska	117
33	Mississippi	112
34	West Virginia	109
35	Arkansas	99
36	Utah	97
37	Oklahoma	87
38	Maine	74
39	Nevada	69

40	Alaska	64
41	Hawaii	62
42	New Hampshire	61
43	Idaho	54
44	Delaware	42
45	Rhode Island	42
46	Montana	37
47	New Mexico	37
48	North Dakota	36
49	South Dakota	35
50	District of Columbia	33
51	Wyoming	33
52	Vermont	32
53	Guam	7
54	Virgin Islands	6

States rankings of total child support collections per full-time equivalent (FTE) staff. Nationally, the amount of child support collected per FTE was \$259,452.

Total Collections Per FTE Dollars (Thousands)

1	South Carolina	658
2	Wisconsin	482
3	Michigan	471
4	South Dakota	396
5	Maryland	389
6	Iowa	357
7	Idaho	351
8	Massachusetts	332
9	Virginia	332
10	Hawaii	313
11	Oregon	305
12	Vermont	296
13	Indiana	293
14	Maine	293
15	New York	286
16	Tennessee	285
17	Texas	284
18	Minnesota	282
19	New Hampshire	282
20	Kansas	277
21	North Dakota	277
22	Alaska	273
23	Pennsylvania	273
24	Rhode Island	272
25	Connecticut	271
26	Georgia	270
27	New Jersey	269
28	Florida	266
29	Washington	265
30	Nebraska	263
31	Missouri	259
32	Alabama	247
33	Ohio	246
34	Delaware	228
35	Kentucky	208
36	Colorado	202
37	Montana	194
38	North Carolina	192

39	Louisiana	191
40	Utah	188
41	Puerto Rico	186
42	Virgin Islands	186
43	Illinois	180
44	Oklahoma	179
45	West Virginia	175
46	Mississippi	171
47	California	169
48	Arkansas	157
49	Wyoming	154
50	District of Columbia	152
51	Arizona	149
52	Nevada	143
53	New Mexico	140
54	Guam	133

Rankings of each state in terms of the percent of prior year support due and received.

Prior Year Past Due Collections (Percent)

1	Missouri	86.5
2	West Virginia	77.5
3	Oklahoma	62.8
4	North Dakota	59.9
5	Nebraska	44.1
6	Louisiana	33.0
7	Washington	31.7
8	Georgia	15.5
9	Iowa	13.7
10	Oregon	11.6
11	Virginia	11.0
12	Kansas	10.1
13	Ohio	10.1
14	Rhode Island	9.7
15	South Dakota	8.4
16	Vermont	8.2
17	Indiana	8.0
18	Maryland	7.9
19	North Carolina	7.9
20	Pennsylvania	7.9
21	Maine	7.6
22	New Hampshire	7.6
23	Arkansas	7.5
24	Alabama	7.1
25	Utah	7.1
26	Massachusetts	6.8
27	New Jersey	6.2
28	Colorado	6.1
29	District of Columbia	5.9
30	Idaho	5.9
31	Alaska	5.4
32	Delaware	5.4
33	Wyoming	5.4
34	Montana	5.2
35	Kentucky	5.0
36	Puerto Rico	5.0
37	Michigan	4.6
38	South Carolina	4.1
39	Texas	3.6

40	Connecticut	3.5
41	Arizona	3.4
42	Mississippi	2.7
43	Virgin Islands	2.1

Note: Table 5, no data was available for 11 states

Appendix H. Nebraska District Courts Currently on the *JUSTICE* System

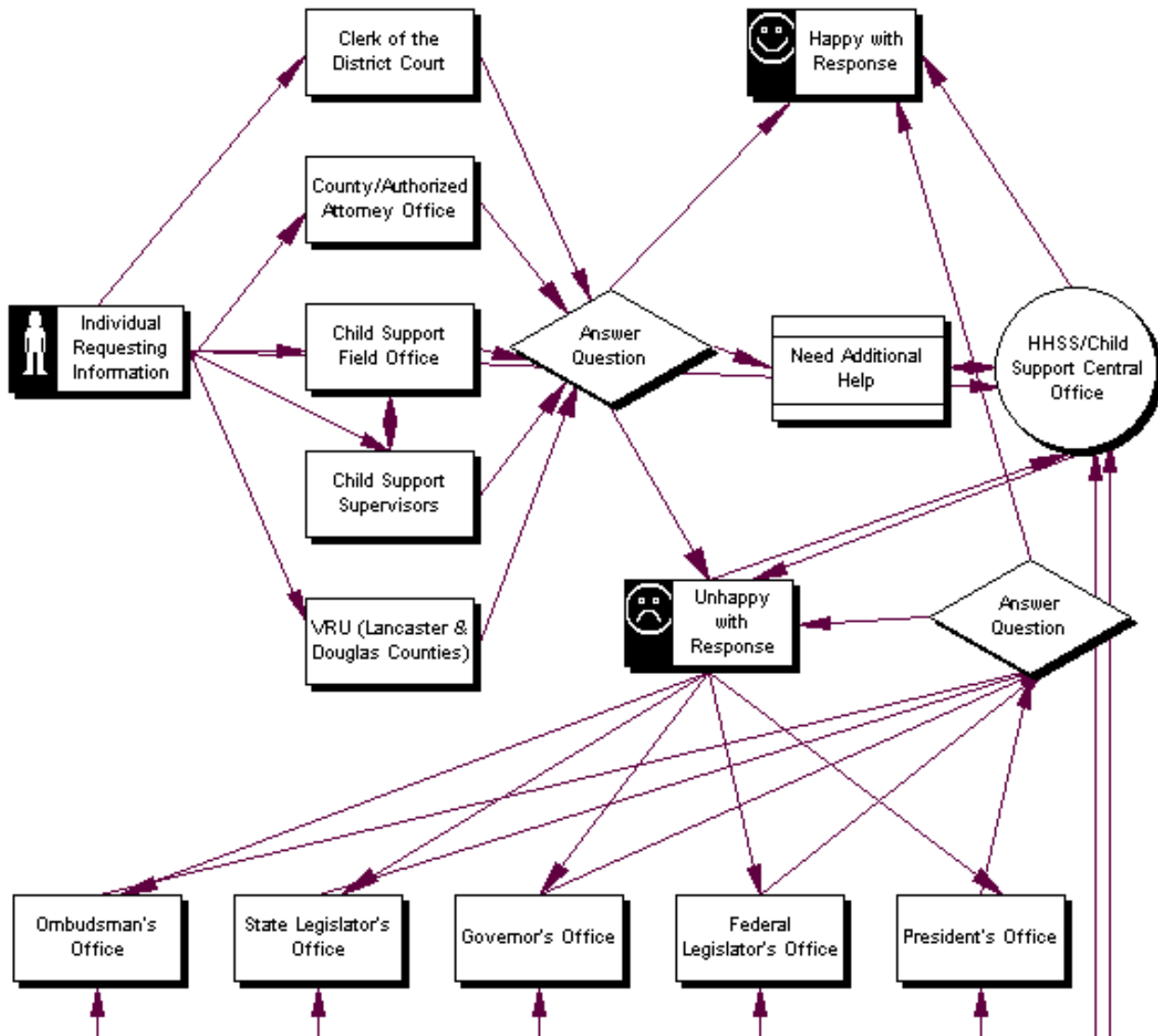
October 11, 1999

Adams	Keith
Antelope	Kimball
Box Butte	Knox
Buffalo	Lancaster
Burt	Lincoln
Butler	Madison
Cass	Merrick
Cedar	Morrill
Cherry	Nemaha
Cheyenne	Otoe
Clay	Pawnee
Colfax	Phelps
Cuming	Pierce
Custer	Platte
Dakota	Polk
Dawes	Red Willow
Dawson	Richardson
Dixon	Saline
Dodge	Sarpy
Fillmore	Saunders
Gage	Seward
Garden	Scotts Bluff
Hall	Sheridan
Hamilton	Thurston
Holt	Washington
Howard	Wayne
Jefferson	York
Johnson	
Kearney	

