

CUSTOMER SERVICES

C. CUSTOMER SERVICE

CONCLUSIONS

Based upon our findings from extensive interviews, reviewing data, and evaluating current technologies, we conclude that to meet the needs of its customers, the State of Nevada's Child Support Enforcement program (CSEP) must reengineer customer service delivery for both internal and external customers. By doing so, customer satisfaction will be improved and CSEP will benefit through improved performance.

We found that while staff at all levels have a desire to provide quality services to families, customers are often frustrated by the service delivery system. To improve the delivery of effective customer service, Central Office must take on the role of providing leadership to instill a quality customer service culture among all stakeholders. In so doing, Central Office will have an opportunity to collaborate with counties to develop strategic initiatives based upon recommendations found within this Customer Service Section.

From establishing a customer service plan and customer service standards to enhancing the Voice Response Unit (VRU) and the Web site, there are many opportunities for CSEP to improve customer service. Some changes will be relatively simple and quick, others are more complex and will require time to implement. We feel all are worth considering.

RECOMMENDATIONS

C.3 CUSTOMER SERVICE DELIVERY

C.3.3.1 Establish Standards Regarding the Method and Timeliness of Contacts With Customers, and Monitor Compliance to Those Standards -

C.3.3.2 Mail Handling

C.3.3.3 Consider Providing an Enhanced E-mail Option as a Method for Communication Between Case Managers and Customers

C.4 VOICE RESPONSE UNIT (VRU)

C.4.3.1 Improve the Existing VRU

C.5 CUSTOMER SERVICE CULTURE

C.5.3.1 Creation of a Statewide Customer Service Committee and Plan

C.5.3.2 Include Customer Service Delivery Goals and Objectives as Part of Case Managers' Annual Personnel Evaluations

C.5.3.3 Solicit Feedback From External Customers

C.5.3.4 Establish an Equitable Distribution of Cases

C.5.3.5 Change in Paradigm of Case Ownership

C.5.3.6 Consideration Should be Given to Customer Service Needs in Future Office Space Planning

C.5.3.7 Adoption of a Proactive Approach Towards Customer Service

C.5.3.8 Provide a Centralized Customer Service Call Center and Specialized Customer Service Training

C.6 COMPLAINTS

C.6.3.1 Implement and Monitor the Formal Procedure for Handling Complaints

C.7 WEB SITE

C.7.3.1 Enhance Central Office's Web Site for Case Participants and Employers

C.8 DOCUMENTS: FORMS, CORRESPONDENCE, AND LITERATURE

C.8.3.1 Improve the Readability and Clarity of Customer Forms and Correspondence

C.8.3.2. Standardized Forms Should be Used by all Offices, When Possible

C.8.3.3 Improve the Readability and Clarity of Customer Literature -

C.8.3.4 Develop an Outreach Plan

C.8.3.5 Assign Responsibility for Development of Outreach Materials to the DWSS Central Office

C.8.3.6 Expand the Dissemination of Brochures and Fact Sheets

C.8.3.7 Improve the Readability, Clarity, and Accessibility of the Application for Child Support Services

C.10 EMPLOYERS

C.10.3.1 Strengthen Relationship with Employers

C.10.3.2 Ease Employer Burden

C.1 BACKGROUND FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE STUDY

The intent of the customer service study portion of our audit is to ascertain the extent to which the State of Nevada, Child Support Enforcement Program (CSEP) provides effective, efficient, and quality customer service. We realize because the state supervises the child support enforcement program and the administration of services rests with the county district attorneys through cooperative agreements, customer service is the responsibility of all parties involved to deliver services to the children and families of Nevada.

We also recognize customer service delivery is a very important part of the child support enforcement program across the nation and has gained renewed emphasis through the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE). A National Strategic Plan was developed by OCSE in conjunction with IV-D Directors and reflects the direction and support of state child support enforcement programs. In this Strategic Plan for 2005-2009, customer service is identified in its strategies and customers are defined.

The National Strategic Plan defines the primary customer and beneficiaries of the child support enforcement program as the children. The parents and/or custodians of these children are also customers. The National Strategic Plan also acknowledges the many partners and stakeholders that are integral to the program.

We developed definitions for "customer" and "service" that are used across the study to ensure consistent context. For purposes of this study we defined *customers* as

those who receive any type of service from, or who deliver services to, the CSEP. We also categorized customers into two categories: internal and external.

- *External customers* are defined as children, custodial parents (CSTs), non-custodial parents (NCPs), employers, and others who are outside the government umbrella who receive any type of service from, or deliver services to the CSEP.
- *Internal customers* are defined as those entities primarily under the governmental umbrella that receive services from, or deliver services to the CSEP. Case managers are included in this definition as casework is often transferred from one person or team to another.

Services are defined as any tangible product or service provided by an entity or a person to an internal or external customer. Essentially, if an entity or person performs work and delivers a product or performs a service on behalf of another, then a customer relationship exists.

For information relating to the proposed restructuring of the CSEP, including in regards to customer service, please see *Section B: Proposed Restructuring of the Nevada Child Support Program*.

C.2 METHODOLOGY

We used our **SURE** (Scan, Understand, Recommend, and Execute) methodology to evaluate the current effectiveness and efficiency of customer service in the Nevada CSEP.

Our SURE methodology detail can be found in our response to the Request For Proposal (RFP) to provide this audit of the Nevada child support enforcement program. A high level explanation of our Sure methodology approach includes:

- We **Scanned** the customer service operations of the CSEP to identify key issues and collect essential data. The primary means used to collect essential data included staff interviews (see Section B.2.1), customer interviews (see Section B.2.2), a customer survey (see Section B.2.3), and review of documentation in the form of reports and other customer service-related data (see Section B.2.4).
- We took every effort to gain a complete **Understanding** of the role of the customer service operation within the CSEP by reviewing and analyzing information gathered, as well as researching and analyzing "best practices."
- We made **Recommendations** for improvements in customer service operations in the areas of customer service delivery, Voice Response Unit (VRU), customer service culture, complaints, Web site, documents, and employers. Recommendations are provided in summary fashion in the Recommendations section above with more detail provided within each particular section.
- The **Execution** of the recommendations will be at the discretion of the Nevada state legislature, DWSS, and the counties.

References to large, medium and small counties are noted in the Customer Service study section. The large county is Clark County, the medium county is Washoe County, and the small counties include Elko and the other rural counties.

C.2.1 Staff Interviews

We interviewed staff from large, medium, and small counties. Our interviewees represent over 131 child support professionals, including executives, managers, supervisors, case managers, and administrative support. We conducted interviews in group and one-on-one settings, and to ensure a proper environment for staff to speak freely, conducted interviews in conference rooms and by telephone to ensure confidentiality. We recognized that when selecting staff to be interviewed, there was apprehension on the part of the employees. To allay that apprehension and to obtain frank and honest responses, we assured employees their names would not be mentioned in the report, and made it clear the intent of the study was to seek their input for improving the Nevada CSEP. With these assurances, we are confident the information provided by staff was in the form of honest and open communication.

We created interview questions based upon the contractual obligations contained in the RFP response, plus additional questions. The questions and responses from each interview were entered in an Excel spreadsheet. To maintain the confidentiality of the responses, we maintained the actual responses from individuals, but did not include their names in our report. We conducted interviews primarily in person, although some smaller offices interviews were conducted by telephone. Some interviews were held in a group setting by teams and/or by functional areas, while others were held with individuals. We interviewed by rank within the organizational structure such as executives, managers, supervisors and case managers. Depending upon staff role, additional types of questions were asked.

Since delivering case management services to custodial parents (CSTs) and non-custodial parents (NCPs) is a part of customer service, conversations often overlapped into organizational structure and associated issues.

A list of interview questions for non-supervisory and supervisory staff can be found in *Appendix C-3* and *Appendix C-4: Customer Service*.

Results of staff interviews are mentioned within relevant sections of the Customer Service Section.

C.2.2 Customer Interviews

We conducted exit interviews with customers after they visited, in-person, with counter staff or case managers.

We had the opportunity to observe customer service interactions in the Clark County Reception Area. In addition, customers were interviewed after they were assisted by counter staff. A list of interview questions used for this purpose can be found in *Appendix C-2: Customer Service*. Five customers – two custodial parents and three non-custodial parents were interviewed formally. Several others were talked to informally.

Although the number of customers we interviewed was small and would not be considered a statistically valid sample, we obtained valuable information that still adds insight into customer service delivery.

The results of our customer interviews are mentioned within relevant sections of the Customer Service Section.

C.2.3 Customer Surveys

A customer satisfaction survey was developed, mailed to external customers (custodial and non-custodial parents), and responses were reviewed. The customer satisfaction survey can be found in *Appendix C-1: Customer Service*.

OCSE developed customer satisfaction surveys in the late 1990s; the surveys were a result of work done by a Federal/State/local child support customer service workgroup. We used these surveys as starting point for developing our survey instrument, but made significant changes, including additions, deletions, and revisions to tailor it to the Nevada CSEP, and to ensure information we gathered was relevant to the performance review.

Our survey asked a series of questions about the customer's most recent contact with the program. In addition, the survey asked questions about the customer's experience with leaving a voice message, sending an e-mail or letter and using the Voice Response Unit (VRU) and Web site. We also asked questions about receipt of letters, forms, brochures and asked the customer to rate satisfaction in a number of areas. For demographic data we asked customers to provide year-of-birth, gender, and education level.

When drafting the survey, we strived to use language that recognizes the unique relationship customers may have with the CSEP. For example, our survey asked if the customer received the information they needed, rather than asking if the customer received the information they wanted. In a program like Child Support Enforcement, it is not always feasible or appropriate to provide customers with what they want, but rather the goal should be to provide customers with what they need. For illustration purposes:

A non-custodial parent may want CSEP to reinstate a suspended license. While it may not be appropriate for CSEP to reinstate the license (i.e., what the customer wants), it is appropriate to provide options for contesting the action and information as to what action the non-custodial parent must take to have their license reinstated (i.e., what the customer needs). Great customer service can be provided, though the customer may not always get what they want.

The customer satisfaction surveys were mailed out in July 2006, to 1,875 customers: 938 sent to custodial parents, 937 sent to non-custodial parents. A cover letter accompanied the surveys and customers were given a deadline to respond. To encourage response, we provided postage-paid return envelopes. We analyzed responses to our surveys returned before August 24, 2006.

Unfortunately, the percentage of completed surveys returned was low. Of 1,875 total surveys mailed, 197 were completed and returned by the recipient (10.5%), 275 were returned as undeliverable (14.7%), and 1,403 were unaccounted for (74.8%). For a further break-down, see the *Exhibit C.2.3-1: Customer Survey Return Statistics* below.

| Mailed | CST | NCP | Percentage |
|---------------|-----|-----|------------|
| 1,875 | 938 | 937 | 100% |
| Completed | CST | NCP | Percentage |
| 197 | 125 | 72 | 10.5% |
| Undeliverable | | | |
| 275 | 157 | 118 | 14.7% |
| Unaccounted | | | |
| 1,403 | 656 | 747 | 74.8% |

Exhibit C.2.3-1: Customer Survey Return Statistics.

The majority of customers responding to the survey were born between the years 1963 and 1974. Over 60% were female and over 60% were custodial parents.

As far as education level, the vast majority of customers responding to the survey had at least a high school diploma or GED. We cannot conclude if this is indicative of the education level of the case participants. Of the five customers formally interviewed in-person, three reported having less than a high school diploma or GED. The responses may indicate that customers with a higher education level are more apt to complete a written survey, and may also indicate that customers with a lower education level are more likely to seek in-person assistance.

Although we are perplexed as to the reasons for the low response rate to the customer survey, those responding did provide valuable information. We gave special attention to the "free form" comments provided in response to a question which asked customers to share anything else about the program and its services to customers. We found trends within comments that may indicate the presence of customer satisfaction issues.

A summary of the results of the customer survey can be found in *Appendix C-5*. Specific results of customer surveys are also mentioned within relevant sections of the Customer Service Section.

C.2.4 Requests For Documentation

We requested various documentation from both the DWSS Central Office as well as various District Attorney Offices. This requested documentation included Voice Response Unit (VRU) statistics and scripts, as well as customer forms and literature. The Central Office and counties were very cooperative in providing us with the requested documentation to the best of their ability. In addition, we also reviewed documents regarding and relating to customers and organizational staffing. For a complete list of documents, see the Document Repository in *Appendix F: Document Repository*.

We noted that NOMADS is not currently able to produce management reports with the details necessary to provide effective management and thus, customer service.

See Effectiveness of Operations *Section D-6: Reports* for more information regarding management reports. Management reports are critical to effective leadership and management of the CSEP for Nevada. Accurate and detailed information is vital to providing the outputs that relate directly to customers, thus providing customer service.

C.3 CUSTOMER SERVICE DELIVERY

C.3.1 Background

In evaluating customer service delivery, we reviewed the methods CSEP staff use to interact with internal and external customers and the use of technology. Our review of methods included telephone, mail, e-mail, in-person contact, and other forms of technology.

C.3.2 Findings

C.3.2.1 Finding: Methods of Interacting with Customers Varies Across the State

C.3.2.2 Finding: The Methods and Timeliness of Contacts with Customers needs Improvement

It became evident during interviews with county staff that the size of the county and the size of a case manager's caseload impacted the methods they generally preferred to use to interact with customers. Case managers with higher caseloads tended to prefer less personal contact with customers than case managers with lower caseloads. Case managers with smaller caseloads were more likely to try to resolve the customer's issue immediately, i.e., when the customer calls or stops in the office.

While it was consistently reported that telephone was the primary method used by customers to contact case managers, there were variances as to what was the primary method used by case managers to contact customers. It was not uncommon for case managers, especially those with higher caseloads and those in larger offices, to state a preference for sending a letter to a customer in response to a customer's voice mail message. Reasons given for this preference included that it was a more efficient use of their time and that it was a way to document the response to the customer. Other case managers, especially those with lower caseloads and those in smaller offices tended to prefer returning voice mail messages with telephone calls.

A practice of consistently responding to voice mail messages left by customers with a letter is questionable. Customers may feel frustrated that a call-back was not provided, and there is an increased likelihood that customers will again need to contact the case manager with follow-up questions because the letter did not respond to their issue. This need for repeated contact is especially true if the customer's voice mail message did not completely or accurately describe the issue.

Case managers in Clark County in particular tended to prefer mail rather than speaking with customers on the telephone or in-person. Washoe County utilized a more balanced approach between telephone and mail. Small counties, such as Elko, Mineral, and Nye, generally take telephone calls and walk-ins at anytime, and

expressed the desire to speak with the customer the first time the customer contacted the office in an attempt to meet the customer's needs at that time.

A common concern among counties was that caseloads were too large.

Interview responses indicated that staff from larger counties tend to want to be sheltered from customer contacts so they could do "case work." There was more of a tendency to view customer contacts as something outside of "case work." On the other hand, staff from smaller counties tend to view customer contacts as being a more integrated part of working on cases.

There were also variances regarding the reported use of voice mail. Case managers in large counties were more likely to report having a large number of voice mail messages. To what extent this is due to caseload numbers versus a practice of letting telephone calls go to the voice mail system is unclear. Case managers in smaller counties were more likely to answer the telephone calls when they come in, rather than deal with voice mail later.

Case managers in Clark and Washoe Counties require a substantial amount time to process their voice mail messages. In spite of managerial expectations and policies that all telephone calls are returned within 48 hours, it is clear that not all case managers are able to meet this commitment due to the sheer volume of messages. When a customer served by Clark and Washoe Counties cannot get through to their case manager, the customer sometimes calls outlying counties and asks those case managers for assistance; customer have learned who is likely to answer the telephone. This customer tactic is burdensome to the smaller counties, but in their spirit of customer service, they will answer basic questions and will sometimes send an e-mail to the customer's case manager to request an action.

Best Practice – Washington (WA 05)

Washington does a lot of outbound dialing for reminders and collections and returns incoming calls that are taken on voice mail within 24 hours.

The "free-form" comment section in our customer survey became an avenue for customers to vent about the lack of ability to contact their case manager, the feeling that case managers perceived NCPs to be "bad people," and the belief that telephone calls and voice mail messages need to be returned. We received numerous comments about the Voice Response Unit (VRU) not working properly and about the menu being too long. There were many comments that were about case specific issues not related to the survey; those types of comments may indicate the customer needs to be heard and understood.

Many customers indicated through the customer survey and customer interviews they do not receive return calls when they leave voice messages. Of the 145 customer survey respondents reporting they left a voice mail message, 64 (44%) reported not receiving a return call. Even though the sampling of customers interviewed in the Clark County reception area is too small to draw any statistically valid conclusions, it should be noted that the two customers interviewed in Clark County reported they left

a voice mail message, and not received a return call, thus necessitating an in-person visit.

One NCP interviewed was quite upset because he reportedly lost two days of work to resolve his problem. If he had reached the case manager on the telephone, he would have made sure to bring with him some of the financial data the case manager needed. He was advised not to mail the financial data in because it might get lost and the case manager needed the information as soon as possible.

