

A Strategic Look at the Federal, State and County Child Support Program Questions and Answers from the Panelists 10/3/16

As promised, since we didn't have enough time to answer all of the questions asked, and didn't have a lot of time to answer those that we did answer, below is a compilation of answers prepared by the group that were on the panel for the opening session this year. Some panel members answered more than once, and others did not have an answer for some questions. The panel members consisted of¹:

- Federal – Tami Masuca, Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of child Support Enforcement Region 5 Program Specialist
- State - Jeff Jorgenson, Director, Minnesota Department of Human Services, Child Support Section
- County – Casey White, Area Manager, Hennepin County Human Services
- County – Trish Skophammer, Assistant Director, Ramsey County Human Services Division
- Moderator – Melissa Rossow, Assistant County Attorney and Assistant Director, Ramsey County Attorney's Office, Human Services Division

1. What is the ETA on new technology to replace PRISM?

Child Support/PRISM is part of a major DHS systems modernization effort. An exact date has not yet been determined for replacing PRISM. Working together through the DHS Business Architecture Domain Team (BADT), the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) and county and tribal agencies (local agencies) have created a roadmap to implement an integrated, people-centered human services system that works better for the workers who administer it and the Minnesotans who use it. The roadmap sets the course for business and information technology (IT) to work together to implement this integrated human services system. This integrated system encompasses several major business processes: eligibility, assessment, enrollment and case management. DHS will be focusing on infrastructure related projects during the next year.

Initial Business Processes to Move to an Integrated Service Delivery System

- Triage and Intake
- Online Application
- Case Management (with the State Medical Review Team [SMRT] as the first pilot implementer in the last quarter of 2015)
- MNsure (Eligibility)

¹ Chris Sorenson, Director of Southwest Health and Human Services was slated to be on the panel, but was unable to make it. On very short notice (for one about an hour before while driving) Casey White and Trish Skophammer agreed to join Jeff, Tami and Melissa on the panel. Thanks to Chris for being willing. Thanks to Casey and Trish for jumping in last minute!

- Client Portal (with SMRT as first implementer)
- MnCHOICES (Assessment, Service Planning and Authorization)
- Licensing (Components of Provider Management)
- Appeals

Initial Technical Processes and Activities to Support This Work

- Data Management (Data Architecture)
- Data Sharing: Information Compliance and Systems Modernization (Data Architecture)
- Business Intelligence and Reporting Data Analytics (Data Architecture)
- Advance Planning Document (APD): Creation, Submission and Approval by Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)
- Environment and Infrastructure (Technical Architecture)
- Access and Identity Management (Security and Technical Architecture)

2. When will credit/debt inline payments be available?

There is not a firm date of when new payment functionality will be available. Both DHS and the Counties want to provide more options for clients to pay DHS including online payments, credit cards and other alternatives. That being said there are a number of issues that need to be resolved before new payment functionality will be available. For example there are State banking contracts, contracts with existing payment vendors, concerns over liability for chargebacks, concerns over fees charged to clients, etc. DHS has also been asked to look at other areas within DHS who accept payments and look for a global solution beyond just accepting child support payments.

DHS also has the real issue of technical resources being available to do the work. Over the last two years, a group of financial and policy people have been meeting to discuss alternative forms of payment for the people we serve. Recently DHS has met with Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB) and US Bank regarding how they can assist in moving these efforts forward. The DHS chief financial officer is submitting a request to the DHS commissioner looking for support and guidance. Everyone from top down knows this is a slow process, but it is a priority for both DHS and the counties, and DHS is working on it.

3. Searching by SSN, when or how often does the interface between MN and the FEDS happen?

OCSE is working on the FPLS to reduce the amount of time it takes to share information.

4. What is EDE “Electronic Document Exchange” and how do you use it?

EDE is an application on the Child Support Portal (Portal) that provides a secure way for states to exchange child support documents and UIFSA forms electronically. This link takes user to an overview of EDE:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/css/resource/electronic-document-exchange-edo-overview>

5. What is the timeline for Iteration 3 for PRISM and METS interface?

Work on iteration 3 is continuing. There are 2 fixes going into the Winter release (December 2016): One is fixing when the question “Is there a child with a parent living outside of the home?” is presented to applicants and the other is a fix for PRISM not receiving all of the closure notices from METS that we should be. DHS is hopeful that Iteration 3 (interface from PRISM to METS) will be deployed in the spring 2017 release, but like many other answers attached to technology, there is no firm date.