*Privatized office

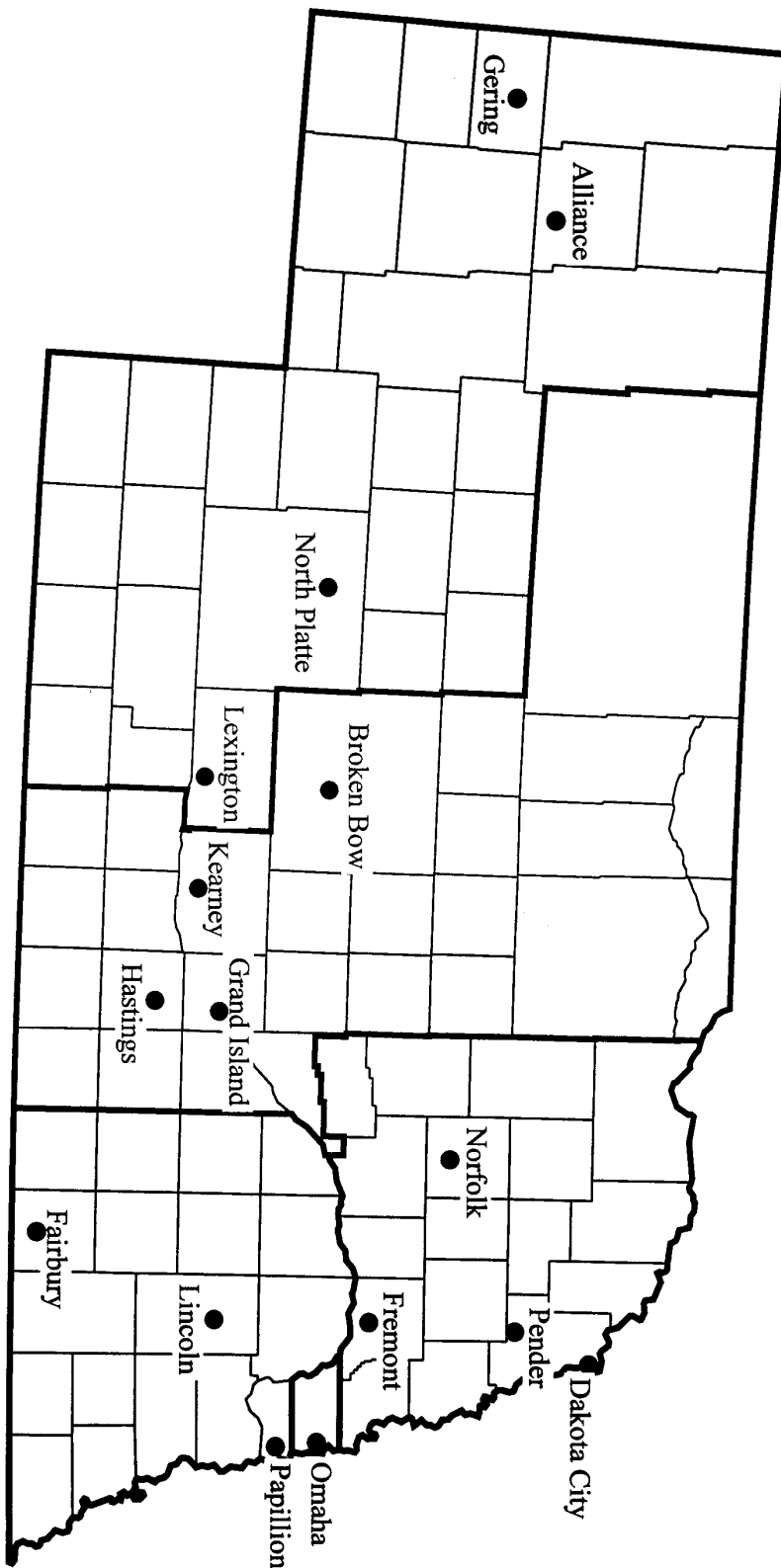
Appendix M. Nebraska Child Support Collection and Disbursement System Project:

Nebraska Child Support
Customer Service



Appendix J. Map of Child Support Enforcement Field or Regional Offices in Nebraska

HHS Child Support Enforcement Field Offices



Appendix K. Population of Counties with Child Support Enforcement Field Offices

	County	Population²	% of Nebraska Population
1	Adams	29,464	1.77%
2	Box Butte	12,832	0.77%
3	Buffalo	40,596	2.44%
4	Custer	12,026	0.72%
5	Dakota	18,792	1.13%
6	Dawson	23,183	1.39%
7	Dodge	35,333	2.13%
8	Douglas*	443,794	26.69%
9	Hall	51,851	3.12%
10	Jefferson	8,378	0.50%
11	Lancaster	235,589	14.17%
12	Lincoln	33,515	2.02%
13	Madison	34,585	2.08%
14	Sarpy	120,785	7.26%
15	Scotts Bluff	36,109	2.17%
16	Thurston	7,181	0.43%
TOTALS		1,144,013	68.80%

*Privatized office

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Customer Service

100 Point Allocation Task

Although each of the following dimensions are important, it is likely that the customer service model selected in Nebraska will be stronger on some dimensions and weaker on others. With customer service in mind (by “customer service,” we mean all the various facets of serving the various constituencies involved in child support enforcement process), please distribute the 100 points you have available across the various categories.

You are welcome to discuss this with your other group members. However, we would encourage each participant to complete their own form. The purpose of this task is to allow us to understand the relative values stakeholders place on each of these dimensions rather than pretend all important values are equal when there are limited resources available to create a system (or in the case of customer service, a sub-system).