Reviewing Clark County customer interviews, we identified some common themes. Generally, customers felt they were treated courteously by the Reception Area workers. However, they didn't feel that counter workers knew enough about their case, and they expressed dissatisfaction they were unable to speak with their case manager. Also, they expressed general dissatisfaction about not being able to get what they needed from the Voice Response Unit (VRU), thus necessitating an in-person visit. Customers who had Limited English Proficiency (LEP) were grateful for the availability of Spanish interpreters.

Customer survey results revealed 50 respondents sent an e-mail or a letter to the CSEP or case manager asking for information. Of those 50, only 13 (26%) reported they received all of the information they needed.

Customer survey results revealed the following from the 180 respondents answering the question as to whether they received the information they felt they needed during their most recent contact:

- 60 (33%) reported getting all of the information they needed;
- 77 (43%) reporting getting some but not all of the information they needed; and
- 43 (24%) reported getting none of the information the needed.

Of the 120 reporting not getting all of the information they needed, 47 reported being told that someone from CSEP would follow-up after the contact with more information. Of those 47, 22 (47%) reported not receiving the information following the contact.

Respondents expressed the following opinions in the customer survey as to whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with various statements about their most recent contact with the caseworker or other representative (these are arranged in an order showing descending satisfaction levels):

- **75%** strongly agreed or agreed that the worker was **polite and courteous**. 25% strongly disagreed or disagreed
- **60%** strongly agreed or agreed that the worker **listened closely to their question and concerns**. 40% strongly disagreed or disagreed
- **53%** strongly agreed or agreed that the worker was **knowledgeable about their case**. 47% strongly disagreed or disagreed
- **49%** strongly agreed or agreed that the worker **gave clear answers to their questions**. 51% strongly disagreed or disagreed
- **48%** strongly agreed or agreed that the worker **clearly explained what happens next**. 52% strongly disagreed or disagreed

- **46%** strongly agreed or agreed that the worker **clearly explained their options**.
54% strongly disagreed or disagreed

Respondents expressed the following opinions in the customer survey as to their overall satisfaction with how they were treated during their most recent contact:

- **21%** were **very satisfied**
- **21%** were **satisfied**
- **13%** were **somewhat satisfied**
- **11%** were **somewhat dissatisfied**
- **9%** were **dissatisfied**
- **26%** were **very dissatisfied**

Our customer survey also asked how satisfied customers were with the level of customer service provided by the CSEP. *Exhibit C.3.2.2-1: Customer Service Satisfaction* indicates responses for those expressing an opinion in each of the areas. The responses are arranged in an order showing descending satisfaction levels.

| Customer Service Level of Satisfaction Question | Very Satisfied or Satisfied | Very Dissatisfied or Dissatisfied |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Overall treatment by worker | 60% | 40% |
| Length of time to talk to worker | 49% | 51% |
| Ability to get things explained to me | 46% | 54% |
| Ability to have my questions answered | 44% | 56% |
| Length of time to get a response | 37% | 63% |
| Ability to get information needed | 35% | 65% |

Exhibit C.3.2.2-1: Customer Service Satisfaction.

In general, our findings indicate that customers believe they are treated politely and courteously when they are able to make contact with a worker. However, they are frustrated about their inability to make contact with case managers by telephone, and they feel their voice mail messages are not consistently returned. Customers are generally not satisfied about the ability to get information they need, get questions answered, and the timeliness of responses.

Some customers have learned to ask for supervisors to get action on their requests. In other instances, customers come into the office in hopes of receiving some personal time with case managers. When customers do make contact with case managers, they tend to leave satisfied. However, customers were quick to note that if the case manager would have spoken or returned their phone calls in the first place, they would have not needed to make an in-person visit and would had a better disposition prior to entering the office. Costs associated to office visits (parking, child care, and lost wages) for customers can be burdensome as many customers have a low income status.

C.3.2.3 Finding: Mail Handling is Problematic

Depending upon the size of the county, mail is processed by a unit or person. Smaller counties make it a priority to keep up with the mail daily; medium to large counties struggle with the volume of incoming mail. Clark County has experienced a significant increase in incoming and outgoing mail over the last year, and thus, outgoing mail is now handled by case managers. As we noted earlier, large and medium counties prefer to do most of their customer contacts by mail, generating larger amounts of return mail. Smaller counties prefer in-person or telephone contacts, with a lower volume of mail.

NOMADS does not generate documents properly, there is no centralized mailing service, and documents are not bar coded.

C.3.2.4 Finding: Use of Email as a Method of Interactions Between Case Managers and Customers is Limited

While there is an e-mail link for customers on Central Office's Web site, the use of e-mail as a method to interact with customers was very limited in county offices. Case managers from small counties generally welcomed the idea of e-mail as a method of communicating with customers. Case managers from medium and large counties were more likely to express concerns with the idea, expressing they were not comfortable with the idea of customers having their e-mail addresses. These concerns, however, seemed to be allayed with the idea of an office email address which the case managers could use to respond, and then generally agreed there may be a value to having an e-mail contact option.

C.3.2.5 Finding: Location, Parking, and Office Hours Make In-Person Office Visits More Difficult for the Customer

Our personal site visits to Clark and Washoe counties revealed that location, parking, and office hours make in-person office visits more difficult for the customer. CSTs and NCPs may need to secure transportation and child care (or bring their children with them) when making in-person visits. In some cases, a customer that makes this burdensome trip in an effort to talk to the case manager, is told upon arriving the case manager is not available. Parking is not an issue in the rural offices.

C.3.3 Recommendations

C.3.3.1 Recommendation: Establish Standards Regarding the Method and Timeliness of Contacts With Customers, and Monitor Compliance to Those Standards

We recommend DWSS establish standards and expectations regarding the method and the timeliness of customer contacts, and monitor those standards for compliance. Established standards may be appropriately addressed through the statewide Customer Service Committee and Plan we recommend in *Section C.5*.

WASHOE COUNTY

Washoe County has implemented specified timeframes for case managers to respond to requests coming into the Family Support Division to see their case manager. When a customer comes up to the Reception Desk, the Receptionist completes a index card

size green slip recording the customer's name, Case # or SSN, Caseworker Name and reason for the visit. The Receptionist then sends the case manager an inner office email notifying them of the customer request. The case manager is to come to the Reception area within 15 minutes to speak with the customer in one of the Interview Rooms. If the case manager does not respond within the 15 minute timeframe, a second email is sent to the case manager with a copy to the case manager's supervisor along with a copy of the original email. If there is still no response within a 5 minute timeframe, an email is then sent out to all of the 4th floor supervisors. If there is still no response from any of the 4th floor supervisors within 5 minutes, an email is then sent out to all of the 5th floor supervisors and then to the assigned attorney if there is still no response within an additional 5 minutes. It is the responsibility of the Receptionist to track the timeframes and resend the emails however there is no report provided to management of the response times to these emails. While this provides a means of ensuring that customers coming into the office are seen, the monitoring is a totally manual process.

We recommend that this process be automated and that there be an ability to provide management reports regarding the number of walk-in customers, the length of time they had to wait, and at what point in this progression the customer was seen. While we commend Washoe County for their proactive approach to providing timely customer service to their walk-in customers, the efficiency and effectiveness of this procedure should be measurable.

C.3.3.2 Recommendation: Streamline Mail Handling

Mail processing could be streamlined by:

- Bar coding basic documents
- Ensuring NOMADS generates documents on correct forms
- establishing a centralized mailing unit for all outgoing NOMADS-generated mail
- Purchasing scanners for scanning incoming mail and for those incoming documents that have a bar code
- Enhancing NOMADS to automatically update the case record

C.3.3.3 Recommendation: Consider Providing an Enhanced Email Option as a Method for Communication Between Case Managers and Customers

We recommend DWSS explore an enhanced e-mail option as a method of communication between case managers and customers. Consideration should be given to creating an "office e-mail address" from which case managers can respond (rather than using their individual e-mail addresses).

See Recommendation in Section C.5 regarding considering customer service needs in future office space planning

C.3.4 Benefits

Establishing standards regarding the method and timeliness of contacts with customers, and monitoring those standards, will ensure more consistent delivery of appropriate customer service.

Streamlining the mailing and returned mail processes will ensure case managers receive valuable information in a timely manner. Information regarding potential collections and money to families is too valuable to leave in an "in basket" on a desk. Providing an enhanced e-mail option as a method for communication between case managers and customers can be beneficial to both customers and to the CSEP. Customers are provided an additional option for contacting the case manager. In addition, case managers may find receiving e-mails versus telephone calls from some customers has its advantages. For example, case managers can respond to the e-mail during a more convenient time of day. There are also benefits such as the ability to attach information to the e-mails when responding.

C.4 VOICE RESPONSE UNIT (VRU)

C.4.1 Background

Automated voice response systems are often used by Child Support Enforcement programs as a method to provide information to, and to communicate with, external customers via the telephone. In the Nevada CSEP, the automated voice response system is called the Voice Response Unit (VRU).

States use their automated child support systems as the data source for these automated voice response systems. In Nevada, NOMADS is the automated system for both CSEP and the welfare programs. The VRU supports both the CSEP and the welfare program.

Automated voice response systems are often the method most used by customers. Customer survey results showed 57% of the respondents have used the VRU. (The VRU was used equally between CSTs and the NCPs.) This clearly demonstrates the importance of the VRU.

The VRU leads customers through the system by specific menu options.

We obtained and reviewed VRU statistics and scripts. In addition, we conducted actual testing of the VRU.

C.4.2 Findings

C.4.2.1 Finding: The Ability to Harvest Detailed Management Data From the VRU is not Presently Available

C.4.2.2 Finding: The VRU is Complex in Design and not Customer-Friendly

The VRU lacks the ability to produce detailed reports.

NOMADS is the data source for the VRU. Customers in Clark and Washoe Counties have the option of either calling county VRU phone numbers or the Central Office VRU. However, customers calling the Clark or Washoe VRU numbers are seamlessly routed to the Central Office VRU for very basic case information. Since the VRU also supports the welfare program, child support customers must first navigate through initial menu options before choosing the CSEP option. After choosing the child support option, there are six child support menu options to choose from. The six options are:

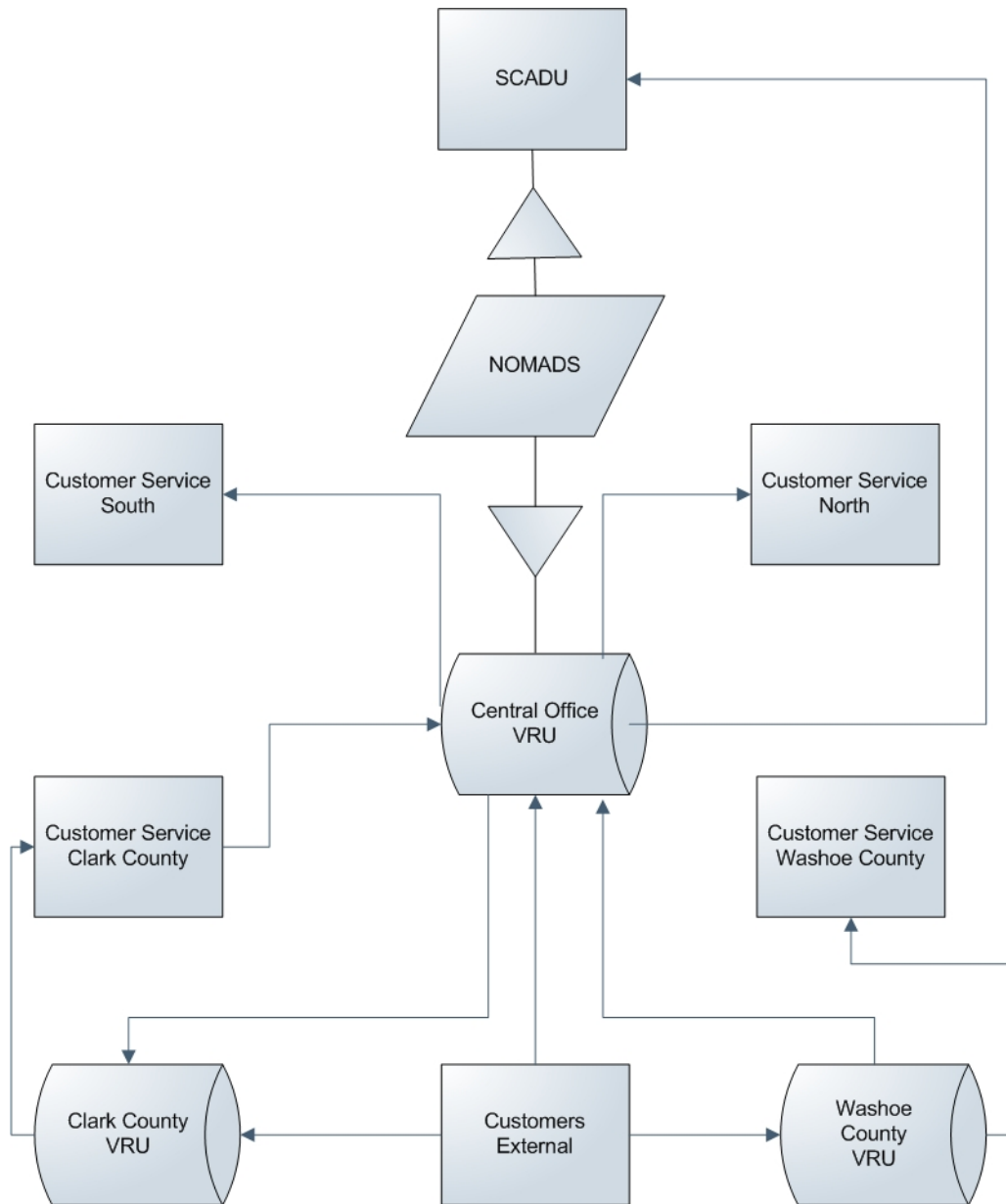
1. Custodial Parent
2. Non-custodial Parent
3. Paternity Establishment
4. Attorney
5. Employer
6. General Child Support Information

The basic information provided is as follows:

- Last Five Payments
- Direct Deposit/Debit Card
- Lost/Stolen Checks
- Next Court Date
- Child Support Office Locations
- To Speak with a Case Manager
- Paternity Establishment

Once inside the Central Office VRU system, provided the customer enters his or her Personal Identification Number (PIN), the customer can opt-out to speak with a case manager. If the customer chooses to opt out, the customer is routed back to the Clark or Washoe County VRU and into the case manager's voicemail box. If the customer does not know their PIN and has opted out, the customer is routed to either the North or South DWSS Central Office Customer Service Units.

Exhibit C.4.2.2-1: Nevada Voice Response Unit Routing System illustrates the VRU routing process flow as it was explained to us.



Please note that the North and South DWSS Customer Service Units service welfare recipients as their primary customers. Since many of the recipients must receive child support services as a condition of receiving benefits, child support questions are asked. Due to this, DWSS added customer service representatives and child support scripts to their call center services. Our findings indicate there is very limited child support information provided to the customer and an insufficient number of customer service representatives. However, we applaud DWSS for recognizing the need to assist welfare recipients who have child support questions.

The State Collection and Disbursement Unit (SCaDU) provides payment data to NOMADS. NOMADS updates the Central Office VRU during a nightly batch run and customers access payment information via the Central Office VRU. However, to speak with someone at the SCaDU, the customer must call into the SCaDU via a direct phone number. At the DWSS South customer service unit (Desert Inn building), when SCaDU has high volume call days, the South customer service unit phone lines are negatively impacted due to technical capacity issues. Customers are unable to reach customer service agents.

In Clark County, customers always have the option of leaving a voice message or talking to a live person. However, some customers we interviewed stated they left voicemail messages that are never returned, escalating the customer's frustration to new heights. The customer becomes motivated to appear in person at their county office.

Since Washoe County elected to link their VRU with Central Office VRU this past February, an unintended consequence has been that some of the calls occasionally "overflow" to the main District Attorney's office telephone number.

Out-of-state customers cannot reach the Central Office VRU with the toll-free number. Customers must call either the North or South main phone number at their own cost. If the VRU does not recognize the customer as having an active case, or if the customer cannot recall their PIN, they must speak with a Customer Service Representative (CSR). There is no option for the customer to retrieve their PIN without speaking to a CSR. We learned from our interviews with CSRs that the majority of customers do not have, or have forgotten, their PIN. CSRs spend significant amount of time providing PIN numbers and payment information that could have otherwise been provided through automation.

The Central Office VRU accepts calls from Clark County, and as of February 2006, Washoe County. The volume for an eleven-month period was over 430,000 transfers. Although the transfer is seamless to the customer, it still involves two systems working together and different phone numbers for the customer, adding to customers' confusion.

According to staff, the VRU can only hold 34 calls in the queue at one time and many callers never reach the queue for a CSR to respond. Also, the other counties in Nevada have no connectivity with the Central Office VRU for routing their customers back to their case managers. These county customers must call the Central Office VRU for basic payment information and then call their local county office phone number to speak with their case managers.

