

089382



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON REGIONAL OFFICE
FIFTH FLOOR
803 WEST BROAD STREET
FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA 22046

MAR 25 1975

Mr. Edward W. Sterling, Director
Fairfax County Department of Social Services
4041 University Drive
Fairfax, Virginia 22030



Dear Mr. Sterling:

The General Accounting Office, as part of its nationwide evaluation of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, surveyed Fairfax County's procedures for collecting child support payments. In performing this work, we observed instances where the Department's procedures could be strengthened as a means of better assuring that absent parents provide child support. Our observations are summarized below.

We examined two randomly selected samples from the December 1973 active AFDC files--100 cases involving 133 absent parents where no support account had been established and 47 cases involving 50 absent parents where a support account was established. In 71 of the 100 cases where no support account had been established, there was no evidence in the files of attempts to locate absent parents by querying Federal information sources; requiring petitions of nonsupport to be filed; or attempting to negotiate voluntary support agreements. A further review of 12 of these cases disclosed six cases where attempts to collect support payments had been made, but not documented in the file. Eligibility technicians could not explain why petitions of nonsupport were not filed, or why no actions had been taken in the six remaining cases.

We also found that information initially obtained from recipients was often inadequate to locate absent parents. Twenty eight of the case files reviewed did not have basic information, such as the birth dates of absent parents, although the recipient was closely related to the deserting relative and would presumably know the absent parent's birth date. Responsible department personnel agreed that such information should have been available in most of these cases.

~~909427~~

089382

We discussed these observations with Mr. C. Edward Amundson, Deputy Director, and suggested that Fairfax County should strengthen its administrative procedures to increase the probability of collecting support payments from absent parents. Mr. Amundson agreed that improved training of eligibility technicians in required support procedures and increased emphasis on related supervisory review could increase support collection and reduce program cost. Regarding the possibility of concentrating support collection activities within a group of specialized personnel, he told us it may be difficult to justify from a cost standpoint even though it would allow the development of needed skills and permit the department to focus increased attention on the support collection.

As you may know, Public Law 93-647 enacted January 4, 1975, contains several amendments to the child support program that should facilitate program operations at the county level. Among other things these amendments provide:

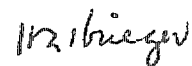
- establishment of a parent locator service within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare,
- use of Federal courts to adjudicate child support cases,
- garnishment of moneys due to individuals from the Federal Government for the purpose of paying child support,
- Federal reimbursement of 75 percent of State costs for carrying out an approved State plan for administering the child support program, and
- financial incentives to political subdivisions for the enforcement and collection of support.

You may wish to reassess your plans for carrying out the child support program in view of this recently enacted legislation.

- - - -

We appreciate the courtesy and cooperation our representatives received during this survey and would like to be advised of any action you plan or take in regard to these matters. If you have any questions or desire further information, please contact Mr. Robert McArter at 557-2151.

Sincerely yours,



H. L. Krieger
Regional Manager