Name/Group _____

_____ **Access** (ability to get to the right person for the needed services)

_____ **Accurate** (correct information)

_____ **Effective** (producing desired outcome)

_____ **Efficient, system** (reasonable investment for benefit obtained)

_____ **Efficient, user** (reasonable investment for benefit obtained)

_____ **Fair** (treats all stakeholders the same)

_____ **Feasible** (can it be done?)

_____ **Necessary** (is this really needed for child support enforcement?)

_____ **Prompt** (get information needed quickly)

_____ **Responsive** (get info needed when it is expected)

_____ **Other** (please specify: _____)

**Appendix N1. Summary of
Child Support Enforcement Worker Responses (n=12)**

1. What do you see as the general possibilities and barriers to providing child support customer service in Nebraska?

Possibilities:

- free up workers so they can do more hands-on case work
- reduction of call volume for individual workers
- continued support enforcement
- make service more streamlined and less confusing

Barriers:

- hiring people with no depth of knowledge — low pay means low quality
- staff should be able to read narratives from previous client contact; narratives may be inaccurate/outdated
- hiring enough staff
- extra step means more time in handling a case
- lack of personal attention and trust-building with clients
- duplication of services (HHS, county, attorneys)
- uncooperative custodial parents
- employers not reporting new hires

2. What are the key possibilities and barriers to using the “red phone” model of providing customer service?

Possibilities:

- free up caseworkers’ time to work on cases
- no waiting for call-backs
- possible wider access to information

Barriers:

- waste of money/who will fund this?
- inaccurate information going to clients
- each county is set up differently, need for red phone may differ/unnecessary
- extreme overload in phone calls
- no office space
- untrained or undertrained staff

3. What recommendations would you have to assure that Nebraska has premier customer service?

- qualified people (legal backgrounds); pay well
- customer service training and monitoring

- return calls within a specified time frame
- open communication between all entities
- need customer service central staff or staff in individual offices
- have one central clearing house for all information
- hire enough staff so caseloads are relatively small
- case workers should be accessible
- sponsor a child support seminar to educate the general public about facts of child support capabilities

4. Approximately what percentage of time to you spend providing customer service?

- 50-85%

Appendix N2. Discussion Questions Summary of “Other” Child Support Roles (n=3)

1. What do you see as the general possibilities and barriers to providing child support customer service in Nebraska?

Possibilities:

- specialists would have more time to prepare documents and locate non-custodial parents

Barriers:

- motivation — quality staff is vital
- different procedures by different counties may cause confusion

2. What are the key possibilities and barriers to using the “red phone” model of providing customer service?

- red phone could help some clients, however, some questions are better answered in person

3. What recommendations would you have to assure that Nebraska has premier customer service?

- customer service training should include knowledge of process and interstate needs
- accurate information is key
- must have established specialists — those who know establishment and enforcement

4. Approximately what percentage of time to you spend providing customer service?

- 75%
- phones 1 hour a day

Appendix N3. Discussion Questions
Summary of District Court Clerk Responses (n=3)

1. What do you see as the general possibilities and barriers to providing child support customer service in Nebraska?

Possibilities:

- publicize who and where questions can be answered
- create a partnership between state and local government and agencies

Barriers:

- availability of human person to speak with to vent frustrations
- long distance travel
- government's reluctance to invest in training may result in poorly trained staff

2. What are the key possibilities and barriers to using the "red phone" model of providing customer service?

- do not implement the red phone, use 800# instead; otherwise Clerks will be expected to provide customer service
- could be busy and there could be a long wait

3. What recommendations would you have to assure that Nebraska has premier customer service?

- customer service staff should be experienced and well trained in listening and patience skills
- customer service must be handled by those who handle payments
- child support enforcement is key

4. Approximately what percentage of time do you spend providing customer service?

- 30-50%

Appendix O. Customer Service Standards Survey

1. What is the maximum reasonable number of rings for callers to the VRU until the call is picked up?
 1-3 rings 4-6 rings 6-10 rings more than 10

2. What is the maximum reasonable hold time for a caller to the VRU until receiving a customer service representative?
 up to 1 minute 1-2 minutes 2-4 minutes more than 4 minutes

3. What is the maximum reasonable response time for someone with a complex child support enforcement question to wait before getting an answer or update?
 up to 1 working day 1-2 working days 2-3 working days
 3-4 working days 4-5 working days more than one week

4. What is the maximum number of miles someone should travel to speak face-to-face for customer service?
 less than 10 miles 10-20 miles 20-40 miles 40-60 miles
 60-80 miles 80-100 miles more than 100 miles

5. Other standards you think are important (please specify)

Appendix P. Customer Service Standards: Responses Summarized

1. What is the maximum reasonable number of rings for callers to the VRU until the call is picked up?

Between 1-6 is the maximum number of rings.

1-3 rings	10 responses
4-6 rings	11 responses
6-10 rings	none
more than 10	none

2. What is the maximum reasonable hold time for a caller to the VRU until receiving a customer service representative?

Up to 2 minutes is best, up to 4 minutes on occasion.

up to 1 minute	6 responses
1-2 minutes	10 responses
2-4 minutes	6 responses
more than 4	none

3. What is the maximum reasonable time for someone with a complex child support enforcement question to wait before getting an answer or update?

Up to 3 working days is the maximum reasonable time.

up to 1 working day	1 response
1-2 working days	8 responses
2-3 working days	8 responses
3-4 working days	2 responses
4-5 working days	3 responses
more than 1 week	none

4. What is the maximum number of miles someone should travel to speak face-to-face for customer service?

60 miles is the maximum number of miles someone should travel.

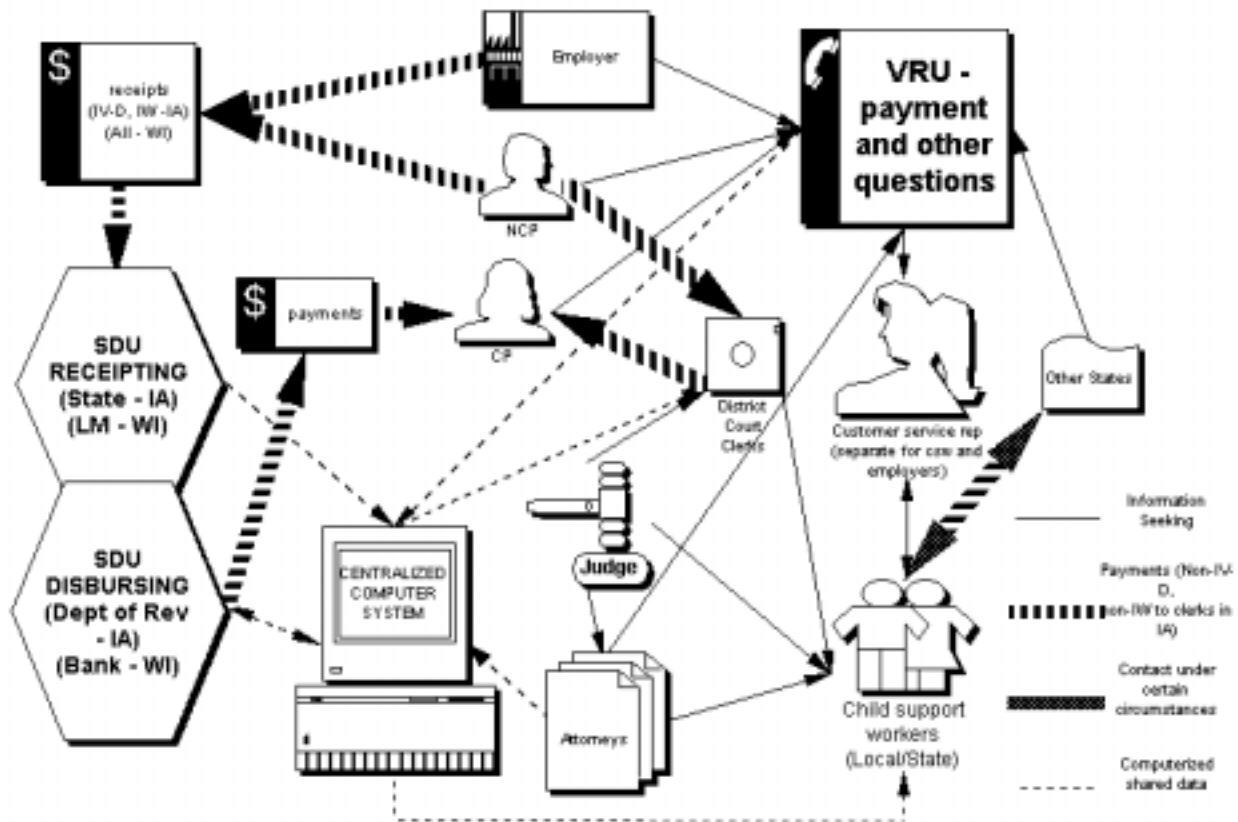
less than 10 miles	1 response
10-20 miles	4 responses
20-40 miles	5 responses
40-60 miles	7 responses
60-80 miles	1 response
80-100 miles	1 response
more than 100 miles	1 response