Customer survey results showed that 70 respondents reported choosing the VRU option to speak to a worker. Of those, only nine (13%) reported being able to speak with a worker. Of those reporting not being able to speak with a worker, only 8%)reported being able to get the information they needed from choosing another option.

In addition, this type of VRU configuration is ineffective when a customer has multiple cases across the state. Customers with more than one case must exit out of the VRU, call back and enter another case number to obtain case information.

C.4.3 Recommendations

C.4.3.1 Recommendation: Improve the Existing VRU

We recommend the following improvements to the VRU:

- **C.4.3.1.a** Enhance the VRU into a single Statewide VRU system with a national toll-free number for all counties in Nevada
- **C.4.3.1.b** Ensure the VRU has adequate phone lines to handle the capacity of callers
- **C.4.3.1.c** Allow customers to retrieve a forgotten PIN within the VRU system
- **C.4.3.1.d** Permit customers to transfer to a case manager or centralized CSR
- **C.4.3.1.e** Permit outbound calling to proactively update customers on selected changes in case and payment statuses
- **C.4.3.1.f** Provide periodic updates of PINs to customers through electronic means or the U.S. Mail
- **C.4.3.1.g** Provide marketing tools like wallet cards and refrigerator magnets with VRU short cuts for the most sought after information
- **C.4.3.1.h** Allow customers to obtain case information on multiple cases without leaving the VRU

Best Practice – Pennsylvania (PA 05)

Pennsylvania has expanded the media through which contact can be made. Most customer service is conducted at the Domestic Relations Office level. Each has an IVR, although the state manages them. Each Domestic Relations Office records its own scripts for the IVR. There is a state hotline and a SDU number for calls regarding payments.

C.4.4 Benefits

Customer satisfaction will be improved when customers can more easily navigate, and get the information they are seeking from, the VRU.

The need for customers to contact a case manager will be reduced. Keeping case managers working on cases is a major benefit towards productivity and program performance.

C.5 CUSTOMER SERVICE CULTURE

C.5.1 Background

Customer service culture relates to viewing customer service delivery from large, medium, and small county operations, as well as from the Central Office. We reviewed unmet customer service needs and trends regarding duty assignments between and among agencies, staffing, and customer service training. We also reviewed customer service from a variety of perspectives. First, we looked at internal customer relations: the relationship and the delivery of services between internal organizations. We believe this is the foundation for delivering customer service to the end customer; primarily the custodial parent, the non-custodial parent, and their children. Second, we looked at the relationship and services with the external customer.

C.5.2 Findings

C.5.2.1 Finding: There is Lack of Knowledge About Central Office's and Local Offices' Duties in Regards to Customer Service

Our findings indicate there is limited customer service and an apparent disconnect between Central Office and local offices. We noted there were contrary views expressed by Central Office and local offices in this regard. However, a consistent finding was neither party had full knowledge of the tasks or services performed for the external customer, or which entity was responsible for what services within the cooperative agreements.

County office staff possessed very little knowledge as to the services and duties Central Office performs for customer service. The majority of respondents had no ready response what Central Office did in regards to customer service. Staff offering a response described Central Office as addressing general questions and counties were described as addressing case-specific questions.

The vast majority of Clark County staff were unaware that Central Office had customer service units. Other county staff across the state that knew of the customer service units, were unaware of what types of questions and customer services were performed and how those services may affect their customers.

From the Central Office customer service unit perspective, they believe they are helping the counties and providing a valuable service. Central Office staff view the customer service unit's role as more providing customer service to callers, than providing a service to the counties as customers. The Central Office customer service units do not communicate directly with county case managers. This is due to a request from the District Attorneys to DWSS. The CSRs create a Contact Entry on the case with the hope case managers discover the information in time. We witnessed a Central Office CSR receive verified employment information and pass it along to the county case manager via case notes.

C.5.2.2 Finding: There is Lack of Customer Service Plans and Objectives

There is a lack of customer service plans and objectives at the Central Office and local office level. The lack of customer service perspectives in strategic and personnel performance plans, and with minimal customer service requirements for staff, leaves very little organization accountability for customer service.

During our interviews, we noted offices did not have established customer service goals or objectives, aside from perhaps a written or unwritten policy regarding within what amount of time telephone messages should be returned.

We asked staff how well they believed customer service goals or objectives were achieved by themselves individually, and as an office as a whole. Generally, individuals tended to think they were doing a good job with customer service given their duties and caseloads, but admitted there was always room for improvement. Regarding as an office as a whole, individuals from large and medium counties stated their offices as a whole were doing "fair" to "poor." Individuals from smaller counties often said their offices were doing "excellent."

C.5.2.3 Finding: Caseloads are Disproportionate

Caseloads in Clark and Washoe counties are disproportionate among teams, and among workers in a team. Some case managers have 1,500 cases while others have 200 cases. How county offices use FTEs varies across the state. Smaller counties tend to have few staff that are not case managers and leverage every FTE to perform case work. We recognize that staff assignments are management decisions. However, we believe an established caseload standard should be applied across the state per CSEP FTE.

C.5.2.4 Finding: There is a Need for More Proactive Case Work

We have learned through years of consulting in the Child Support Enforcement program there is a direct correlation between performing quality case work and a reduction in customer contact. Stated simply, contacts from customers are reduced and customer satisfaction is higher if work is being done on their case. Therefore, an integral part of ensuring demands in the customer service area are manageable is ensuring the case managers are performing proactive case work.

In Nevada, case managers have different interpretations about what customer service is, the means of customer service delivery, and to what extent customer service should be provided. Some case managers will take the time to educate and inform their customers, while others want to hurry back to their work.

Early intervention techniques are getting national attention. The idea behind early intervention is that case managers, or other staff, invest time with the customer early in the process, educating them about the program and actions to be taken with the goal of gaining increased long-term cooperation of the customer over the life of the case. One of the highlights of the National Strategic Plan is to "Prevent the build-up of unpaid support (arrearages) through early intervention rather than traditional debt threshold-based enforcement." Strategies within the Plan are to "Emphasize prevention and early intervention" and "Provide proactive case management to ensure

reliable payments of support." A Special Improvement Project (SIP) grant was awarded in FY 2004 for a study entitled "Early Intervention: A Multi-Site Study." This study assesses the use and impact of early intervention techniques in five jurisdictions of varying size. The project period for this SIP project was extended through October 31, 2006.

Smaller Nevada counties are proving the concept to be reliable as they work their cases from "cradle to grave." This approach has allowed case managers to develop long-term relationships with their customers.

While examining customer service delivery, we identified that smaller counties work cases more proactively, while Clark and Washoe Counties work cases more reactively. In Clark and Washoe counties, it is often the "squeaky wheel that gets the oil." Concentrating more on the "squeaky wheel" cases results in fewer cases worked timely and potentially more calls and complaints. Some customers have learned to complain to supervisors to get their cases worked.

Our findings have shown that staff in the smaller counties are touching each of their cases at least once every two months, whereas staff in the larger and medium counties cannot recall the last time they touched every case in their caseload. We believe proactive casework by the smaller counties is the main reason for higher productivity and higher levels of customer satisfaction. The same result can also occur for Clark and Washoe counties with effective enhancements and programming in NOMADS and the use of newer technologies.

Another philosophy to this customer service unit is to instill a culture that working in the customer service unit is a privilege and honor. These customer service agents are the most tenured, most customer service-talented and technical staff and therefore, paid among the highest paid positions. This is the best of the best handling the most valued customers – the citizens of Nevada.

Our findings among staff interviewed depended upon the size of the organization. The majority of staff in Clark and Washoe Counties endorsed a Customer Service Unit to shelter case managers so other case work can be performed. On the other hand, smaller counties endorsed adding more staff to reduce caseloads to a manageable level and allow case managers to work directly with the customers. The smaller counties felt customers were better served by the personal contact and worked cases cradle to grave. The Clark and Washoe staff prefer case specialization to mass produce casework and meet the customer's needs by getting casework done as quickly as possible. They felt the best way to do that was to shelter staff by having a statewide customer service unit with experienced staff. Both of these methodologies remain valid. The implementation of one solution over the other can be driven by the program costs over customer service delivery goals. (See our recommendation in Executive Summary B – Proposed Restructuring of the Nevada Child Support Program for organization structure.)

Best Practice – Vermont (VT 04)

Vermont has found centralized customer service to be very helpful and highly recommends it. Vermont advises, however, that it cannot be set up as a "glorified answering service" – the customer service representative must give out accurate information to the caller.

It was reported that the most common issues in customer contacts for external customers dealt with payment information for the CST and enforcement actions for NCP.

Customers are calling case managers for basic information which takes time away from dealing with cases with special issues and needs.

In the VRU Section (C.4), we discussed the number of callers into the VRU. Industry standards have shown that 20% to 25% of the callers will immediately opt-out for a live customer service agent. Statistics show there were 2,645,039 total VRU calls in twelve months (July 2005 – June 2006). If 20% opted out for a customer service agent, it would mean 529,008 callers did so. Our study found that child support callers were entering the VRU on the welfare side and not just through the child support menu option. There are no accurate statistics to indicate what percentage of these callers are truly in need of child support services.

Statistics reveal the average hold time is over five minutes. Over 16,000 calls are abandoned after an average wait time of over four minutes of holding. Our conversations with the customer service unit staff revealed that only 34 people can wait in the "hold" queue at a time. All other callers are told to call back at another time via an automated message. Central Office does not know how many customers wanting services are not registering within the statistical data. Note that abandoned calls rose over 20% from the previous year's statistics. This may indicate that customers are frustrated with the VRU and not reaching a CSR.

Industry standards have shown that 50% of callers opting out for a live customer service agent only want payment and status information that can be obtained from the VRU. Customers simply do not want to go through the menu of options. By using outbound calling and proactively notifying customers of basic case information, customers with more pressing needs will be able to reach customer service representatives and potentially reduce the need for FTEs in a call center as well. See *Exhibit C.5.2.4-1: Central Office Call Center and VRU Statistics* below.

| Type | July 2004 – June 2005 (average per month) | July 2005 – June 2006 (average per month) | Notes Regarding Change Between Years (based on averages per month) |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|---|
| # of Staff | | | |
| North | 3.3 | 5.0 | 2.7 more staff |
| South | 13.6 | 11.9 | 1.7 less staff |
| Total Calls | 30,772.0 | 33,502.0 | 2,730 more total calls |
| Calls Answered | | | |
| North | 8,545.0 | 10,726.0 | 2,181 more calls answered |
| South | 22,227.0 | 22,776.0 | 549 more calls answered |
| English | 29,954.0 | 31,363.0 | 1,409 more English calls |
| Spanish | 817.0 | 2,140.0 | 1,323 more Spanish calls (Note: This is an increase of over 2.5 times) |
| TANF/FS/Medicaid | 28,571.0 | 22,916.0 | 5,655 less TANF/FS/Medicaid calls |
| Child Support | 2,201.0 | 3,476.0 | 1,275 more Child Support calls |
| EAP | N/A | 7,758.0 | N/A |
| Resolved by CSU | 23,856.0 | 15,521.0 | 8,335 less cases resolved |
| Referrals to Office | 6,898.0 | 7,421.0 | 523 more calls referred back to counties |
| Immediate Referrals | 17.0 | 5.0 | 12 more immediate referrals |
| Avg Time Per Call (mn/sec) | 2:56 | 2:49 | 7 seconds less time per call |
| Avg Wait Time | 5:23 | 5:18 | 5 seconds less wait time |
| Abandoned Calls | 12,660.00 | 16,094.00 | 3,434 more abandoned calls |
| Avg wait time before Abandoned | 3:44 | 4:43 | 59 seconds longer wait time before abandoning |

Exhibit C.5.2.4-1: Central Office Call Center and VRU Statistics.

Exhibit C.5.2.4-2: Total Calls, Exhibit C.5.2.4-3: Number of Staff and Exhibit C.5.2.4-4: Time per Call illustrate these statistics.

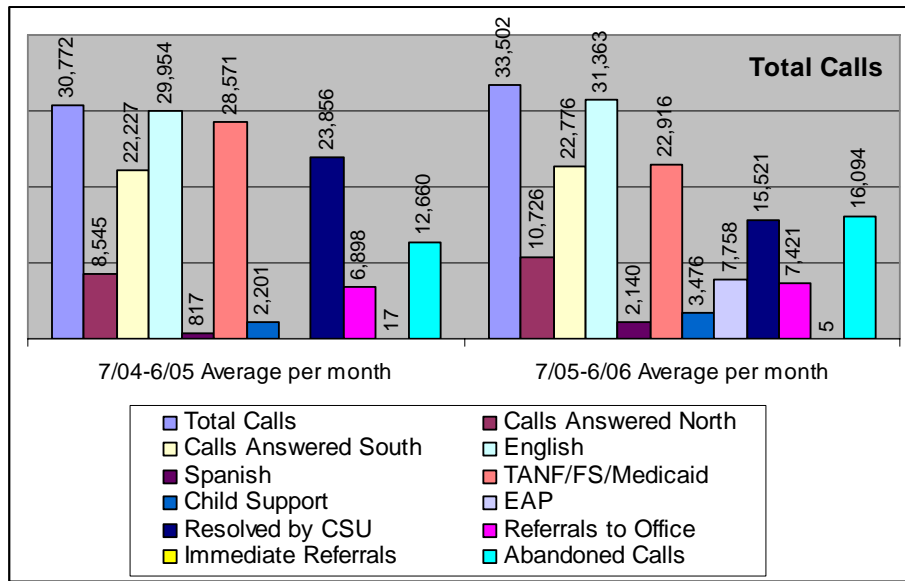


Exhibit C.5.2.4-2: Total Calls.

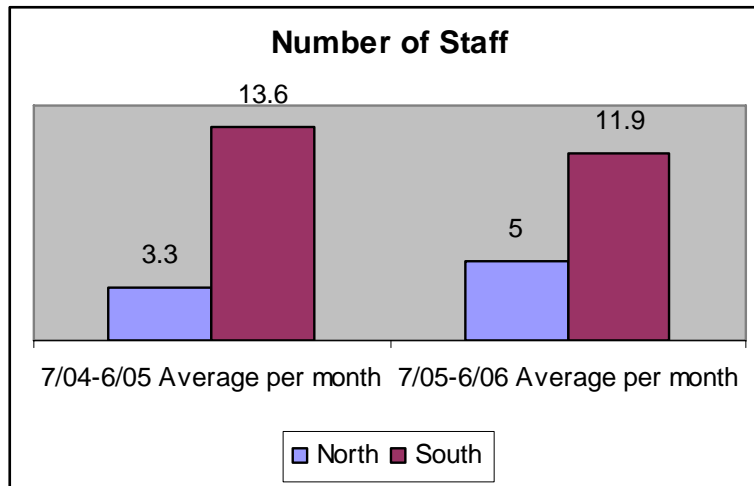


Exhibit C.5.2.4-3: Number of Staff.

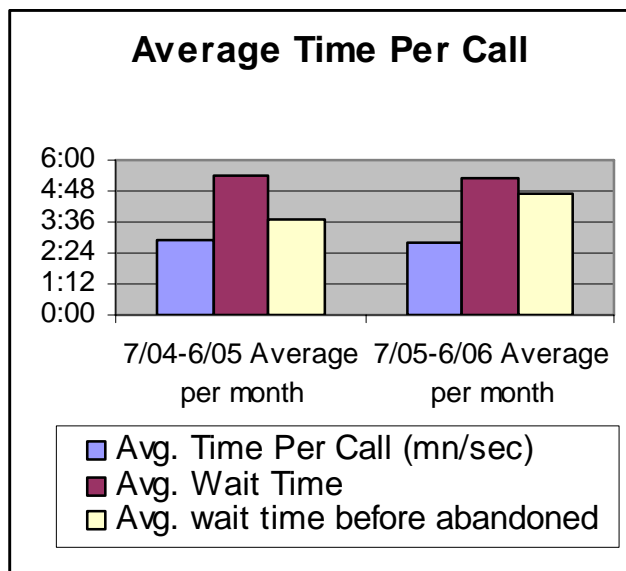


Exhibit C.5.2.4-4: Average Time per Call.

C.5.2.5 Finding: Location, Parking, and Office Hours Make In-Person Office Visits More Difficult for the Customer

C.5.2.6 Finding: Security is not Present Consistently Across the State

Central Office does not typically experience walk-in traffic for customer service. However, should someone come to Central Office, they are seen by someone from the administrative office. The vast majority of face-to-face customer service is at the county level.

Clark and Washoe Counties have established customer service units for handling walk-in traffic and some telephone calls. Although each case manager is responsible for handling customer calls, these customer service units attempt to assist case managers as much as possible. Clark County's customer service unit is much larger than Washoe County's, but both are based upon volume and need. Washoe sees approximately 24 customers a day compared to Clark at approximately 110 per day.