6. What do you see as the child support program’s biggest challenges and opportunities in the future?

All panel members agree that Minnesota’s performance as a program has never been better. But with that said, there are still some challenges and opportunities.

a. Challenges:

- Changing to meet the needs of families is always a challenge since family dynamics are so diverse.
- The caseload is shrinking. We need to learn by, and also do a better job marketing our services to other county/state programs and with all of our stakeholders.
- Unemployment remains high for our low income and diverse population impacting their ability to pay.
- A higher percentage of children are now born outside the marriage contributing to a harder to serve child support cases requiring more intensive case management.
- Workforce – We need to recruit younger workers. I’d also like to see our workforce become more diverse.
- Obsolete statewide computer systems – PRISM.
- Family centered services take more time and resources – how do we balance what we can do vs. what others should be doing?
- Keeping up with technology changes and trends, and the changing family structure.
- Public service does not seem to be as attractive of a career as it once was. In some counties, the average tenure of an employee is now 1-2 years. How will we respond to the changing landscape in terms of maintaining services for a program that takes upward of a year to learn - balancing the needs of clients & employees, resources, training, transfer of knowledge, and our return on investment? How can the government change to make public service attractive to the upcoming generations?
- Ongoing interface, communication, referral, and empathy issues with and for our IVA partners related to METS

b. Opportunities:

- The continued evolution of the program to meet the needs of the families we serve by continuing to participate in grants and studies to determine what we should be doing to support these families.
- I'd like us to conduct customer service surveys on our services – hours of operation, location of services, etc. We should be listening to our clients.
- Expand partnerships with the courts and legal services to assist pro se litigants.
- Use local celebrities to help with our message.
- Upgrade and enhance our online customer service – more payment options, allow customers to access and submit case specific information, mobile technology, etc.
- We need to make all of our notices easy to read and understand. We should also start sending them electronically.
- Minnesota should watch for grant opportunities that can be applied for to enhance local programs.
- TECHNOLOGY – for us and our clients
- To increase our ability to respond to the ever changing circumstances of our clientele – more nimble adjustments/modifications to ongoing orders for support both increasing and decreasing/suspending obligations
- Compassionate integrated service with other human service programs and community partners
- To be innovative – we need to continue to identify different ways to do our work in order to remain competitive and a national leader

7. What are 1 or 2 of the biggest things every caseworker can and should do to improve the program overall?

- Be proud of the program – We have a great program and you should be proud of that. Share our success stories and be an advocate for the program! Everyone can and should be an advocate for our program.
- Be involved at every level – Pay attention to what's happening in child support at both the state and national level, be involved in organizations like MFSRC, volunteer for statewide projects like the CLV, initiate projects within your county aimed at improving services, build new partnerships, etc.
- Provide awesome customer service – This is one of the hardest and yet most critical things we must do. Excellent customer service is at the heart of our business model if we want to be successful. We need to build trust with our families and providing awesome customer service is one way to establish trust. We also need to remember most normal people don't speak government – they don't understand PRISM, CORD, DORD, OCSE, DHS, or any other acronym we use on a daily basis.
- More on customer service - These are people we are working with. Remember that there are people on the other end of that computer screen, letter or phone. Put yourself in their shoes and serve them the same way you would want to be served.

Also, remember that you know a lot about the history, reasons, and requirements of this program – the people we serve do not. It is our job to educate, explain, help, refer to partner organizations, be patient, and serve people despite the fact that we need to meet performance standards.

- Make a difference – With each interaction you have tremendous power to make meaningful change for a child, to make a positive change for a CP or an NCP, to make one of your co-worker’s day with a kind word or gesture.
- Set your own goals - Identify the intrinsic rewards in what you do, set outcome goals for yourself, challenge the status quo if you hear yourself say “we’ve always done it this way” and remind yourself you do important work for children!

8. How can we better address the perception that we are pro-mother/woman and don’t care about fathers/men as much?

- We need to be aware and more careful with language we use in materials, pleadings and in discussions. We are often referring to CPs as a female and NCPs as a male. We need to portray that we are truly an equal services organization, not just believe it but show it. We serve the family as a whole and not just the CP or mother in whatever role she is in.
- We need to move away from the terms Custodial Parent (CP) and Non-Custodial Parent (NCP). We have parents who owe support and parents who receive support. We need to be cognizant of this when dealing with parents/families. Children need the financial and emotional support of both parents and we need to reinforce that message when talking about our services.
- When trying to enforce a case, look beyond the fact that child support isn’t being paid, and talk to the parent who owes support in an attempt to identify why. If you can identify the barriers, you can provide referrals to agencies that might be able to help that parent obtain employment to meet the financial obligation.
- When doing community outreach and public education, include resources for fathers (i.e., parenting classes, employment services, general info on his rights and responsibilities as a father, etc.)
- Always provide services to your family (case) as if they were still together – what would you need to do to help this family. Your actions and words should demonstrate a holistic approach.