5. Other standards you think are important:

- personal service with respect
- accurate info must be provided
- voice mail — 60 seconds to leave message, expectation set on call back or info. must supply number, name, case ID
- caller ID — for anyone answering phones, recorded with reports on demand for supervisor and customer service representative
- random survey of customers who call — follow up on their service and follow through with changes to system
- keep track of percent of satisfied callers
- multi-cultural phone service (Spanish, Laotian, Vietnamese)

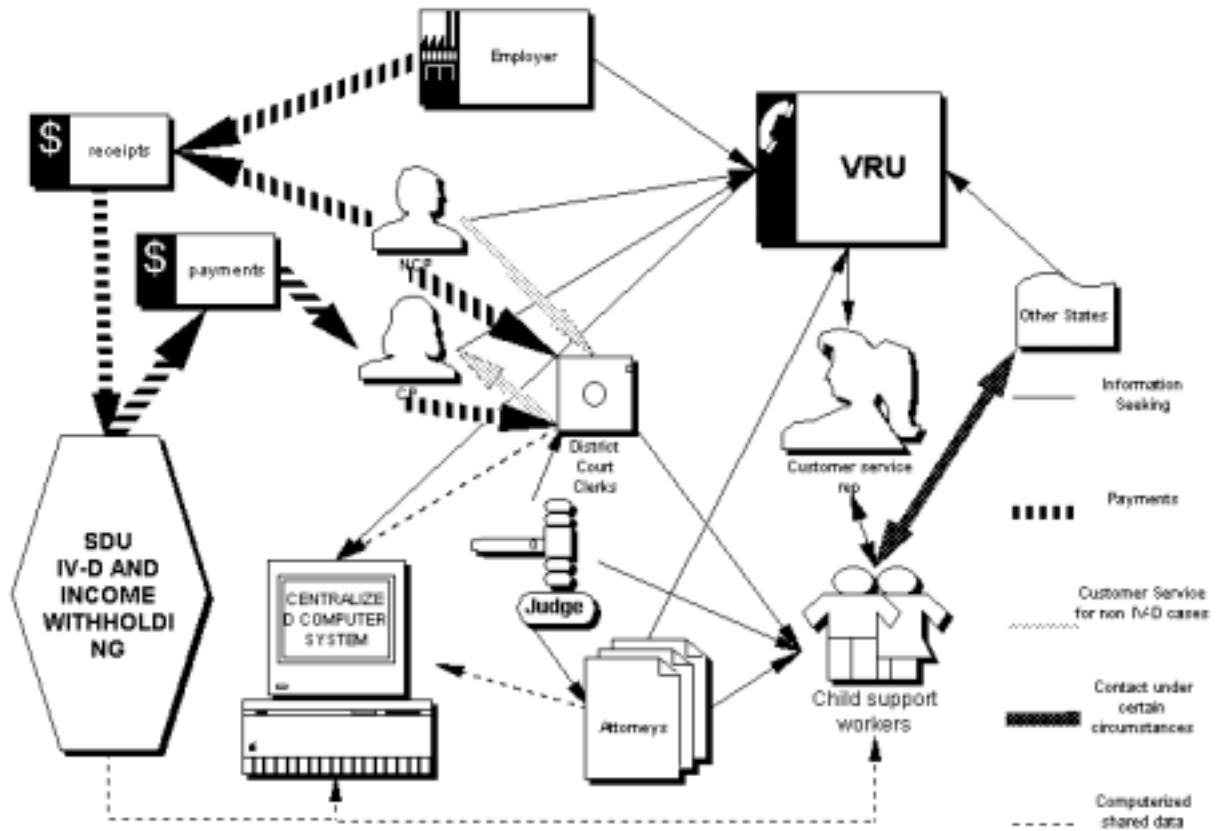
Appendix Q1. Voice Response Unit-Mediated Chart

VRU-MEDIATED CUSTOMER SERVICE (WI, IA – MI, MO similar)