Clark County uses counter staff to work with the customers, with a Case Manager of the Day (CMOD) to handle difficult case questions. The intent is to keep the case managers free to work their cases. However, our interviews indicated some resistance by case managers to this approach because someone else was working their cases and could potentially make a mistake in the case. Furthermore, with the new Central Office evaluation process which requires strict adherence to policy, case managers do not want to suffer personnel actions based upon someone else's mistake.

We received 32 customer survey responses on in-person visits. Of those, 20 (63%) reported not having a appointment or court hearing, 26 (81%) reported waiting for under 30 minutes, and about half reported being able to talk in a private area.

The table below shows Clark County statistical customer service data for the first nine months of 2006. Clark County had 21,532 visitors to their customer service unit in the reception area. Four staff handled over 10,000 of those customers. *Exhibit C.5.2.6-1: Clark County Customer Service Log* simply provides some insight into how many customers are seen and the average time a customer service worker spends with the customer.

| Group | Served | Avg. Service Time | Max. Service Time |
|--------------|--------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 2_Admins | | | |
| 2_Admins | | | |
| 2_Admins | 39 | 00:09:00 | 00:27:45 |
| 2_Admins | 17 | 00:02:06 | 00:30:06 |
| 3_Managers | 1027 | 00:09:19 | 03:05:40 |
| 3_Managers | | | |
| 3_Managers | | | |
| 4_CMODO | 350 | 00:09:34 | 01:42:05 |
| 4_CMODO | 26 | 00:15:39 | 01:48:56 |
| 4_CMODO | 1747 | 00:19:33 | 02:19:46 |
| 4_CMODO | 52 | 00:08:22 | 00:27:10 |
| 5_Front Desk | 1635 | 00:08:34 | 01:17:22 |
| 5_Front Desk | | | |
| 5_Front Desk | 195 | 00:07:47 | 00:28:32 |
| 5_Front Desk | 855 | 00:09:22 | 02:43:15 |
| 5_Front Desk | | | |

Exhibit C.5.2.6-1: Clark County Customer Service Log.

| Group | Served | Avg. Service Time | Max. Service Time |
|--------------|--------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 5_Front Desk | | | |
| 5_Front Desk | | | |
| 5_Front Desk | 2183 | 00:07:17 | 01:35:07 |
| 5_Front Desk | 968 | 00:10:51 | 00:52:58 |
| 5_Front Desk | 280 | 00:04:59 | 00:18:10 |

Exhibit C.5.2.6-1: Clark County Customer Service Log (continued).

CLARK COUNTY

County office locations for the most part are not customer-friendly. Clark County is located centrally in Las Vegas but parking is very limited and costly. The customer enters through the main office door and is immediately greeted by private security and a metal detector. The main lobby area prior to the customer service waiting area is congested with equipment and all of the patrons entering the building. Once inside the customer service waiting area, the customer reports to a receptionist that requests personal contact information in open view and within hearing range of all customers. Clark has a unique customer calling system by flashing the customer's number and informing them to report to a designated window. The window is similar to a bank teller's window that is incased in bullet-proof glass with a speaking hole and slide tray for documents. There is no privacy for the majority of conversations. However, Clark County does provide individual interview rooms should the need arise to see the CMOD or a case manager. The interview rooms do not have computers and thus, no access to NOMADS nor are case files available. The odds of meeting the customer's needs are unlikely if this visit is unscheduled.

Overall, the waiting area is cramped and congested with little or no privacy.

Exhibit C.5.2.6-2: Clark County Family Support Division Reception Area below is a view of the reception area at the Clark County District Attorney's Family Support Division.



Exhibit C.5.2.6-2: Clark County Family Support Division Reception Area.

WASHOE COUNTY

The Washoe County DA's office is housed within the courthouse. Parking is blocks away at a cost to the customers. Security is located as you enter through the main doors. Only employees are allowed past security prior to 8:00 am. This arrangement prevents flexibility in adjusting hours for customer service - no early or late appointments. The lobby for the Family Support Division is located on the fourth floor of the Mills B. Lane Justice Center and is co-located with several other District Attorney departments. Adequate seating is available for customers while they wait to speak to a case manager. Five interview rooms, equipped with computers, are available. Overall, the customer has privacy after their first contact with the receptionist; however there are security concerns for the receptionist and for the case manager meeting with the customer. The case managers visiting with customers in the individual interview rooms are behind solid closed doors with no windows. If a case manager is experiencing difficulty with a belligerent customer or is being threatened, case managers in the office on the other side of the door cannot view what is going on inside the closed door. The receptionist is in an open area and access to the inside of the work area where the case managers are located is behind locked doors with access through the use of a key card. On those occasions when there is only one receptionist in the reception area, if there is any problem with an angry customer, she is reliant on one of the other receptionists for one of the other District Attorney departments to observe and summons assistance.

In both instances, in the individual interview rooms and in the reception area, there is an absence of a "panic" button that the staff person may press for help.

Exhibit C.5.2.6-3: Washoe County Family Support Division Reception Area below is a view of the reception area at the Washoe County District Attorney's Family Support Division Office.



Exhibit C.5.2.6-3: Washoe County Family Support Division Reception Area.

RENO PAO

Reno PAO is located in offices atop a parking garage. The customer has no privacy when speaking to staff. There are no interview rooms nor is there security.

ELKO DA and PAO

Elko County DA is located in a daylight basement of a building with very limited, but free parking and a very cramped reception area. Customers are seen by a case manager at the front counter or are taken to the case manager's office if the questions are detailed in nature.

Elko PAO has plenty of free parking and easy access to their office. However, they are extremely crowded and perhaps only two customers can be at the front counter at the same time. Otherwise, customers have to wait out in the hallway of the building. There is no security for staff.

C.5.2.7 Finding: There is a Lack of Customer Service Training

Customer service training for staff is lacking in both Central Office and county offices. Staff who received customer service training usually reported the training was several years ago, and not child support-specific.

C.5.3 Recommendations

C.5.3.1 Recommendation: Creation of a Statewide Customer Service Committee and Plan

We recommend that communication between Central Office and the counties be improved. A better understanding of services and the roles each agency provides in the overall delivery of customer service is a must. Central Office and the local offices must work together as partners in the CSEP.

We recommend that the Central Office Customer Service Unit staff work with each county and ascertain how each county office operates.

We recommend the creation of a statewide Customer Service Committee to develop a plan how customer services are to be delivered, statewide, in a consistent and effective manner. This Customer Service Committee could serve as a sub-committee to the Child Support Oversight Committee recommended in *Section D.9.2.2* of this report. The basis for this recommendation is that the current IV-D Planning Committee currently operates under a full agenda for the 2 days that the committee meets. The availability of time for in-depth discussions and development of goals, objectives and standards for customer service would more than likely be extremely limited and not do "justice" to the task at hand. Additionally, not all the individuals involved or tasked with providing customer service are part of the IV-D Planning Committee and may not be available to participate. Forming a sub-committee would appear to be a more viable alternative as those individuals appointed to the sub-committee would be able to participate in the customer service-focused activities and discussions and then have the Sub-Committee Chair report back to the IV-D Planning Committee.

We recommend that a statewide customer service plan include standards and objectives to which all child support staff in Nevada are held accountable. This plan can also be a vehicle for discussion and dissemination of office-specific "best practices."

C.5.3.2 Recommendation: Include Customer Service Delivery Goals and Objectives as Part of Case Managers' Annual Personnel Evaluations

We recommend that customer service delivery goals and objectives are included in case managers performance plans, and made a part of annual personnel evaluations.

C.5.3.3 Recommendation: Solicit Feedback From External Customers

We recommend that feedback regarding customer satisfaction is solicited from external customers. This can be accomplished by comment cards at local offices, on-line surveys (mentioned in the Web site section, see *Section C.7*), interviews by management of randomly-selected customers after an in-person visit, and by periodic mailings of surveys.

C.5.3.4 Recommendation: Establish an Equitable Distribution of Cases

We recommend that caseload standards are established that can be applied statewide, and the proper allocation of resources considered in the organizational structure of

offices. In addition, when FTEs are added, priority should be given to the case manager level.

C.5.3.5 Recommendation: Change in Paradigm of Case Ownership

We recommend a cultural change as to who owns the child support cases. For customer service to work efficiently and effectively, the culture should support the concept that cases belong to the state. Assuming that all workers in contact with customers are well trained, any staff receiving a call from a customer should be able to handle the customer's needs.

A related recommendation is to focus more on performance than on strict policy adherence. This is discussed more in the Effectiveness of Operations *Section D.10: Performance Measurements*. Besides advantages on doing so mentioned in other areas of the report, strict policy adherence may cause case managers to be more inflexible in addressing special needs or issues customers may have.

C.5.3.6 Recommendation: Consideration Should be Given to Customer Service Needs in Future Office Space Planning

We recommend future building plans need to consider customer service needs. A "one-stop" concept may work well in some areas of the state.

We also suggest that consideration is given to staff safety as levels of security were inconsistent across the state. We recommend that security needs are blended between safety of the staff and the needs of the customer.

While security is needed, it is beneficial when the presence of the security does not project an appearance of lack of trust.

We provide the following to illustrate this recommendation:

The Washoe County reception area is very open and the receptionist does not have protection. Installation of bullet-proof glass or a panic button, or both, would afford the receptionist with security and would not negatively affect customer service. Interview rooms allow the customer privacy, but put case managers at a security risk. Addition of strategically placed windows or a panic button, or both, would afford the case managers with a level of security while still allowing customers privacy.

With the restructuring of the program and the creation of Regional Offices, we recommend that the safety of those who interact on a personal level with customers be given a high priority and they safety be given serious consideration in the design of the floor plan for the Regional Offices.

C.5.3.7 Recommendation: Adoption of a Proactive Approach Towards Customer Service

We recommend the Central Office and local offices consider early customer education and intervention in child support cases. Refer to *Section D.3.1.6* for additional recommendations.

NOMADS must provide systematic case management that is directly related to the desired result of getting payments to families, and case managers must then

consistently work alerts. Please refer to *Section D.5* for additional findings and recommendations regarding alerts.

Enhancements to the VRU and the Web site (see also Sections C.4 and C.7), as well as outbound calling, would also go a long way in adopting a proactive approach towards customer service. Providing basic information to customers through other technologies will free up case managers' time for dealing with cases with special issues and needs, as well increase the likelihood that customers with more difficult issues can speak with case managers.

C.5.3.8 Recommendation: Provide a Centralized Customer Service Call Center and Specialized Customer Service Training

We recommend the development and implementation of a statewide Child Support Customer Service Call Center. The State of Virginia is one of the first states to have a full service child support customer service unit. The intent of this unit, and for any effective customer service unit, is to answer and meet as many of the customers' needs as possible. It is not to serve as a glorified message taking unit or VRU and to allow all customers the right to speak with an individual rather than leave a voice message.

It is evident during our discussions with IV-D case managers across the state, that a good deal of their time is spent handling customer service calls and taking reactive actions in response to the calls. Recommending a centralized Customer Service Unit is by no means intended to replace the unique customer service that is currently being provided by IV-D case managers. It is the intent, however, of allowing customers who either call in through the VRU and elect to talk to a "real" person, or who would prefer calling a Customer Service toll free number to talk to an individual. The Customer Service Unit would operate on a triage basis, responding to entry-level inquiries concerning payments, hearing dates, reporting address changes and/or employment changes, requests for case status, etc. The Customer Service Representatives at this level would take and resolve all of these calls, making any requested changes, sending out requested forms, and providing the requested information. Case manager-level Customer Service Representatives would handle second-level calls related to more specific information requests. These CSRs would be trained in providing more detailed information and taking more specific actions. For all third-level calls, the CSR would refer the customer directly to their case manager in the appropriate office.

For a customer service unit to be effective, Nevada case managers will need a paradigm shift of case ownership. That is, case managers in the District Attorney Offices will need to understand that all IV-D cases are "owned" by the state and that they have contracted with the state to provide the IV-D services on the local level. The intent of a triage-type Customer Service Call Center is not a reflection on the high level of customer service that the DA offices currently provide to their customers, but to alleviate these case managers from having to spend an inordinate amount of their daily activities on answering and returning phone calls instead of working their case alerts, processing documents and mail, and any other ongoing special projects.

CSRs who are part of the Customer Service Call Center would have specific performance standards and measurements to abide by to ensure that quality customer service is being provided. Among these would be a predetermined maximum "hold" time for callers, monitoring of response time, meet customer service satisfaction goals are among some of these. Software is currently available that will monitor and report the number of calls received, the amount of "hold" time, and the number of "dropped" calls. These reports will provide management with statistics and an ability to measure and evaluate results and performance.

We recommend child support-specific training is provided for staff dealing with custodial and non-custodial parents. DWSS should consider using the OCSE training tool entitled Customer Service Training for Child Support Enforcement Workers when developing the state's own curriculum. The training material is available on the OCSE Web site at

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pubs/training/customer_service/trainer_guide/.

According to the OCSE Web site:

"The goal for this course is to provide comprehensive customer service training to Child Support Enforcement workers who are responsible for handling customer situations. This training will equip them with practical tools to improve their customer service skills and attitudes."

Best Practice – Virginia (VA 03)

Virginia is currently migrating all of its caseload to an outsourced, statewide call center in a rural part of the state. Three-quarters of the caseload had been migrated as of July 2006. Customer service representatives look up case information and answer questions at a fairly detailed level. The call center has the capability to do outbound dialing to call customers to remind them individually of events that affect them.

Best Practice – New Jersey (NJ 05)

Three counties are piloting a joint call center, jointly staffing the center. Since the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) oversees the county work, the state IV-D agency cannot summarily set up the pilot. The state IV-D agency works with the AOC to plan for the program's future, using pilots such as the call center to determine if program changes should be rolled out statewide.

Best Practice – California (CA 05)

The Los Angeles County Child Support Services Department (CSSD) call center has been shown to be very effective. The statewide state disbursement unit has a call center.

Best Practice – Wisconsin (WI 04)

Milwaukee has a call center for Milwaukee and Racine Counties. Other counties and the state disbursement unit answer questions directly.

We recommend that training include techniques to terminate telephone conversations. A common concern with staff was they had difficulty getting off of a telephone call. This is covered in the OCSE curriculum.

C.5.4 Benefits

Improved communication, a complete understanding of the roles within the CSEP between Central Office and the counties, and the creation of a statewide Customer Service Committee will lead to a unified understanding of operations and development of a consistent and holistic approach to delivering customer services across the state. This approach will increase collaboration, streamline customer service objectives, and improve performance.

A more hands-on approach by Central Office and providing more guidance for the county offices, should result in program improvement.

Measuring customer service as part of a case manager's performance plan will keep customer service in the forefront of the work case managers perform, thus enhancing prioritization of customer service delivery. It also ensures appropriate accountability with established standards.

Soliciting feedback from external customers on customer satisfaction will allow CSEP to identify systemic customer service issues, and appropriate actions can be taken to address those issues. The benefit to exit interviews by management is to gain the most recent feedback from the customers their office served. The effort to seek improvements from involving customers assists in making customers feel they are valued. This practice offers an opportunity to improve overall customer satisfaction.

The benefit to establishing the ratio of cases to case manager by total assigned FTE removes arguments about large county versus small county. Furthermore, it stresses the responsibility on the office management to allocated FTEs carefully. A balanced caseload to case manager ratio will provide a baseline standard for evaluating customer service delivery among case managers. Management will have a more effective means to evaluate resource allocation, the ability for NOMADS to aid case managers, and future staffing allocation.

The benefit to a cultural change in case ownership is the customer makes one contact with the agency and is assured the work will get done. Taking messages and requiring the customer to call back because their specific case manager is inaccessible results in a lesser degree of customer service.

Focusing on performance rather than strict policy adherence will better serve customers as case managers may be more flexible in addressing customers special needs or issues.

Early customer education and intervention in child support cases will assist in ensuring long-term cooperation of customers.

The benefits of having an appropriate set of NOMADS alerts allows case managers to work what is important and necessary on their cases. Focused work leads to higher productivity, increasing the production on federal performance measures and better customer service delivery.

VRU and Web site enhancements, and the use of other media to proactively provide basic case information will permit case managers to stay focused on cases with special issues and needs.

Child Support Enforcement professionals deal daily with customer personal issues involving divorce, children, and money, and must possess the skills needed to interact with customers in difficult situations. Child support staff who receive specialized customer service training will possess the confidence and the ability to provide quality customer services. Customers benefit by receiving a higher level of customer service from staff who possess better skills to handle customer issues and situations.

C.6 COMPLAINTS

C.6.1 Background

We reviewed complaint processes when conducting our interviews, attempting to ascertain the number of complaints and how complaints were registered and tracked for resolution.