9. Is there a plan for addressing parentage issues with same sex couples and setting child support for these families?

- The private bar in Minnesota has been working on some issues, including a surrogacy task force.
- Laws and materials have been made more gender neutral, which is something that OCSE has suggested to state and local agencies.
- When families are not made up of two biological parents of opposite sex, parentage issues can be complex – even in families of opposite sex couples. The question that needs to be asked is whether the parents were legally married and whether there is

a legally recognized parent and child relationship for both parents. If not, the next step is to make that determination through an administrative or court process. We should consider a session for future conferences to outline the processes involved. If counties are struggling with these issues, they could contact Hennepin or Ramsey Counties for support – it is more likely than not one of these two counties have seen the scenario the other county is struggling with.

- Sometimes we may complicate things more than they need to be. For setting child support, it should not matter whether the family is a man and a woman as parents, two men as parents, or two women as parents. In any of these families, there will be a parent who owes child support and a parent who receives child support as determined by the court. The same questions should be asked – has parentage been established through marriage or another means, who has custody of the child, what is the parenting time, what are the incomes.

10. Why has there not been a legislative change to allow for imputation of income to MFIP recipients, which is an employment goal program?

The Minnesota Legislature passed a law that requires a Minnesota Child Support Guidelines Task Force that began meeting last month. A report is due to the Legislature in 2018. One issue that needs to be addressed is whether our guidelines work as they were intended to work. This question is definitely on the list to consider. With how the guidelines work today, imputing income to MFIP recipients risk making orders too high for the child support obligor at a point where the MFIP recipient really cannot contribute more than the grant amount into his or her household. So, it would take a change in the guidelines calculation to accomplish this – if this is the right thing to do.

11. How can we better use social media for locate information and figuring out what income to use?

- Use it to push information and education out, so that we get over the negative myths of our program.
- There may be some legal issues relating to using social media to do locate or to determine income, particularly if you are using a “fake name” account. Most social media providers require real people for real accounts. Additionally, there may be some data privacy issues relating to the use of social media to obtain information. Before you go out into the world of using social media as a locate tool or to determine income, talk to your county attorney, particularly one who knows civil and data privacy laws.
- Nothing prevents the other parent from presenting social media information to us or the court. However, we cannot ask or require this of the other parent. The best way to approach this issue if the other parent offers information is to inform them that they can bring this information to the attention of the court.

12. How does a \$50 order (minimum support order) encourage an NCP to find a job? How can we better respond to CPs who are upset by this?

- It gets the family to the table and starts the process of cooperation. The goal is to get some real money to the child rather than pretend money that will likely never be collected. Then encourage and increase orders or some other form of support from there.
- An idea for cases where you are certain but cannot prove that the NCP has more income, is to include some conditional language in them; court will set the order at \$50 but NCP has to find a job within x many days. The order could also require an NCP to attend a financial class that would teach him how far a \$50 order will go in meeting the needs of the child.
- The order itself won't encourage an NCP to find a job – additional language may be needed. It's more important to engage the NCP in supportive services – employment and training services and perhaps programs that help with basic needs. In terms of upset CPs this is an opportunity for a discussion about the realities of the situation, how were things when they were together – was employment an issue, basic needs, etc. - those issues will remain until addressed. Only then will the entire family have an ability to move forward.
- If the CP has information that will help set a support order in a different amount, the CP should be encouraged to provide that information to us or to the court.

13. If you had a magic wand with no limit at all, what initiative would you grant to the child support program that would help the program the most?

- Grant unlimited technology funds to not only the child support program, but all partner organizations so that we can all work together in a modern symbiotic system to serve our families through one access point.
- Get rid of all assignment, all child support collected should go directly to the family and if the parent receiving the support is on public assistance child support should not be budgeted against the public assistance grant. We should only have 1 financial bucket – Non-public assistance.
- We need a more flexible/nimble and simplified review and modification process.
- More outreach – that might mean more staff, better technology, and more flexibility in hours. This is so needed, especially with underserved groups and special populations.
- Change the federal laws to allow IV-D programs to provide more services to NCPs, like job placement, access and visitation programs. Actually, allow IV-D programs to provide more services to either parent!
- I wish the magic wand worked on everything we need from technology to outreach to creating jobs and training programs! One initiative is not enough!