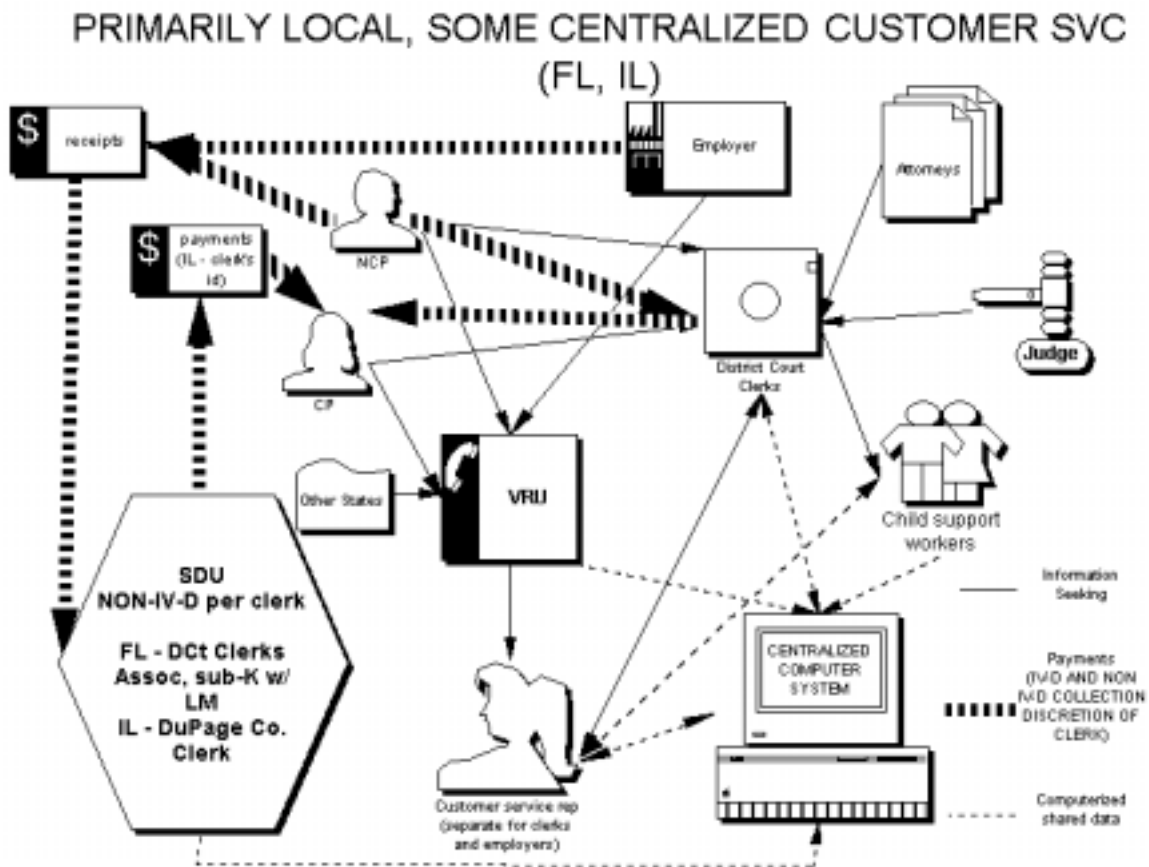


Appendix Q2. Order-Differentiated

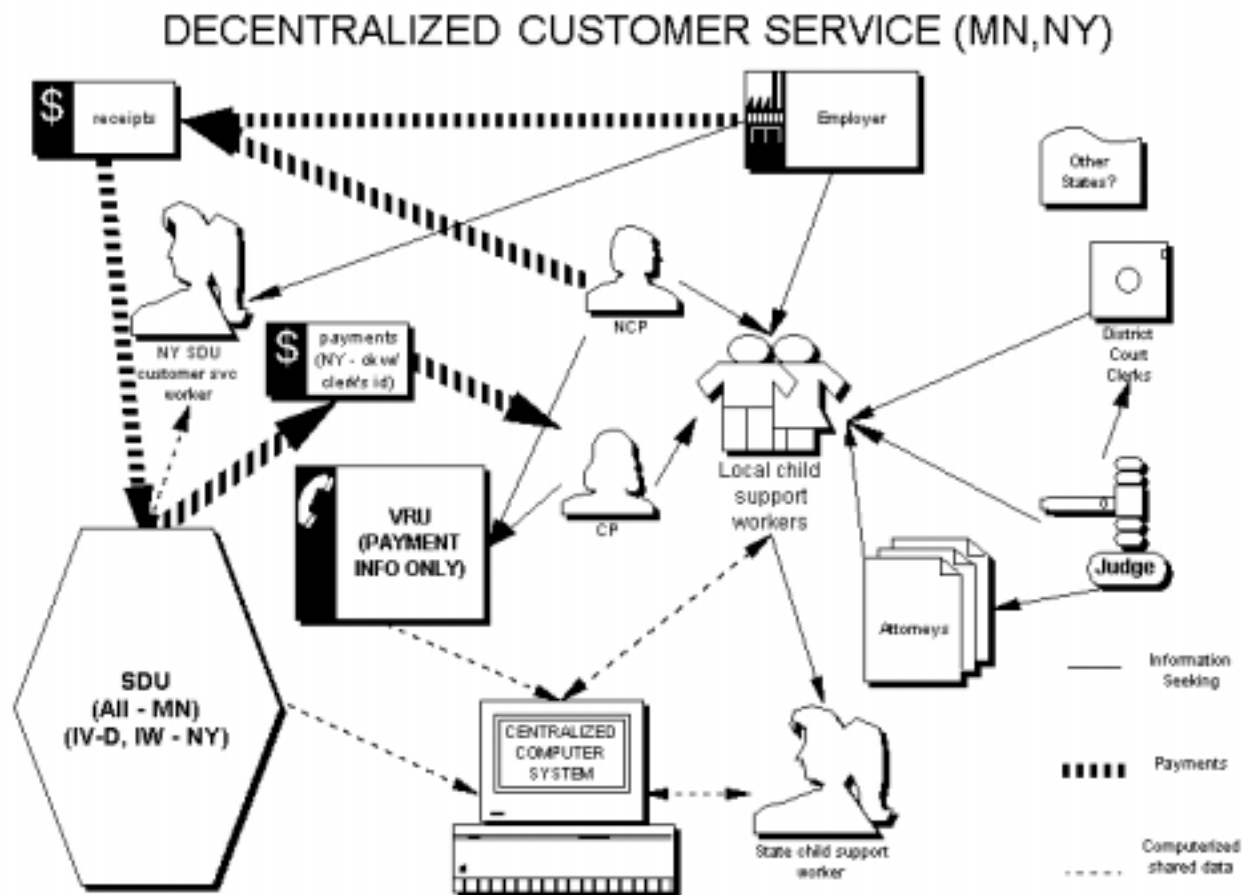
ORDER-DIFFERENTIATED CUSTOMER SERVICE (AZ)