C.6.2 Findings

Finding: Complaints are not Effectively Identified and Tracked

Federal regulations at 45 CFR § 303.35 require states to have in place an administrative complaint procedure. The provision is as follows:

- (a) Each State must have in place an administrative complaint procedure, defined by the State, in place to allow individuals the opportunity to request an administrative review, and take appropriate action when there is evidence that an error has occurred or an action should have been taken on their case. This includes both individuals in the State and individuals from other States.*
- (b) A State need not establish a formal hearing process but must have clear procedures in place. The State must notify individuals of the procedures, make them available for recipients of IV-D services to use when requesting such a review, and use them for notifying recipients of the results of the review and any actions taken.*

In Nevada, the procedure can be found in Section 219 "Administrative Complaint Procedure" of the Child Support Enforcement manual.

Central Office considers customers complaints to be a county responsibility.

CLARK COUNTY

Clark County uses a Complaint Log that is an Excel spreadsheet for complaints registered from their child support Web site and complaint calls that come in through the General Administrative phone number located on the 6th Floor. These complaints are logged on this Complaint Log by an individual in the Administration Office and then passed on to the Unit Managers for investigation. The Unit Manager is

responsible for ensuring that the complaint is resolved and reporting back to the Administration Office the resolution which is also logged. The individual Unit Managers, Team Leads and/or case managers do not keep separate complaint logs to record other phone calls they receive outside of those coming in through the 6th Floor.

Other counties handled complaints verbally. Complaints are not tied to case managers' performance and thus, there is reduced accountability for how customers are served.

We did not find an apparent link between the informal processes followed by the counties for complaints and the procedure required in Section 219 of the Child Support Enforcement Manual.

C.6.3 Recommendations

C.6.3.1 Recommendation: Implement and Monitor the Formal Procedure for Handling Complaints

A formal Administrative Complaint procedure is addressed in the Child Support Enforcement Manual. There is a need for these procedures to be consistently implemented and monitored. If the procedures are not workable for some reason, DWSS should consider revising the procedures, while ensuring that all federal regulations are still met. Developing forms to be used by customers and the local offices may assist in the implementation of complaint procedures.

We recommend the complaint process includes a reporting requirement so complaints are tracked and evaluated, and to ensure systemic issues can be identified and acted upon.

We also recommend that an automated complaint tracking system be developed for use in both Clark and Washoe counties to log all customer service complaints received directly by these two offices and provide management reports identifying the type of complaint, the length of time it took to call back as well as the length of time it took to resolve the complaint. The complaints logged in on this tracking system would also be prime candidates for requesting Customer Service Satisfaction information.

C.6.4 Benefits

The implementation of a formal procedure will ensure customers are afforded a process to have complaints addressed.

A reporting requirement offers the opportunity to identify possible needs for program improvements as well as identify possible staff training needs.

Best Practice – Ohio (OH 05)

Customer calls go to the counties and then, if needed, they are bumped up to the state. Part of customer service can be done at the state level, including fielding state disbursement unit calls. If a customer is unhappy, there is an independent hearing officer to review the actions taken or not taken.

Best Practice – Washington (WA 05)

Complaints are handled by a community relations unit of five people. They act as core staff to respond to legislators' inquiries and to field calls from inquiring parents. A conference board adjudicates disputes regarding policy application in specific cases, caseworker treatment, and compromising arrearages.

C.7 WEB SITE

C.7.1 Background

We reviewed the contents of Nevada's Web sites and compared the results to other states' Web sites to identify enhancements that may improve child support customer service operations.

We reviewed Central Office's Web site. The Central Office Web site provides links to two county office Web sites: Carson City District Attorney Child Support Enforcement Division and Clark County District Attorney Family Support Division. These two county Web sites were also reviewed. (Note: An error, "The page cannot be found," was initially received when trying to access the Carson City link. Upon learning of the "broken link" through a MAXIMUS preliminary report, the link was quickly fixed. However, a link to application materials within that Web site does not work.)

Our reference to other states' Web sites includes a matrix detailing states' use of Web sites for customer service components, entitled "Customer Service Website Information." This detailed information can be found on the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement Website at:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/stsys/wbcs/CustomerWeb.pdf>.

We used information from this matrix and information based on our team members' knowledge of various Web site enhancements to identify options and enhancements.

C.7.2 Findings

C.7.2.1 Finding: There Are Opportunities for Enhancements to Nevada's State Web Site

Although generic information of interest to case participants is available through the Web site and there are some download options, case participants cannot access case-specific information, nor can they submit information on-line. In addition, while information of interest to employers is available through the Web site, employers have no on-line options. We expect web site enhancements would increase customer satisfaction for case participants and employers, as well as provide significant benefits to the program.

We noted problems with links to, and within, one of the county's Web sites (Carson City).¹ We conclude there is an apparent need to review existing Web sites periodically to ensure links are working appropriately.

See Exhibit C.7.2.1-1: Carson City Division of Welfare and Supportive Services Web Site – Child Support Enforcement below.

CENTRAL OFFICE

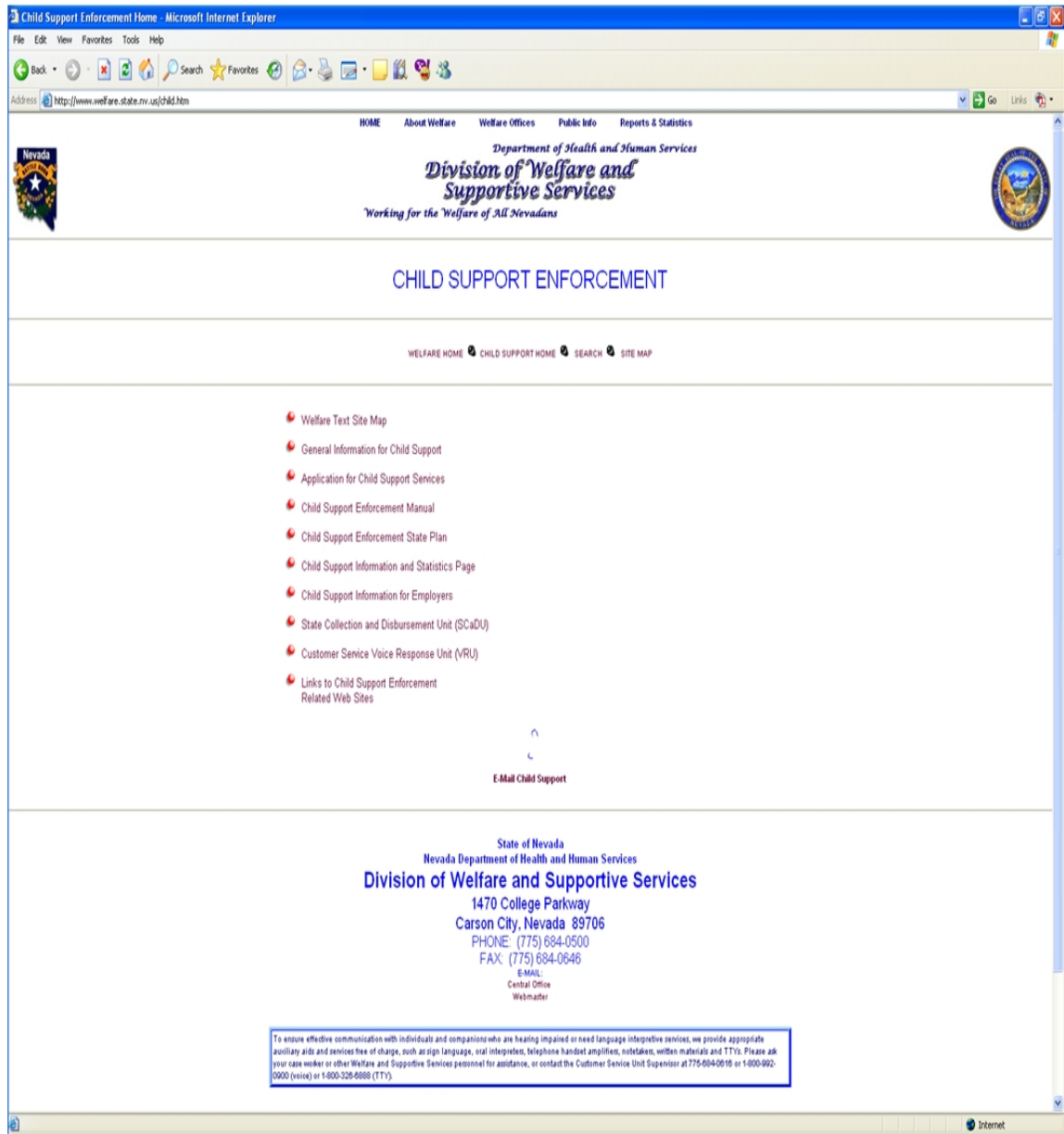


Exhibit C.7.2.1-1: Carson City Division of Welfare and Supportive Services Web Site – Child Support Enforcement.

A summary of the contents of *Central Office's* Web site follows:

- **"General Information for Child Support" Section**
 - Information on electronic payments (direct deposit and debit card) - explanation, frequently asked questions, Chase Nevada debit card information including how to access account information on-line, and the flyer entitled "Electronic Child Support Payment"
 - "What Every Parent Should Know About Establishing Paternity" state brochure
 - Information for mobilized reservists and national guard members – links to OCSE and Judge Advocate General's (JAG's) information
 - "OCSE Handbook on Child Support Enforcement" federal handbook
 - "Affidavit of Custodian of Minor Child and Notice to Obligor" state form (Note: appears to be listed twice) – can be printed then completed
 - "Affidavit of Custodian of Minor Child and Notice to Obligor" state form instructions – can be printed then completed
- **"Application for Child Support Services"** The Application form can be printed then completed by the applicant.
- **"Child Support Enforcement Manual" (.pdf)**
- **"Child Support Enforcement State Plan"**
- **"Child Support Information and Statistics Page"**
 - Information on caseloads, incentive measures, and collections/disbursements (Note: It appears the most recent information available on collections/disbursements is for quarter ending March 2005.)
- **"Child Support Information for Employers" Section**
 - Income withholding information – links to OCSE information; state-specific information regarding questions/answers, fees, and an email option to get EFT instructions
 - National Medical Support Notice information – instructions
 - New hire reporting information – instructions
- **"State Collection and Disbursement Unit (SCaDU)"**
 - Information on direct deposit and an authorization form (.pdf) and instructions as to where payments are to be sent
- **"Customer Service Voice Response Unit (VRU)"**
 - Information on the VRU numbers and other contact information
- **"Links to Child Support Enforcement Related Web Sites" Section**
 - Links include:
 - Child Support Enforcement Manual, Domestic Violence – Clark County
 - District Attorney Offices in Nevada (addresses & phone numbers)
 - District Attorney Child Support Web Sites (Carson City, Clark County)
 - National Council of Child Support Directors
 - Tribal IV- D Agencies (pdf file)
 - Various links within the OCSE Web site

- Link to Service members Civil Relief Act (SCRA) which provides a "look-up" feature.
- The Web site also contains a "**E-mail Child Support**" option (sent to cse@dwss.nv.gov)

See Exhibit C.7.2.1-2: Carson City Web Site below.

CARSON CITY

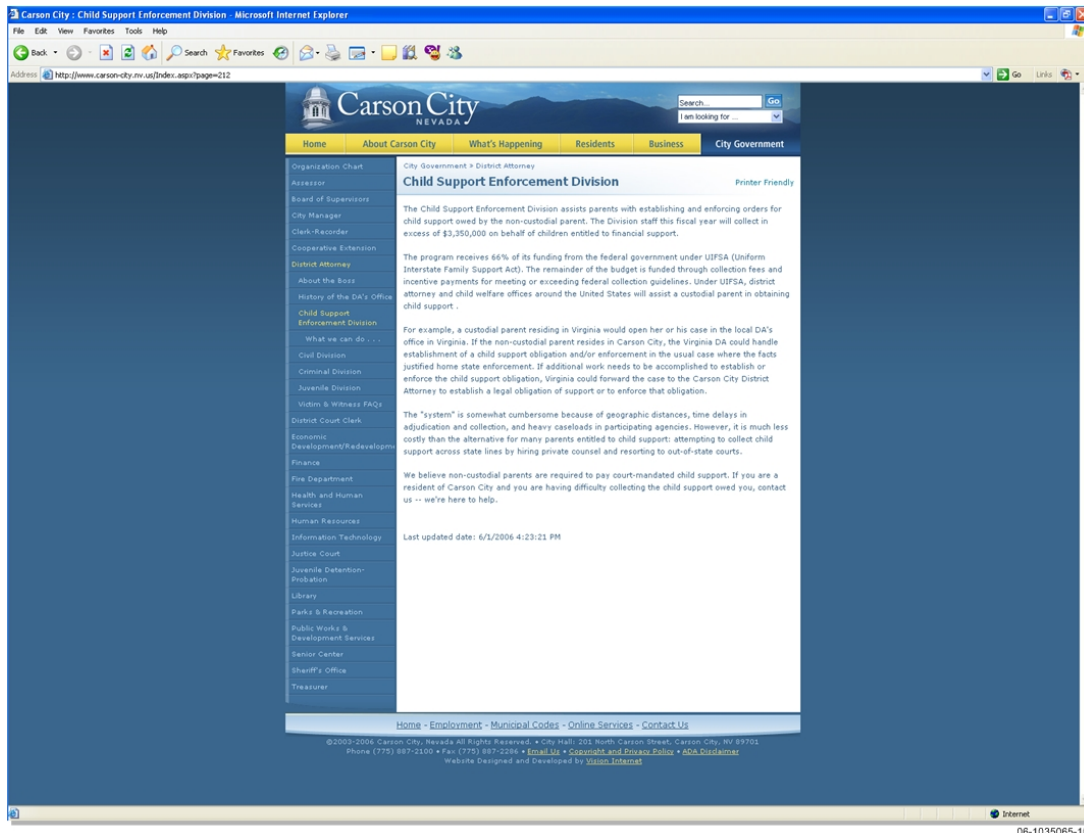


Exhibit C.7.2.1-2: Carson City Web Site.

A summary of the contents of Carson City District Attorney Child Support Enforcement Division's Web site follows:

In addition to the above information, Web site visitors can select a "What can we do. . ." option. When selected, a page of additional information is displayed which includes very general information about applications, paternity, and enforcement. (Note: Regarding applications, it states "If you would like to see the information or documents it will be necessary to have when applying, click here." However, the "click here" link did not work.) Also included is the number of cases and the sources of the referrals. (Note: Language states that referrals come to the office from three sources, and there are four listed.)

See Exhibit C.7.2.1-3: Clark County Web Site below.

CLARK COUNTY



06-1035065-09

Exhibit C.7.2.1-3: Clark County Web Site.

A summary of the contents of Clark County District Attorney Family Support Division's Web site follows:

Provides office information such as address, telephone number, fax number, office mission, office structure, office location, and telephone directory.

■ **"Filing for Child Support (Overview)"**

- The Application for Child Support Services is available here (can be printed and then completed by the applicant). There are several "up-front questions" that are asked of the potential applicant, and then, depending on the answers, a list of certain forms is provided. These are forms that can be printed, then completed. In addition, instructions for completing an application are provided. [Note: These were options not found on the state's Web site. The customization is interesting, and it helps ensure additional paperwork is received at time of application. The state should, however, determine whether it is appropriate to seemingly require this additional paperwork at the time of application, rather than requesting it after the application is received. For

example, if the applicant indicates the non-custodial parent resides in another state, the applicable federal interstate referral forms are then listed for completion. A balance should be struck between getting the information needed to establish a case, but not discouraging applications by asking for too much information up-front.]

- **"Child Support Issues"**
 - Contains "frequently asked questions" on child support issues.
- **"Paternity Issues"**
 - Contains "frequently asked questions" on paternity issues.
- **"Outreach Program"**
 - The "C.A.R.E. Handbook."
- **"Other State Child Support Agencies"**
 - Provides links to other states' Web sites.
- **"Other Local Agencies"**
 - Provides more information than the category suggests. When this option is chosen, the information is labeled "Relevant Agencies Re: Family Support" and includes links to State of Nevada Index of Agencies & Services, Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, ADOPT: Assistance Information Support, DivorceNet: Family Law Divorce Resource, and Nevada State WIC Program.

No prominent link to the state's Web site was noted on Clark County's Web site. There was a link to it under the "Other State Child Support Agencies" section, in alphabetical order with all other states.

While state Child Support Enforcement programs have historically used Web sites to provide general information to customers and the general public, programs are increasingly using Web sites to take advantage of opportunities to enhance and improve customer service operations. Emerging technology and states' use of automated systems for case processing has made web technology particularly attractive when faced with rising caseloads and limited resources; and has made the large scale dissemination, and exchange, of information possible. The "working smarter, not harder" concept applies here.

Custodial parents, non-custodial parents, and employers are the primary recipients of these enhanced and improved operations.

C.7.2.2 Custodial parents and Non-Custodial Parents (Case Participants)

In addition to using Web sites to provide general information, a number of states are using Web sites to provide "access" to case-specific information to case participants, as well as to provide "interactive" components for their use.

Our customer survey results revealed 24 respondents reported trying to access a Web site to get information. Of the 24, only three reported getting the information they needed, with an additional four reporting they received some of the information they needed.