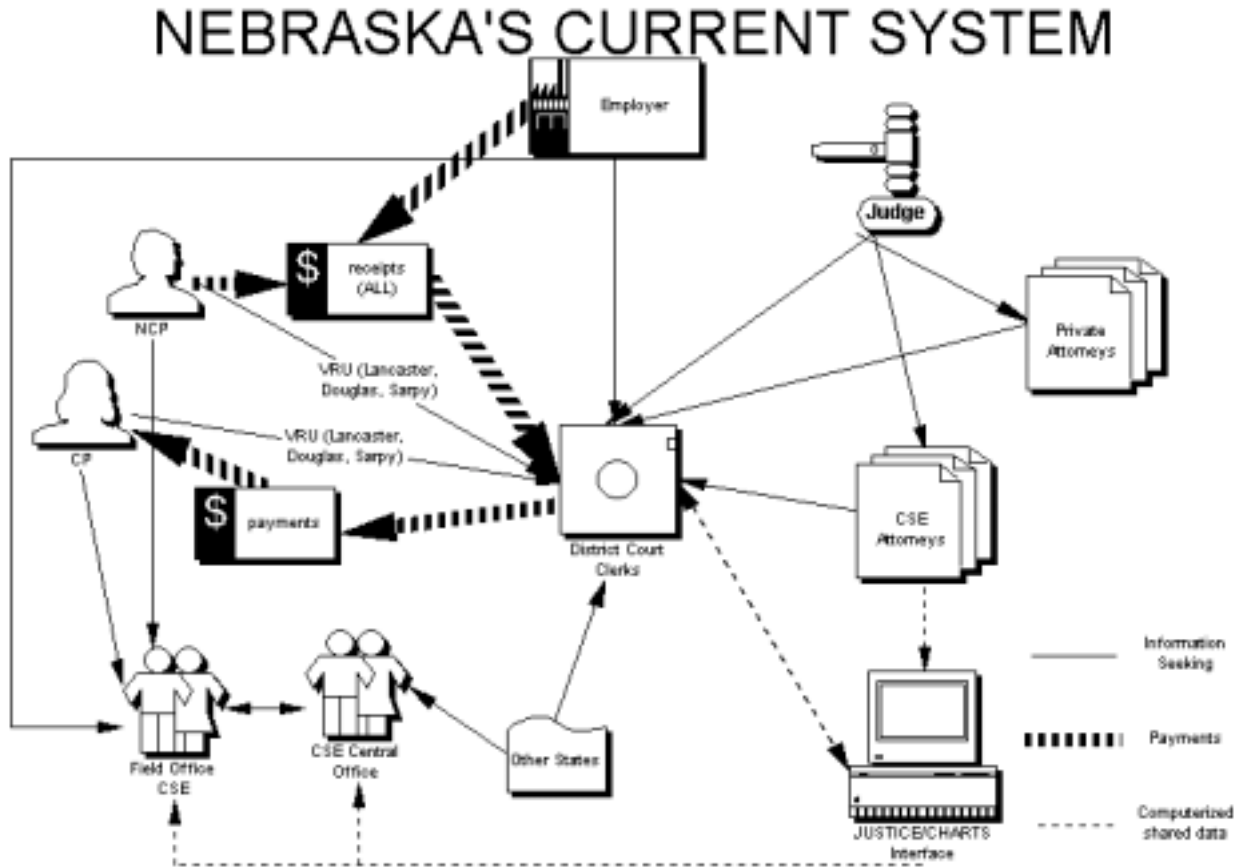
Appendix Q3. Primary Local With Some Centralized



Appendix Q4. Decentralized



Appendix R. Nebraska's Current Child Support System



**Appendix S. Nebraska Child Support Collection and Disbursement System Project:
Customer Service**

MODEL REPORT CARD

For the model, please assign a letter grade (A, B, C, D, F— plus and minus signs are acceptable, too) for each of the customer service dimensions provided below. When you have completed this task, we would like for you to 1) identify any other dimensions that may have been omitted from our list; 2) give us any other recommendations (e.g., implementation steps) we should consider; 3) identify three key strengths/benefits associated with the model and three key weaknesses/limitations associated with the model. Finally, 4) indicate any other issues or fears we should know that would assist in an optimal implementation of the State’s Disbursement Unit and would assure that Nebraska’s customer service will be as good – or better – than it has been.

Model _____ Name/Group _____

- | | |
|--|---|
| _____ Access (ability to get to the right person for the needed services) | _____ Fair (treats all stakeholders the same) |
| _____ Accurate (correct information) | _____ Feasible (can it be done?) |
| _____ Effective (producing desired outcome) | _____ Necessary (is this really needed for child support enforcement?) |
| _____ Efficient, system (reasonable investment for benefit obtained) | _____ Prompt (get information needed quickly) |
| _____ Efficient, user (reasonable investment for benefit obtained) | _____ Responsive (get info needed when it is expected) |

Other dimensions which should be considered

Other recommendations (e.g., implementation steps)

3 key strengths associated with the model

1.

2.

3.

3 key weaknesses associated with the model

1.

2.

3.

Other issues or fears we should know

**Appendix T. Summary of Model Report Card Results
Nebraska Child Support Collection and Disbursement System Project:
Customer Service**

The only two models selected by participants are the VRU-mediated (Iowa and Wisconsin) and Primarily Local (Florida, Illinois) models. Although only fourteen “Report Cards” were completed, the grades assigned and the group discussion represent a consensus of the vast majority of participants.

	VRU-Mediated Model	Primarily Local Model
Access (ability to get to the right person for the needed services)	B+	A-
Accurate (correct information)	A-	A-
Effective (producing desired outcome)	B+	A
Efficient, system (reasonable investment for benefit obtained)	B+	B-
Efficient, user (reasonable investment for benefit obtained)	B+	B-
Fair (treats all stakeholders the same)	B+	A
Feasible (can it be done?)	B+	B+
Necessary (is this really needed for child support enforcement?)	B+	B+
Prompt (get information needed quickly)	B+	A-
Responsive (get information needed when it is expected)	B	A-

VRU-Mediated Model

Twice as many participants voted in favor of the VRU-mediated model than voted in favor of the Primarily Local model. Participants perceived that an especially strong-point of the VRU-mediated model is accuracy. Other reported strengths of this model include strong customer service availability and responsiveness. Because it is expected that customer service representatives could handle 85% of the calls, it was perceived that local district clerks would have more time for casework and enforcement. Another reported option is that local district clerks could be transferred to the VRU as customer service representa-

tives. In addition, the VRU model provides centralized customer service – customers would have one phone number to call to access most case information.

On the other hand, several participants voiced concern that the Clerks would not be able to access the VRU. In order for the VRU to maintain accurate records, it was suggested that there be regular communication between the Clerks and the VRU. In addition, it is important that customer service representatives be trained well, so they can answer most customer questions. There is some concern regarding the transition to a new system – confusion needs to be dealt with and, before implementation, the system should be well-tested. There should be a direct connection between the VRU, customer service representative and local Clerk to prevent customers from being forced to make multiple calls to different offices or wait for extended voice recordings. There was discomfort with losing local control over customer service; therefore, it seems important to maintain active participation by district clerks and attorneys.

Other issues raised by participants include: the same system should be used for Title IV and non-Title IV cases; a separate phone line should be made available for employer use; calling should be toll free; there should be a maximum time limit for customer service response; and the system should be kept simple to avoid customer frustration.

Primary Local

While fewer participants voted for the Primarily Local model, those who did respond tended to assign very high grades to it. This is especially the case for the access, accurate, effective, fair, prompt and responsive categories. A major strength of this model is that it continues local office use while also providing 24-hour customer service via the VRU. Therefore, customers would have an option of using the local Clerks or centralized VRU. Another strength of this model is that it is not privatized. There is concern about accountability and enforcement of regulations with respect to privatization.

Concerns with the Primary Local model include finding the funds to support two customer service systems (rather than one) while avoiding redundant services. There is also the possibility of disparity in quality of service. Other issues raised by participants include slowed transfer of child support funds; phone accessibility; cultural sensitivity and responsiveness; and the possibility of technology overshadowing the needs of customers for personal interaction.

Additional Issues or Concerns

- Many participants stress the importance of placing receipting and disbursement of child support in the same unit with daily updates to the data.
- To the extent possible, collection and disbursement should be done electronically.
- A unique tracking number needs to be assigned to each case. Currently Justice routinely assigns the same ID number to multiple cases.
- Security checks are needed.
- Training west of North Platte is needed.