With enhancements and advertisements of the availability of the options, we expect the use of the Web site to give and get information to greatly increase.

C.7.2.2.1 Access – Case Participants

There are a number of possible options for case participants to access case-specific information through a Web site. This case-specific information is taken from the state's automated system. Some examples of possible options are as follows:

- Court-ordered Amounts
- Last Payment Information
- Arrears Balance
- Payment History (time period available varies)
- Case Status
- Hearing Information

In some instances, case participants (or sometimes other interested persons) can access and download various forms.

C.7.2.2.2 Interactive – Case Participants

There are a number of possible interactive options for case participants as well.

In some instances, case participants can provide information on-line. This information can be processed in a number of ways. For example, programming can allow information to automatically feed into the automated system and/or create an "alert" regarding the information to a worker. Some examples of possible options for case participants to provide information on-line are as follows:

- Address Updates
- Employment Updates
- Telephone Number Updates

In other instances, case participants (and sometimes other interested parties) can use other interactive tools. Some examples of possible interactive tool options are as follows:

- Child support guidelines calculator
- Application for IV-D services (completed and submitted on-line)
- Customer satisfaction surveys

Best Practice – Virginia (VA 03)

To provide customers the information they want, Virginia posts information to their Web site. This includes information on frequently asked questions as well as providing access to unique case-specific information, such as payment history, last five actions noted in a case, and upcoming court dates.

C.7.2.3 Employers

In addition to using Web sites to provide relevant information to employers (forms, resources, and references), a number of states are using Web sites to provide "interactive" components for employers' use.

C.7.2.3.1 Interactive - Employers

Some examples of "interactive" options for employers are as follows:

- Reporting new hires
- Reporting employee terminations
- Submitting income withholding payments electronically, through a secure Web-based process (This is especially beneficial to smaller employers who may find that programming for Electronic Funds Transfer/Electronic Data Interchange is beyond their capabilities or is not cost beneficial.)
- Exchanging documents electronically

C.7.2.4 Security

Safeguards must be in place to ensure appropriate access when allowing case participant access to case-specific information. For example, states may require use of a PIN (Personal Identification Number) to access on-line services. In addition, "interactive" options require safeguards to ensure information submitted is secure.

C.7.3 Recommendations

C.7.3.1 Recommendation: Enhance Central Office's Web Site for Case Participants and Employers

C.7.3.1.a We recommend DWSS consider enhancing the state's Web site to provide options for case participants to access case-specific information. Primary items for consideration include:

- Court-ordered Amounts
- Last Payment Information
- Arrears Balance
- Payment History (time period available varies)

Other items include:

- Case Status
- Hearing Information

Best Practice – Colorado (CO 05)

Colorado provides customers with the ability to go online through their state website and access payment history online. In addition, the CST or NCP may display a complete payment record in pdf format to be printed.

C.7.3.1.b We recommend DWSS consider enhancing the state's Web site to provide options for case participants to provide information on-line. Primary items for consideration include:

- Address Updates (for both case participants)
- Employment Updates (for non-custodial parents)
- Telephone Number Updates (for both case participants)

C.7.3.1.c We recommend DWSS consider enhancing the state's Web site to allow electronic completion and submittal of:

- An Application for Child Support Services
- Request a Debit Card
- Sign Up for Direct Deposit

Best Practice – Colorado (CO 06)

Colorado provides customers with the ability to go online through their state website and request case status and/or request an application for a debit card.

C.7.3.1.d We recommend DWSS consider enhancing the state's Web site to provide additional options specifically for employers. Primary items for consideration include:

- Reporting New Hires
- Submitting income withholding payments electronically, through a secure Web-based process (This is especially beneficial to smaller employers who may find that programming for EFT/EDI is beyond their capabilities or is not cost beneficial.)
- Other items that may be considered:
 - Reporting Employee Terminations
 - Exchanging Documents Electronically

If this recommendation is implemented, it is also recommended that access to this portion of the website be secure so that only employers and not CSTs or NCPs be allowed access.

The other alternative is to develop and maintain a separate website that is accessible only to employers.

C.7.3.1.e All county DA Child Support Enforcement Web sites should contain a prominent link to the state's Web site.

With the implementation of Regional Offices, this would not be an issue as there would be only one website in use for customers statewide.

C.7.3.1.f We recommend DWSS consider assigning responsibility to ensure links to, and within, Web sites remain in working order. The links on the DWSS website should be "tested" periodically to ensure that they are not broken, as well as updated as they may change.

C.7.3.1.g When allowing access to case-specific information, DWSS must implement safeguards to ensure appropriate access. In addition, if interactive options become available, safeguards must be in place to ensure information submitted is secure.

C.7.3.1.h Once any enhancements are made, on-going advertising of what options are available, and how to access the options, should be done. Advertising can be accomplished by adding this information to brochures and fact sheets, as well as telling case participants and employers about it when speaking with them. The availability of options should also be added to any counties' Child Support Enforcement Web sites, along with a link. In addition, mass-mailing to employers regarding enhancements may be appropriate, as well as coordinating outreach efforts with government or private entities that deal with employers.

C.7.4 BENEFITS

We recognize that not all case participants or employers will choose to use customer service enhancements through Web sites. Some customers simply are not internet users, and will always prefer other methods to get information and interact with the program. However, people are increasingly using the internet to obtain and provide information in other parts of their lives. Web enhancements simply provide another option for customers.

We expect providing case participants options through the Web site to improve customer satisfaction. Case participants can access available information any day, at any time, and provide information to the program any day, at any time. Case participants can avoid lengthy waits on the telephone and waiting for a response from voice messages or correspondence.

We expect Web site enhancements to improve operations for the program as well. Case participants using Web site options don't need to call or visit the offices. This frees up time for the case managers. In addition, case participants may provide important information not otherwise provided if Web site options did not exist.

Another advantage is the program can control what will happen to information provided by case participants for each option. For example, DWSS may decide when a custodial parent provides updated address information through an on-line option, the address in NOMADS is automatically updated, and the assigned worker does not receive an alert. On the other hand, DWSS may decide when a non-custodial parent provides updated address information through an on-line option, the address in NOMADS is automatically updated, but the assigned worker receives a system-generated alert, prompting the worker to request a postal verification. (There may be instances where a non-custodial parent is attempting to provide a "false" address in order to avoid Child Support Enforcement.)

We recognize employers are important customers to the Child Support Enforcement program, and play an increasingly integral role in the program's success. We expect enhancing employer options and easing their burden through Web site options, will increase employer satisfaction as well as compliance, generating positive results for the program. In addition, information that is submitted on-line can be processed more efficiently. For example, new hire reports received through a Web site do not have to be manually entered. This means less worker intervention and reduced chance of error.

C.8 DOCUMENTS: FORMS, CORRESPONDENCE, AND LITERATURE

C.8.1 Background

We selected 20 various forms and correspondence from Central Office and county offices for a detailed review.

We also reviewed customer service literature (brochures and fact sheets, etc.) from Central Office and various county offices and selected thirteen for a detailed review. The literature was developed by Central Office, Clark County, and Washoe County, and the intended recipients of the documents are custodial parents, non-custodial parents, or both.

The primary objectives of the review were to:

- Determine the general readability of the document.
- Determine whether the document clearly conveyed the intended message(s).

To determine general readability, our initial review of each document included the application of the "Fog Index" to language, or a sampling of language. The "Fog Index," devised by Robert Gunning, can be used to identify a "grade level" of the language to help determine the "readability." The Fog Index does not assess how well something is written. There are currently several versions of the "Fog Index."

The method we used in this review was as follows:

1. Counted the words in a sample.
2. Counted the number of sentences within the sample.
3. Counted the number of words with three or more syllables (with some exceptions such as capitalized words (unless the words are capitalized only because they begin a sentence), compounds of simple words, and verbs with the third syllable of -ed or -es).
4. Divided the number of words (#1) by the number of sentences (#2) for an "average words per sentence."
5. Added the "average words per sentence" to the number of words with three or more syllables (#3).
6. Multiplied the total in #5 by .4. This result is the "readability grade level."

While the "Fog Index" can give an indication of "readability," it does not ensure the message is clear. Therefore, we also reviewed each of the selected documents for clarity.

We also reviewed the "Application for Child Support Services" and the methods that may be used by customers to apply for services.

C.8.2 Findings

C.8.2.1 Finding: Readability and Clarity Of Forms, Correspondence, and Literature Could be Improved

C.8.2.2 Finding: Much of the Available Customer Documents are "County-Specific," Rather Than "Statewide"

C.8.2.3 Finding: Dissemination of Literature is Largely Limited to Customers Visiting "In-Person"

C.8.2.4 Finding: There is no On-Line Application Process (in which applicants can complete and submit an application on-line) Available

C.8.2.5 Finding: The Application for Child Support Services Appears to be Applicable to Only Custodial Parents.

C.8.2.6 Forms And Correspondence

| Document Description | Provided by | Identifier |
|---|-------------------|------------|
| • SURRENDER LETTER | Central Office | GN0005 |
| • Positive genetic test results | Central Office | GN0032 |
| • DELINQUENCY NOTICE | Central Office | GN0049 |
| • CASE CLOSURE IN 60 DAYS | Central Office | GN0074 |
| • Child turning 18 | Central Office | GN0106 |
| • Notice of genetic testing appointment | Central Office | GN0116 |
| • Cover letter to Arrearage Calculation Summary | Washoe County DA | WGN008 |
| • Notice to party of genetic testing appointment | Washoe County DA | WGN013 |
| • NOTICE REGARDING DIRECT PAYMENTS (NCP) | Washoe County DA | WGN030 |
| • NOTICE REGARDING DIRECT PAYMENTS (CST) | Washoe County DA | WGN031 |
| • Child turning 18 | Washoe County DA | WGN034 |
| • 60 DAY CLOSURE NOTIFICATION | Carson City DA | DAYS60 |
| • Paternity testing appointment | Carson City DA | PATTST |
| • Positive paternity testing results | Carson City DA | PATPOS |
| • Negative paternity testing results | Carson City DA | PATNEG |
| • Letter to custodial parent upon opening the case | Douglas County DA | N/A |
| • Letter to non-custodial parent upon opening the case and employment is unknown or non-custodial parent is self-employed | Douglas County DA | N/A |
| • Introductory letter (application) | Clark County DA | ACKLTR |
| • No longer employed | Clark County DA | EMPTRM |
| • Child turning 18 | Clark County DA | VERANC |

Exhibit C.8.2.6-1: Sample Forms and Correspondence Reviewed.

Regarding readability, the application of the "Fog Index" to the documents we selected showed documents fell into the various grade levels as follows:
(Conventional wisdom is that reading level should generally be kept at or below a grade level 7 or 8. Results of the sampling showed the majority of the documents exceeded that level)

- Six documents were in the grade level 7 or 8 range.
- Seven documents were in the grade level 9 or 10 range.
- Six documents were in the grade level 11 or higher range.

(One document was too short to get an adequate language sample.)

Regarding clarity, the results of our review indicate improvements are needed to ensure customers understand what the document is telling them, what if any action they can or should take, and the consequences for taking or not taking an action.

The customer survey responses appear to support the finding that improvements are needed in the readability and clarity of documents. One hundred and twenty-one (121) respondents reported receiving a letter, form, or brochure from the CSEP. Keeping in mind that 90% of survey respondents possessed an education level of at least a high school diploma or GED, 36 (30%) of the 121 respondents reported they had problems understanding the letter, form, or brochure. In addition, 11 (9%) respondents reported asking someone to translate the letter, form, or brochure and 24 (20%) reported needing to ask someone to explain the document.

C.8.2.7 Customer Literature (Brochures, Fact Sheets, Etc.)

Applying the conventional wisdom that the reading level should be kept at or below a grade level 7 or 8, the application of the "Fog Index" revealed customer literature, like forms and correspondence, exceeds that level.

Regarding clarity, results of the review indicate improvements are needed to better ensure customers are able to understand the customer literature.

As we mentioned in the preceding section, customer survey responses support the finding that readability and clarity improvements are needed. (See Section 8.2.2 for more information.)

From the literature provided, it appears much of the available customer literature is county-specific and our interviews with county workers indicate use of the literature is largely limited to customers who pick it up during an in-person visit.

Nevada Best Practice (NV 01)

Clark County has a blue card that can be folded into a business card size and contains the office phone number, fax number, hours, location, mailing address, address for mailing payments, room to add individual case numbers, etc. The card requests changes in employment, address, or telephone number be reported and how. The card is a good idea and customers can carry it with them easily in a purse or wallet. (This would also be a good place to advertise email and Web site options, if those areas are enhanced.)

C.8.2.8 Application For Child Support Services

Our review showed that, in addition to Applications for Child Support Services being picked up by customers, or sent out to customers, a customer can also download the Application for Child Support Services from the Web site. This means that customers can print it off from the Web site, then complete it and send it in. It is good to have this option. (However, there does not seem to be clear instructions on where/how the applicant should submit the application.) An "interactive" on-line application process is not available.

Nevada Best Practice (NV 02)

An innovative approach was found in Clark County. A tutorial to the Application is available for in-person visitors. A computer with the on-line tutorial is in a room off of the Reception Area. Potential applicants who need assistance in completing an Application (English or Spanish) are shown to this room and the tutorial guides them through the Application. They can place the cursor on any field and there is an audible explanation as to what is required for that field. Clark County reported benefits include the fact that staff intervention and time is not needed to sit with the potential applicant and explain or assist with completing the application. (Future plans include the ability for potential applicants to complete the Applications on-line. As of now, however, there is not that capability.)

We found the content of the Application for Child Support Services to be applicable to only custodial parent applicants, not to non-custodial parent applicants. From other materials that we reviewed, it appears the program does accept non-custodial parent applications (a federal requirement), but the Application for Child Support Services language is written for custodial parents. (We noted there appears to be a process for non-custodial parents to apply for a "voluntary income withholding case." It is unclear, however if or how this fits into the IV-D application process). There are instances when non-custodial parents want to apply for services. Their motivation for applying is often related to either paternity establishment or, most commonly, review & adjustment.

Consistent with our findings regarding other customer forms and literature, language in the Application for Child Support Services could be improved in both readability and clarity.

C.8.3 Recommendations

C.8.3.1 Recommendation: Improve the Readability and Clarity of Customer Forms and Correspondence

We recommend improvements to ensure written communication with customers is readable and clear.

Improvements can be accomplished by considering the following when noticing or corresponding with customers in writing:

C.8.3.1.a Consideration should be given to adding a "label" or a "heading" on each notice or correspondence.

Labels or headings help the reader put the notice or correspondence in context and, in some situations, may grab the recipient's attention. . Labels and headings also assist to readily identify the document in any subsequent contacts between the customer and staff.

Note: Of the documents we reviewed, six contained a clear "label" or "heading" (Documents #1, 3, 4, 9, 10, and 12).

C.8.3.1.b The "Fog Index" concepts should be kept in mind. Generally, writing which contains shorter sentences and smaller words is more "readable."

To illustrate this, we provide the following example:

- *We found the following language in a document provided by one of the county offices (Document #17):*

"The affidavit of arrears shows that you are delinquent in your child support payments through the designated date in the affidavit of arrears. This delinquency will result in enforcement action by our office if payments in the amount of . . . do not begin immediately."

This language could be replaced with something like this:

"The affidavit of arrears shows you are past-due on your child support payments. You must begin making payments in the amount of . . . now. If you do not, our office will take action to collect the child support."

Common sense, however, should prevail. Do not sacrifice accuracy for readability. In addition, sometimes longer words are more understandable than shorter words (e.g. the use of "non-custodial parent" will be understood by more people than "obligor").

If a sentence is long because of a listing of items, and making one sentence into several is not practical, use bulleted lists to aid readability.

C.8.3.1.c Avoid use of words and terms that may not be generally understood, and ensure language is stated as simply as possible.

To illustrate this, we provide the following examples:

- *We found the following language in a document provided by Central Office (Document # 3):*

"Our records indicate you are delinquent in paying your child support obligation."

This language could be changed to something like this:

"Our records show you are behind in paying your child support."

- *A document provided by one of the counties contains the words "arrearage," "adjudicated penalty," "unadjudicated penalty," and "discrepancies." (Document #7) Consideration should be given to replacing these words with words that are more understandable.*
- *The child turning 18 notices provided by Central Office and two counties contain versions of the word "emancipate." (Documents #5, #11, and #20) This term should be avoided or explained.*
- *We found the following language in a document provided by one of the counties (Document #8):*

"The usual elapsed time for the test results to reach our office is four to four and one-half weeks. However, should further testing be required, it may take 3 or 4 months."

This language could be replaced with something like this:

"Our office usually gets the test results in about a month. If more testing is needed, it may take 3 or 4 months."

- *We found the following language in a document provided by one of the counties (Document #9):*

". . . the tendering of direct payments to the custodial parent. . ."

This language could be replaced with something like this:

". . .paying child support directly to the custodial parent. . ."

- *The terms "active receipt of payments" and "constitute grounds" in a document provided by one of the counties could be clarified (Document #10).*
- *We found the following language in a document provided by one of the counties (Document #16):*

"Per your request, a case has been opened in our statewide mandated computer system (NOMADS). Please refer to the case number listed above on any future correspondence or inquiries you might have."

This language could be replaced with something like this:

"Per your request, we have opened a child support case with our office. Please use the case number listed above any time you contact our office by telephone or in writing."

- *We found the following language in a document provided by one of the counties (Document #19):*

"You must keep this office informed regarding your efforts to obtain employment. You must notify us immediately upon obtaining employment. You must supply the name and address of your new employer. . ."

This language could be replaced with something like this:

"You must keep this office informed of what you are doing to try to get a job. You must let us know right away when you get a job. You must give us the name and address of your new employer. . ."

C.8.3.1.d Clearly state what action, if any, the parent may take and the consequences of taking or not taking the action.

To illustrate this, we provide the following examples:

- *The 60-day closing notice provided by Central Office tells the parent that the case will be closed in 60 days unless additional information is provided that allows the office to proceed with the case. (Document #4) However, it doesn't appear to state the specific reason for closing. There are nine federal closing reasons that require the 60-day closing notice. If the parent were to be informed of which closing reason applies, the parent would be able to better determine what information would be relevant. For example, if the case is being closed because the non-custodial parent could not be located, the custodial parent would know that location-related information would be helpful.*

- *A document provided by one of the counties notifies the custodial parent that receiving direct payments from the non-custodial parent may lead to case closure. (Document #10) The document does not tell the custodial parent, however, what to do to avoid case closure if they receive direct payments .*
- *A document provided by one of the counties asks the custodial parent to complete and return information if the child is still in high school. (Document #11) The document does not tell the custodial parent, however, what will happen if it is completed and returned (presumably that on-going child support will continue until the child graduates or turns 19, whichever happens first).*
- *This same document does address what will happen if a response is not received, but the message is not clear. It states "If a response is not received by the date requested your child will be automatically emancipated on his/her eighteenth birthday." What does that mean to the custodial parent? It should be clear that on-going child support will stop.*

C.8.3.2 Recommendation: Standardized Forms Should be Used by all Offices, When Possible. (This is especially true if the contents of the message are based on federal or state requirements.)

While different versions of forms may be appropriate in some cases, for example if local practices vary for acceptable reasons, a statewide version is preferable, and will ensure consistency of the message. In addition, if Central Office develops a document that is compliant with federal and state laws, the use of that form by all offices will ensure compliance is statewide.

To illustrate this, we provide the following examples:

- *There were two versions of a 60-day closing notice. (Documents #4 and #12) There are 12 reasons a case may be closed under federal regulations (45 C.F.R. § 303.11). If closing for one of nine reasons, a 60-day closing notice is required. Therefore, it is important that a case being closed meets one of the allowable reasons and, if appropriate, the parent receives the 60-day notice. A notice which is used statewide, informs the recipient of the specific reason (of the nine choices), and clearly states what is needed to prevent case closure, would be a good idea. It appears the case closing notice provided by Central Office does not contain the specific reason for closure. The case closing notice provided by one of the counties does provide the reason. However, it is a concern that the reasons do not closely follow the federal reasons. For example, the notice contains six possible reasons, rather than nine, provides an "other" category which could lead to misuse, and one reason is not a federally sanctioned reason ("The custodial parent no longer lives in our jurisdiction"). (Note: States are not required to close a case which meets one of the federal reasons, but they are allowed to close a case which meets one of the federal reason. States often, however, choose to close cases that meet federal reasons.)*
- *There were three versions of a notice relating to the child turning 18 years old. (Documents #5, #11, and #20) Nevada state law appears to provide that on-going child support ends when the child turns 18, unless the child is in high school. If the child is in high school, on-going child support continues until the*

child graduates from high school or turns 19, whichever occurs first. (NRS 125B.200) A good idea would be to create a notice used statewide that informs the recipient of the law, and clearly states what will happen if the requested information (e.g., graduation date) is provided or not provided.

- *There were three versions of a document which notify parents of a genetic testing appointment. (Documents #6, #8, and #13) The requirements for identification differ. While all appear to use the same lab, two documents (one provided by Central Office and one provided by a county) state one form of (picture) identification is needed, while the other document provided by another county states two forms of identification (one picture) are needed. Is there truly a difference in requirements? Also, we noted that one document contains information about when results can be expected, while the other two do not. It seems to be a good addition, as turn-around time is often longer than customers think it will be. Customers are used to receiving lab results from their doctors in a matter of a day or two, and that doesn't happen with genetic testing results.*

Other notes:

While not specifically linked to a recommendation, we believe the following may warrant consideration:

- Two documents (documents #9 and #10, provided by Washoe County) which are custodial parent and non-custodial parent versions of a "direct payment notice" use the term "absent parent." This term, while used historically in the child support program, is one that should be avoided. Some parents take issue with the term, feeling it infers they are absent from their children's lives. The term "non-custodial parent" is generally more acceptable.
- In an introductory letter provided by Clark County (document #18) there is some concern about the length of time mentioned in the letter.

"Please contact us for status if you do not receive correspondence or a court order from our office **within 180 days.**"

Six months seems to be a long time to wait to hear about your case, especially if there is already an order in place. Perhaps this would be better: "If you have an order for child support, please contact us if you haven't heard from us within three months and you are not getting child support payments. If you do not have an order for child support, please contact us if you haven't heard from us within six months and you have not received a child support order."

C.8.3.3 Recommendation: Improve the Readability and Clarity of Customer Literature

We recommend improvements to ensure customer literature is readable and clear. Improvements can be accomplished by considering the following when developing customer literature:

C.8.3.3.a The "fog index" concepts should be kept in mind. See Recommendation **C.8.3.1.b** for more information.

C.8.3.3.b Avoid use of words and terms that may not be generally understood, and ensure language is stated as simply as possible.

The illustrations below provide more detail on our recommendations for customer literature (such as brochures and fact sheets).

CENTRAL OFFICE

- *"Nevada State Welfare Division Direct Deposit Information and Authorization Agreement" contains the following language:*

". . because mailing is eliminated. . ."

This language could be replaced with something like this:

". . .because payments are not mailed to you. . ."

Note: The print is very small, which does not help readability. Page limitations may have dictated the size of the print. .

- *"What Every Parent Should Know About Establishing Paternity" contains the following language:*

". . .entitled to a hearing in court" and ""The age of the father or mother is not relevant under Nevada paternity establishment laws."

This language could be replaced with something like this:

"has a right to have a court hearing." and "The age of the father or mother does not matter under Nevada paternity establishment laws."

- *"Nevada Electronic Payments" contains the following language:*

"If you are a custodian, you will receive your child support collections as a direct deposit into your bank account or by a Nevada Debit card."

This language could be replaced with something like this:

"Child support will be deposited directly into your bank account or onto a Nevada Debit Card."

WASHOE COUNTY

Washoe County has attempted to address customer service issues through the development of a series of brochures. These include: "General Information," "Opening a Child Support Case," "Driver's License Suspension in Child Support Cases," "Modification of Child Support," and "Intercept Programs." They should be recognized for those attempts. However, a review of the brochures showed the contents to be quite complex, often written at a high reading level, and the language often seems to be too "legal" or "technical" to be understood by many customers. Some examples of how the language could be simplified are as follows:

- *"General Information" contains the following language:*

"If either parent contests paternity, they have a right to genetic testing and must request the same through the FSD."

This language could be replaced with something like:

"If either the mother or the possible father is not sure who the father is, he or she has the right to have genetic testing done. The mother or possible father can ask that this testing be done through the FSD."

Note: This brochure contains the words "Obligees" and "Obligors" - two legal terms that most people do not understand.

- *"Opening a Child Support Case" contains the term "opposing party." This term is more of a legal term. In addition, it may carry with it a negative connotation. The term "other parent" would be more understandable and more neutral.*
- *Other note: This brochure addresses how to apply for services, but does not mention that the application can be downloaded from the Web site.*
- *"Driver's License Suspension in Child Support Cases" contains the following language:*

"If you do not want to avail yourself to one of the options set forth above. . ."

This language could be replaced with something like this:

"If you do not want to do any of the above. . ."

- *"Modification of Child Support" contains the following language:*

". . .to determine if there are sufficient grounds for our office to assist in obtaining a change. . ."

This language could be replaced with something like this:

"to see if we find there is a reason for our office to help to change. . ."

CLARK COUNTY

- *"District Attorney's Office Family Support Division" contains the following language:*

"While you are receiving TANF your rights to receive court ordered child support may be affected."

This language could be replaced with something like this:

"While you are on TANF, the state may keep some or all of your child support."

Note: This brochure uses the word "initiate" a couple of times. This word could be replaced with "start."

Note: This brochure contains FAQs (and also contains the Web site address and VRU number), which are all good ideas. In addition, a Spanish version is available.

- *"Looking Beyond Teenage Pregnancy" Note: A Spanish version is also available.*
- *"C.A.R.E. Handbook" While some of the contents could be improved in readability and clarity, there are positive things to note. This handbook attempts to address many aspects of a child support case. It provides a Glossary of words and terms. It provides referral information for mediation services and community resources. It is also available in a Spanish version. Double-sided copying would*

help reduce the number of pages in the handbook. (It is currently 24 pages long. The length was mentioned by Clark County case managers.)

C.8.3.4 Recommendation: Develop an Outreach Plan

We recommend DWSS develop a customer service outreach plan. This plan could be developed in conjunction with the statewide Customer Service Committee and Plan recommended in *Section C.5*, or separately. This plan should take into consideration the VRU enhancements, Web, e-mail options, and employer outreach as noted in various other sections.

The customer service outreach plan should take into consideration the needs of bi-lingual customers, and ensure services are made available to those of Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Bi-lingual resources can be found through colleges, private agencies, phone companies, community service volunteers, and senior citizens centers. Hiring practices should take into consideration the need for hiring bi-lingual staff, as appropriate, to ensure the needs of customers with LEP are met.

WASHOE COUNTY

Clark County has developed software that sits on a computer workstation in their First Floor Reception area. This software allows a customer to access information on how to complete the Application for IV-D Services form in both English and Spanish. The software takes the customer through the Application field by field and explains both visually and audibly how to complete each section of the Application form. We recommend that Washoe County install a workstation in their Reception Area and use the same software that Clark County developed to provide easy access in both English and Spanish on how to complete the Application form.

Best Practice – Washington (WA 05)

Washington has Spanish-speaking personnel in all field offices, and in Seattle there are Russian and Vietnamese speakers. In addition, administrative notices have been translated.

C.8.3.5 Recommendation: Assign Responsibility for Development of Outreach Materials to the DWSS Central Office

We recommend DWSS consider developing a series of brochures and/or fact sheets that can be used statewide, addressing various CSEP services. The content would need to be general enough to allow for acceptable variances among local offices.

C.8.3.6 Recommendation: Expand the Dissemination of Brochures and Fact Sheets

We recommend that workers take advantage of naturally occurring situations to provide the information to customers, regardless of the method customers use for contacting the office. For example, when a worker receives a call regarding paternity establishment and discusses issues with the customer, the worker should consider

following the contact by sending the customer a paternity brochure. It is advantageous to all to have well-informed customers.

C.8.3.7 Recommendation: Improve the Readability, Clarity, and Accessibility of the "Application for Child Support Services"

C.8.3.7.a We recommend that DWSS consider providing an "interactive" on-line application option on the state's Web Site. (See also *Section C.7.*)

C.8.3.7.b The Application for Child Support Services should be made applicable to non-custodial parent applicants.

This can be accomplished by developing one Application that is applicable to both custodial parents and non-custodial parents [Colorado's is an example] or by developing two separate Applications – one for custodial parents and one for non-custodial parents [North Dakota's is an example].

C.8.3.7.c Improvements are needed to ensure the Application for Child Support Services is readable and clear. This can be accomplished by considering the following:

- The "fog index" concepts should be kept in mind. See Recommendation C.8.3.1.b for more information.
- Avoid use of words and terms that may not be generally understood, and ensure language is stated as simply as possible.
- Instructions on where/how the applicant should submit the completed application would be helpful for customers who download the Application for Services from the Web site.

C.8.4 Benefits

The importance of ensuring written communication (such as forms and correspondence) with customers is readable and understandable (clarity) cannot be understated. Easily understood documents will lead to improved customer cooperation and support for the program's activities and services. In addition, easily understood documents will decrease the need for customers to make follow-up contacts with the child support office. It's a win/win for both the customers and the program.

Literature, such as brochures and fact sheets, is useful as an outreach tool if it is readable and understandable to the intended recipient. A variety of well-written brochures and other literature for customers will increase their knowledge of services and reduces the need for customers to contact case managers. This increases productivity and customer involvement.

A customer service outreach plan will help ensure the various entities involved with CSEP know where responsibilities lie, and that outreach resources are available.

Bi-lingual services aid in communication between case managers and non-English speaking customers. When communication is effective the result is a better understanding. Case managers will benefit from this understanding by providing the needed services requested by the customer.

An on-line application process will promote the availability of program services by providing another option for customers to apply for, and thus access, services.

C.9 HELP DESK

C.9.1 Background

We reviewed how the Help Desk provides services to the case managers in the field. DWSS provided documentation from tracking forms for our review.

C.9.2 Findings

Central Office initiated a process where all case manager needs in this area must be handled through the Help Desk in Carson City. When the case manager registers a need, a form is completed by the Help Desk staff person. The case manager receives an incident number via e-mail for future reference. The Help Desk forwards the incident to the most appropriate person that can handle the request. When the incident is concluded, the disposition is also e-mailed to the case manager.

During our interviews with local office staff, some interviewees noted they directly call a person they know in Central Office and get immediate results, while others were required to follow the Help Desk process. Staff that use this work-around commented they take this course of action because they feel the Help Desk takes too long to respond. This approach appears to be a way for case managers to get their needs met in a more timely manner.

Our review of the Help Desk logs, as well as those situations listed in the preceding paragraph, reveals these calls are for services that case managers or supervisors could solve much faster at the local level if trained and empowered. Example: Case merging appears to be one of the most frequent requested actions of the Help Desk and most timely to be resolved. Before case work can be initiated, these cases must be merged.

Also, it appears many corrections require a programmer to move data or release case actions, which may take programmer time away from more important activities.

Other types of frequent requests include financial requests for refunds, moving balances, and how to perform basic screen operations in NOMADS.

Our recommendations for the Help Desk are found in the Effectiveness of Operations Section D.9.2.3 of this report

C.9.3 Benefits

Training field staff to perform the more routine and mundane case data fixes will enable programmers to work on enhancing NOMADS to the benefit of all staff statewide.

C.10 EMPLOYERS

C.10.1 Background

We recognize employers as important customers of the Child Support Enforcement program, as well as a partner, and they play an increasingly integral role in the program's success. Employers' roles include:

- Reporting of new hires
- Withholding and submitting child support and premium payments under income withholding orders and National Medical Support Notices
- Assisting in the enrollment of children in health insurance

It is important to acknowledge the role employers play in the success of the program. One of the primary ways to acknowledge the importance of employers is to ease the burdens placed upon them, by providing them with more options to submit and receive information.

We reviewed the relationship between employers and the CSEP with interviews of child support staff at all levels.

C.10.2 Findings

Finding: More Emphasis on Employer Relations is Needed

Finding: More can be Done to Ease Employers' Burdens

Central Office and the counties need more focus on employer relations. There appears to be confusion with whom has the responsibility for outreach services. The cooperative agreement places the responsibility on Central Office, but county administrators do recognize that outreach is indeed a joint effort. CSEP involvement with employer organizations is lacking. Offices will provide a representative to speak to employer groups if requested from an employer, but otherwise no special emphasis has been placed on employer relations.

We received no positive responses for employer brochures being available at the front reception areas while conducting field visits.

Information is available to employers through Central Office's Web site. However, in addition to using Web sites to provide relevant information to employers (forms, resources, and references), a number of states are using Web sites to provide "interactive" components for employers. More detail is provided in *Section D.7* regarding findings relating to employers and the Web site.

Employers can access the VRU and proceed through a menu designed for them. They must listen to the six options before proceeding with their needs.

Best Practice – California (CA 05)

California reaches out to the California Chamber of Commerce and other state agencies to promote employer/IV-D program understanding and to address issues that the employer community may have.

C.10.3 Recommendations

C.10.3.1 Recommendation: Strengthen Relationship with Employers

CSEP needs to use outreach to get child support information to the employer community. Outreach can be accomplished in a variety of ways including mass mailings to employers or employer groups, coordination with state and local

chambers of commerce or other state agencies who have employers as their customers.

C.10.3.2 Recommendation: Ease Employer Burden

We recommend DWSS consider enhancing the state's Web site to provide additional options for employers. More detail is provided in *Section D.7* regarding recommendations relating to employers and the Web site.

We recommend that DWSS establish a toll-free number for employers into the VRU, minimizing the number of options to access employer functions. In addition, employers should have an option to access a live customer service agent quickly.