- There must be accuracy and accountability in record-keeping.
- All information received by the SDU should be recorded and forwarded to the County Attorney.
- Interstate cases need improved accountability in enforcement.

Appendix U. June Survey of District Court Clerks

Dear Clerk of the District Court:

During the 1999 legislative session, Legislative Bill 637 (LB 637) passed into law. LB 637 reflects Nebraska's compliance with the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 by creating a **State Disbursement Unit** (SDU). The SDU will be responsible for collection and disbursement of all IV-D child support order payments, and all child support orders issued after January 1, 1994 in which the income of the non-custodial parent is subject to wage withholding.

LB 637 also provided for a **study** to determine means of retaining high enforcement rates and superior customer service while complying with federal requirements to establish an SDU. The University of Nebraska Public Policy Center is coordinating the study. LB 637 states that high enforcement rates and superior customer service "characterize the present Nebraska support collection and disbursement system."

During the coming months, customer service options will be discussed through interviews, focus groups and surveys. Clerks of the District Court play an important role in these activities. To focus future interviews, focus groups and surveys, and to build on the results of an earlier survey conducted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Bureau of Business Research, we would appreciate your feedback on some **initial questions** about customer service in the SDU system.

Attached please find a brief survey. We distributed the survey at the meeting last week of the Clerks of the District Court Association, but understand you were unable to attend the meeting. Please complete and return the survey, by July 2, 1999 to:

**NU Public Policy Center
119 CBA
Lincoln, NE 68588-0473
402-472-5678 - phone
402-472-5679 - fax**

Thank you for your time and cooperation. If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at 402-472-5687 (phone), or nshank@unl.edu (e-mail).

Sincerely,

Nancy Shank
Research Assistant Professor

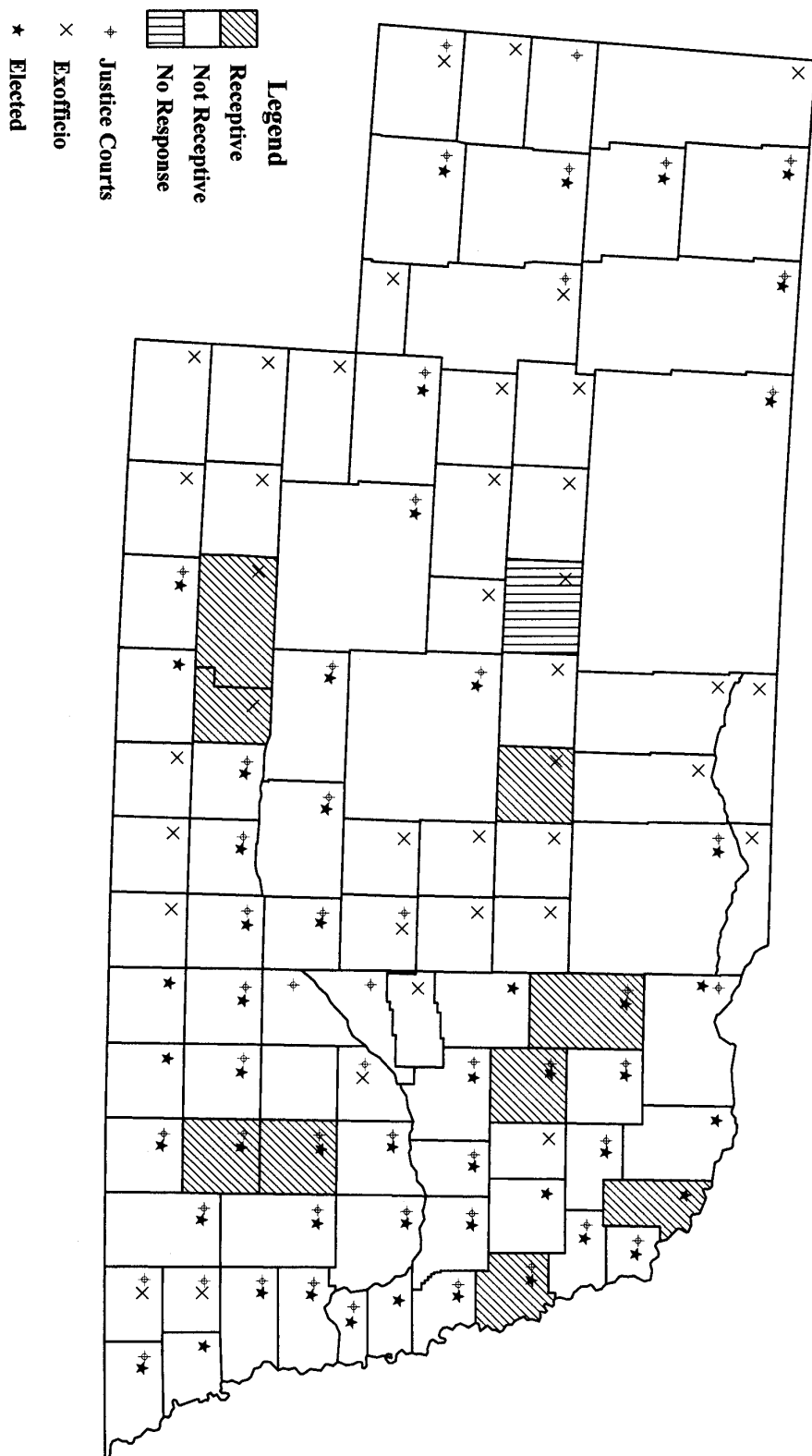
3. What strategies should Nebraska consider to assure that high enforcement rates and superior customer service continue as the SDU system is implemented?

4. What impact do you expect the implementation of the SDU to have on your office operations?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this initial survey. During the coming months, we request your assistance as we continue to explore the SDU system and options for maintaining high customer service. We appreciate your input. Please return your completed survey by July 2, 1999 to: **NU Public Policy Center, 119 CBA, Lincoln, NE, 68588-0473, (402-472-5678) - phone, (402-472-5679) - fax**

Appendix V. District Court Clerk Receptivity to Providing Child Support Customer Service

District Court Clerk Receptivity to Providing
Child Support Customer Service



Appendix W. Overall Functional Task Distribution: Responses Summarized

The numbers in this table represent the number of respondents indicating that YES, this office should be responsible for this function. In addition, for coupons and public access phone, several respondents wrote, “do not do this.”