More information regarding employers can be found in the Effectiveness of Operations *Section D.3*.

C.10.4 Benefits

State child support programs benefit by recognizing the importance of the role employers play in reporting new hires, withholding and submitting support and premium payments and assisting in the enrollment of children in health insurance.

Supporting employers to meet their various requirements leads to increased compliance and benefits the Child Support Enforcement program and its customers. In addition, medical support enforcement adds to the cost savings for DWSS Medicaid program expenditures through cost avoidance.

C.11 DWSS AND COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY COMMENTS

C.11.1 Carson City District Attorney²

We are firm in our position that regionalization will limit access for rural customers and are surprised at the recommendation due to the emphasis that MAXIMUS places on customer service. Limiting access to the system for anyone is contrary to why we are here. Many customers prefer to communicate with their case manager face to face and we have found that it does facilitate the process. Regionalization would certainly cause a hardship for rural customers.

Many of the recommendations made in the area of Customer Service are useful, and some of the suggestions are already in place, such as using standardized forms when possible. The counties do use the federal forms and others when possible, but the child support offices are not the sole determinants of the forms that will be used. Many forms are demanded by the judicial system and those requirements vary from one judicial district to the next. We do not believe that the application form should have been standardized. Central Office changed the application form to fit the IV-A program, and in so doing, deleted much information that was/is needed by the Child Support Offices to establish and begin working a case. The differences in requirements within the state make it impractical to have all the forms standardized and the state must consider the needs of and take input from local offices when creating or changing forms. The difference between the State's employer verification and Carson City District Attorney's Office employer verification is significant. The DA's form requests much more detailed information which expedites the compilation of information for the case manager. The State's verification form is deficient.

Stricter time limits developed by the State for customer service standards are sure to fail until a more user friendly technological system is developed for the child support program. It takes time to respond to questions and requests using the NOMADS system.

The District Attorney's staff understands their customer service duties however, there seems to be some confusion within the state staff. At times the Central Office customer service personnel provided incorrect information to the public which creates a conflict when the District Attorney Child Support Staff gives a different answer to an often hostile client. Part of the problem is that the State staff does not take time to read the case before they answer the client's question. Therefore, to provide the most efficient and useful customer service for clients, it would be counterproductive to have a statewide Customer Service program.

C.11.2 Churchill County District Attorney³

Mineral County's District Attorney Cheri Emm-Smith addresses some major concerns in her November 9 response to the MAXIMUS Audit. These concerns, both on the effect of further limiting services to our smaller communities and restricting the due process and legal rights of our constituents, should be taken very seriously. District Attorney Emm-Smith hit the nail on the head when she stated that rural services provide more satisfactory client service due to the smaller communities to which they provide services. Churchill County agrees that, due to the fact that the people we are serving are our constituents, but they are also our neighbors and our co-workers and people we see in the community every day. It is axiomatic that they receive timely, dignified and conscientious service.

C.11.3 Clark County Family Support Division⁴

There are multiple errors in the section of the report dealing with the VRU in Clark County. First, the statement that calls are "seamlessly routed" to the State VRU is inaccurate. Calls to Clark County are answered by Clark County personnel. They are provided with a PIN if they do not already have one and are then passed to the VRU which matches the PIN with the caseworker. The connection from Clark County to the State VRU bypasses all the non-IVD prompts that exist for all other callers to State Welfare. The caller then has options at the VRU to obtain system information about their case or can "push off" to the Clark County office. The caller is given an option of either leaving a voice message for the case manager or pushing a button to speak to a live person if the phone is not answered. The only time the caller is not given either option is if the case manager is on a regularly scheduled day off, in which case the caller is provided with the days of the week that the case manager is available. Therefore, the diagram of calls originating from Clark County is also in error. The fact that the caller has the option of leaving a voice message or talking to a live person in Clark County breaks the "reoccurring loop" reference. **MAXIMUS NOTE:** *This factual information has been corrected.*

The discussion concerning the fact that caseloads are out of balance in Washoe and Clark Counties failed to mention the fact that NOMADS only allows for caseloads to be assigned one way: alphabetical. Caseloads cannot be distributed to enforcement

workers in a manner different than distributed to paternity or order establishment workers. Moreover, while we are sympathetic to establishing uniform caseload measures so that equivalent FTEs can be established throughout the State, consideration must be given to the fact that Washoe and Clark Counties provide many "statewide" services (e.g., both counties make training resources – a state function – available to rural counties. Clark County I.T. developed a Born Out of Wedlock automation routine two years ago when all jurisdictions in the State reviewed our BOW indicators. This automation routine was used by everyone except Washoe County to update NOMADS. Clark and Washoe counties are currently moving forward on GUI front end screens for NOMADS which will be available throughout the State for use by all workers). Including these personnel, who would be considered "Central Office Support" personnel in any other state, in the local office FTE count would be unfair. I assume that these personnel are the ones that the statement "Clark and Washoe also have employees not performing case work at all and not doing child support work but are in their FTE count" is addressed to. If this statement is taken at face value, however, it simply is not true and we would like to know the identify of any person who is drawing child support salary who is not engaged in child support work so that appropriate actions can be taken.

Section C.6.3 discusses the issue of complaint and inquiry logs. Although Clark does not keep a log of customer inquiries, we do have a customer complaint log. All complaints – regardless of the source (web, phone, in person or by mail) are logged and routed to the appropriate personnel for resolution in accordance with written procedures. **MAXIMUS NOTE:** *This factual information has been corrected.*

C.11.4Humboldt County District Attorney⁵

Complaints regarding the automated systems are numerous. Clients do not like dealing with JP Morgan for their debit card issues. Clients do not like automated phone systems that often times require at least a 5 minute wait for services and sometimes only to be provided inaccurate information or no information.

Child Support Enforcement is a very personal and emotional issue for our clients. Subjecting these parents to a cold, insensitive and inhuman automated phone system bolsters the argument that government services are uncaring, insensitive and employee policy driven bureaucrats.

C.11.5Lyon County District Attorney⁶

Our caseworkers provide hands on assistance to help in resolving issues and doing appropriate paperwork to successfully complete the case. Our updated phone system provides the ability for the customer to communicate with their caseworkers and the ability to leave a message on voice mail. Our office has a minimum of 40-50 calls per day. Our office policy is to return phone calls in a 24 hour turn around. Our receptionist helps the client at the counter and on the phone.

Lyon County also offers a web site with updated information for the clients use. Lyon County receives several calls a week from frustrated clients living in other larger jurisdictions that cannot reach their caseworker or receive necessary information regarding child support as their communication efforts reverts to a machine.

Automation has not shown to be the solution to communication problems. The socio-economic situations many of the clients find themselves in does not allow for easy telephone or computer access.

C.11.6 Mineral County District Attorney⁷

I am not surprised that the rural offices provide more satisfactory client services due to the smaller communities to which we provide services. This is common and unique for rural Nevada due to our constituents also being our neighbors and coworkers.

C.11.7 Pershing County District Attorney⁸

Oftentimes we are given compliments regarding the fact that our clients are actually able to speak to a human being rather than a machine. They often express frustration with automated systems especially California's where it can be virtually impossible to contact a person regarding a case (even as caseworker's we experience this frustration). Automated response units simply are not customer friendly and would serve to reduce our customer satisfaction rather than enhance it.

C.11.8 Washoe County District Attorney⁹

The most glaring factual error noted in this report is "Clark and Washoe also have FTEs not performing casework at all and not doing child support work but are in their FTE count." All 63 Washoe County District Attorney Family Support staff members are dedicated to full-time child support work. While they may not all be assigned a caseload and "performing casework," they are all doing child support work related to the IV-D program. *MAXIMUS NOTE: This incorrect factual information has been deleted.*

"Since Washoe County elected to link their VRU with Central Office VRU this past February, an unintended negative consequence has been the influx of callers to the direct Washoe County Courthouse phone line. This practice is upsetting to the court staff and creating a minor hostility towards the child support agency." We are unaware of any calls that have been received directly by courthouse staff as a result of the VRU and are unaware of any hostility between courthouse staff and the child support agency. Accordingly, we question this factual finding. However, we would note that there have been calls received by the "main" District Attorney's Office phone number that have been received by receptionists and forwarded to the appropriate child support worker. We are unaware, however, of any hostility this has created and question the factual finding in this regard.

The report states that the main child support lobby happens to be on the same floor as the court's lobby. This is factually incorrect. The main child support lobby is located on the 4th floor of the Mills B. Lane Justice Center and is co-located with other D.A. Departments, such as Victim Witness Assistance Center, Fraudulent Check Department, Discovery and Warrants Division. There is no court staff on this floor. In addition, the report states that there are only a few chairs when in reality there are over 20 chairs available. Washoe also has five interview rooms- each with their own computer. The report indicates Washoe only has a "few." It should also be noted that access to the 4th floor, which is the only public floor for the D.A.'s office, is not

limited via controls on the elevator. Only the non-public floors from 5-8 are subject to such controls. **MAXIMUS NOTE:** *This factual information has been corrected.*

Incorrect spelling of interviewed staff – Janet Oneirie should be Janet O'Neill; Kashe Filmer should be Kathi Filmer; Stephanie Grimiun should be Stephanie Grimm; Darina Bennett should be Drina Bennett. **MAXIMUS NOTE:** *The spelling of these individuals' names have been corrected in Appendix A.*

C.11.9DWSS Comments¹⁰

C.1 Background for Customer Service Study. The DWSS has no comment.

C.2 METHODOLOGY. The DWSS has no comment.

C.2.1 Staff Interviews. The DWSS has no comment.

C.2.2 Customer Interviews. The five interviews conducted with external customers is an inadequate sampling.

C.2.3 Customer Surveys. The DWSS was also disappointed in the low response to the surveys. It should be noted that many of the undeliverable mailings were returned due to failure of the contractor to utilize the full address provided by DWSS.

C.2.4 Requests for Documentation. The statement "NOMADS is not able to produce management reports with the details necessary to provide effective management..." is inaccurate. NOMADS is able to produce management reports, but it is not "coded" to produce management reports with details.

C.3 CUSTOMER SERVICE DELIVERY

C.3.3 Recommendations

C.3.3.1 Recommendation: Establish Standards Regarding the Method and Timeliness of Contacts with Customers, and Monitor Compliance to Those Standards.

The DWSS agrees standards for customer service should be established. DWSS currently employs the Management Evaluation process by which shortcomings can be identified and rectified.

C.3.3.2 Recommendation. Streamline Mail Handling. The DWSS agrees with these recommendations, contingent upon adequate funding and resources.

C.3.3.3 Recommendation: Consider Providing an Enhanced E-Mail Option as a Method for Communication Between Case Managers and Customers. The DWSS agrees with this recommendation, but recognizes the need for adequate staff to be responsive to this method of communication. The lack of adequate staff to man this process could result in customer frustration and dissatisfaction.

C.4 VOICE RESPONSE UNIT (VRU)

C.4.2 Findings. It is represented the CSU offers preference to public assistance customers. There is no distinction between child support or public assistance customers. Callers are served on a first come, first served basis. Additionally, it should be noted child support piloted the CSU and public assistance was added in March 2004.

C.4.3 Recommendations

C.4.3.1 (a-h) Recommendation: Improve the Existing VRU. DWSS generally agrees with the recommendations, contingent upon the availability of funding and required staff and equipment.

C.5 CUSTOMER SERVICE CULTURE.

C.5.2 Findings

C.5.2.1 Finding: There is a Lack of Knowledge About Central Office's and Local Offices' Duties in Regards to Customer Service. The Central Office Customer Service Representatives are able to transfer a customer to their child support caseworker. However, they are precluded from doing so based on business rules established by the county IV-D offices.

C.5.3 Recommendations

C.5.3.1 Recommendation: Creation of a Statewide Customer Service Committee and Plan. The DWSS agrees with the recommendation but believes it can be addressed through the current IV-D Planning Committee rather than creating a new committee.

C.5.3.2 Recommendation: Include Customer Service Delivery Goals and Objectives as Part of Case Managers' Annual Personnel Evaluations. The DWSS agrees with the concept, however, application of this practice is contingent upon "Statization" or voluntary compliance by IV-D partners.

C.5.3.3 Recommendation: Solicit Feedback from External Customers. The DWSS agrees with this recommendation and is currently expanding its Management Evaluation Reviews to include surveys of internal and external customers.

C.5.3.4 Recommendation: Establish an Equitable Distribution of Cases. The DWSS agrees with the recommendation. DWSS presented a draft time study to assist in determining a staffing standard which is currently under discussion with the county IV-D staff.

C.5.3.5 Recommendation: Change in Paradigm of Case Ownership. The DWSS agrees with the need for cultural change and has already initiated conversations with IV-D participants advancing the concept of shared case responsibility.

C.5.3.6 Recommendation: Consideration Should be Given to Customer Service Needs in Future Office Space Planning. The DWSS agrees future building plans must meet future customer needs and security. However, this is contingent upon adequate funding and resources.

C.5.3.7 Recommendation: Adoption of a Proactive Approach Towards Customer Service. The DWSS agrees with these recommendations, contingent upon adequate funding and resources.

C.5.3.9 Recommendation: Provide Specialized Customer Service Training. The DWSS agrees with these recommendations, contingent upon adequate funding and resources.

C.6 COMPLAINTS

C.6.3 Recommendations

C.6.3.1 Recommendation: Implement and Monitor the Formal Procedure for Handling Complaints. The DWSS agrees to work with IV-D partners to develop forms, methods for tracking complaints, and amend policy as necessary.

C.7 WEB SITE

C.7.3 Recommendations

C.7.3.1 (a-h) Recommendation: Enhance Central Office's Web Site for Case Participants and Employers. The DWSS agrees with the recommendation, contingent upon the availability of adequate staff, funding and required resources. In addition, there may be automation security issues which must be overcome.

C.8 DOCUMENTS: FORMS, CORRESPONDENCE, AND LITERATURE

C.8.3.1 (a-c) Recommendation: Improve the Readability and Clarity of Customer Forms and Correspondence. The DWSS agrees with the recommendation and is currently developing and piloting a Central Document Management System (CDMS) which is expected to promote the standardization and improved readability of forms.

C.8.3.2 Recommendation: Standardized Forms Should be Used by all Offices, When Possible. The DWSS agrees with the recommendation and is currently developing and piloting a Central Document Management System (CDMS) which is expected to promote the standardization and improved readability of forms.

C.8.3.3 (a-b) Recommendation: Improve the Readability and Clarity of Customer Literature. The DWSS agrees with this recommendation.

C.8.3.4 Recommendation: Develop an Outreach Plan. The DWSS agrees with these recommendations, contingent upon adequate funding and resources.

C.8.3.5 Recommendation: Assign Responsibility for Development of Outreach Materials to the DWSS Central Office. The DWSS currently develops various outreach literature appropriate for statewide distribution. The DWSS agrees to review the literature for possible expansion contingent upon adequate funding and resources.

C.8.3.6 Recommendation: Expand the Dissemination of Brochures and Fact Sheets. The DWSS agrees with the recommendation contingent upon available funding and resources.

C.8.3.7 (a-c) Recommendation: Improve the Readability, Clarity, and Accessibility of the "Application for Child Support Services." The DWSS agrees with the recommendation contingent upon available funding and resources.

C.9 HELP DESK

C.9.3 Recommendations See responses to Section D.9.2.3.

C.10 EMPLOYERS

C.10.3 Recommendations

C.10.3.1 Recommendation: Strengthen Relationship with Employers. The DWSS agrees with this recommendation and has developed an employer outreach plan and has taken steps to implement aggressive employer outreach. DWSS agrees with the recommendation contingent upon available funding and resources.

C.10.3.2 Recommendation: Ease Employer Burden. The DWSS agrees with the recommendation contingent upon available funding and resources.

¹ Once DWSS became aware of this, the link to the Carson City DA Office was repaired as noted during Exit Conference, 10/13/06.

² Comments received from the Vicki Chittenden, CSE Supervisor/Coordinator, Carson City District Attorney, 11/17/06

³ Comments received from Arthur E. Mallory, Churchill County District Attorney, 11/16/06.

⁴ Comments directed to Ruth Hara from Robert W. Teuton, Assistant District Attorney, Office of the District Attorney, Family Support Division, 11/1/06

⁵ Comments received from David G. Allison, Humboldt County District Attorney, 11/17/06.

⁶ Comments received from Patricia Peacher, Child Support Supervisor, Lyon County District Attorney, 11/14/06.

⁷ Comments received from Cheri Emm-Smith, District Attorney, Mineral County District Attorney, 11/9/06.

⁸ Comments received from Rita D. Fowler, Deputy District Attorney, Pershing County District Attorney, 11/17/06.

⁹ Comments received from Susan Hallahan, Chief Deputy District Attorney, and Lori Garcia, Program Manager, Family Support Division, Washoe County District Attorney, 10/30/06.

¹⁰ Comments received from Nancy K. Ford, DWSS Administrator, Division of Welfare and Supportive Services, 11/17/06.