Functions	Clerks	Centralized SDU	Central CSE	Regional/ Local CSE
Case Setup: All activities performed when a new child support case filing is received. Tasks include file stamping, assigning docket and page number, preparing temporary child support orders, paternity judgments, and preparing the trial docket sheet.	7			
Case Maintenance: All activities performed after the initial child support case setup, will include maintenance of the child support payment record prior to the SDU. Tasks include pleadings, entering address changes pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. section 42-364.13 (1998), orders signed by judge, daily journals.	7			
Provide copies of payment records to attorneys, clients and judges.	9	6	6	4
Certify copies of payment records.	7	6	4	1
Provide the SDU customer service phone number.	9		9	9
Provide copies of decrees to child support attorneys.	9	1	2	2
Receive over the counter cash payments.	7	3		1
Have available and disburse various informational pamphlets.	9	1	9	9
Schedule hearings.	8			
General information regarding the case file and judgment.	8	2	3	2
Provide information regarding payment related questions.	5	8	6	3
Change of address and change of employment.	8	8	7	6
Checking dates, amounts, signatures, etc. on payments.		9	1	
Handling problems that need to be resolved before a receipt is issued, such as tracking unidentifiable payments, making account adjustments, tracking payment history, etc.	4	9	2	2
Receipting: All tasks involved in the actual writing of the child support payment receipt.		9		
Disbursing Maintenance: All tasks related to the determination of child support disbursement. Allocating assignments.	4	8	7	1
Disbursement: All tasks involved in the actual disbursement of the child support payment by check or electronic funds transfer (EFT)/direct deposit.		9	1	
Billing: Sending billing notices to payers and employers.	3	8	3	1
Sending coupons to payers and employers.	2	7	3	1
Account reconciliation.	4	9	4	1
Auditing child support financial records.			8	

Functions	Clerks	Centralized SDU	Central CSE	Regional/ Local CSE
Monitoring child support operations.			8	4
Answering payment-related inquiries.	5	9	7	3
Providing a phone for public access to VRU (self-dialing dedicated phone line).	5	1	1	4
Child support problem solving.	6	6	9	7
Answer questions from employers regarding income withholding.	3	7	8	8

**Appendix X. Functional Task Distribution:
VRU with Local (and Red Phone) Access
Responses Summarized**

Customer Service Functions	Voice Response Unit (VRU)	VRU Customer Service Representatives	District Court Clerks	Child Support Enforcement Field or Regional Offices	Central CSE Office (Lincoln)
Have available and disseminate publications various informational pamphlets.	2	2	2	2	2
Provide the SDU customer service phone number.	1	1	2	2	2
Provide recorded information on Frequently Asked Questions.	2				1
Provide automated payment information with access through PIN number.	2				
Enable reply messaging (i.e., caller may leave question as a message and instructions on how to access answer within 24 hours through a private voice mail box).	2				
Provide copies of payment records.	2	2	2	1	2
Certify copies of pre-SDU payment records.			2		
Certify copies of post-SDU payment records.		2	1	1	1
Verbally answer questions about SDU payment records.		2	1	1	1
Answer basic questions about the status of child support enforcement activities.		2		2	1
Track referrals about child support enforcement activities that require CSE worker assistance.		1		1	1
Respond to questions about child support enforcement activities that require CSE worker assistance.				2	1
House "red phone" (self-dialing, dedicated, and toll-free) for access to field or regional CSE office, or VRU.			2		
Use "red phone" (self-dialing, dedicated, toll-free) for access to field or regional CSE office, or VRU.			2		
Staff "red phone" to provide local problem-solving.				2	1

Customer Service Functions	Voice Response Unit (VRU)	VRU Customer Service Representatives	District Court Clerks	Child Support Enforcement Field or Regional Offices	Central CSE Office (Lincoln)
Receive occasional over-the-counter cash payments.			2	1	1
Authorize change-of-address and employment records.	2	2		2	1
Problem-solve with clients in tracking unidentifiable/misapplied payments, authorizing account adjustments, tracking payment history, etc.		2		2	1
Monitor customer service for effectiveness and satisfaction.					2
Resolve complex case issues.				2	2
Answer questions from employers regarding income withholding, and other matters.		2			1
General information regarding court case file and judgment.			1		

Note that only two respondents returned this handout. Other comments include: public access terminal/PC for customer to see data on line; TDD line; email to worker with anonymity for worker. The number indicates the number of respondents agreeing with each part of the model.

Appendix Y. Persons Interviewed from Other States

Kathy Adams, Information Officer, Division of Child Support, State of Kentucky
Dave Aerts, Program Specialist, Federal Department of Health and Human Services, Kansas City Office
Gary Allen, Program Specialist, Federal Department of Health and Human Services, Kansas City Office
Mary Anderson, Awareness and Education Supervisor, Child Support Enforcement Division, State of Minnesota
Mary Arvesen, Systems, Child Support Enforcement Division, State of Minnesota
Dave Ashby, Senior Consultant, Policy Studies, Inc.
Howard Baldwin, Deputy Attorney General for Child Support, State of Texas
Lillie Bogan, Director, Child Support Enforcement, State of Florida
Pauline Burton, Director, Division of Child Support, State of Colorado
Chris Carpenter, Director, Program Services, Florida Association of Court Clerks Association
Pam Compton, Manager, Training and Policy, State of Illinois
Butch Devine, Collection Services Center Customer Service Manager, State of Iowa
Robert Doar, IV-D Director, State of New York
Wally Dutkowski, IV-D Director, State of Michigan
Carol Eaton, Bureau of Collections Program Planner, State of Iowa
S. Kay Farley, National Center for State Courts
Tammy Frazee, Department of Economic Security Administrative Assistant, State of Arizona
Janet Goode, Iowa Customer Service Manager, Policy Studies, Inc.
Tex Hawkins, Project Manager for State Distribution Unit, State of Florida
Stephen L. Hussey, Director, Division of Support Enforcement and Recovery, State of Maine
Laura Kadwell, Director, Child Support Enforcement Division, State of Minnesota
Brian Kinkaid, IV-D Director, Division of Child Support Enforcement, State of Missouri
Thomas Kisch, Bureau of Collections Operations Manager, State of Iowa
Carolyn B. Lapsley, IV-D Director, State of Alabama
Ron Larkin, Administrator, Office of State Courts, State of Missouri
Sherri Larkins, Program Specialist, Federal Department of Health and Human Services, Kansas City Office
Colleen Lembke, President-elect, Nebraska Child Support Enforcement Association
Robert Lyons, IV-D Director, State of Illinois
Nancy Mendoza, Department of Economic Security Director, State of Arizona
Amy Myers, Bureau of Collections, State of Iowa
Teresa Myers, Legislative Specialist, Child Support Enforcement issues, National Conference of State Legislatures
Jeff Peabody, Wisconsin SDU Manager, Lockheed Martin
Sue Pfeiffer, IV-D Director, State of Wisconsin
Ann Reszarch, Bureau of Collections Customer Relations/Intergovernmental Affairs Manager, State of Iowa
Susan Robison, Designated Principal Assistant, Division of Child Support Enforcement, State of Missouri
Tanya Simkins, Customer Service Regional Manager, State of Arizona

University of Nebraska Public Policy Center

Max Smith, Director, Office of State and Tribal Operations, Administration for Children and Families,
Region VII, Department of Health and Human Services

Prudy Stewart, Manager, Centralized Receipt and Disbursement Implementation Plan, State of Wisconsin

Doris Taylor, Bureau of Collections Policy Specialist, State of Iowa

Nancy Thoma, Bureau Chief, Bureau of Collections, State of Iowa

Amy Waddle, Payment Processing Administrator, Supreme Court of Kansas

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