

## DHHS/DEHS – Bureau of Child Support Services

### REPORT ON PERFORMANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY RELATED TO COVID-19

May, 2020

The Child Support program encourages responsible parenting, family self-sufficiency, and child well-being by providing assistance in locating parents, establishing paternity, establishing, modifying and enforcing support obligations and obtaining child and medical support for children. The program seeks to achieve positive outcomes for children by addressing the needs and responsibilities of parents.

Since February 2020, DHHS has been actively responding to the COVID-19 crisis, including planning and preparations to address the health and safety of our citizens and DHHS staff. As the situation rapidly unfolded, so did our business methods to secure continuity of operations.

The purpose of this report is to provide a snapshot of Child Support Services productivity before and during the COVID-19 crisis, and to provide a vision of operations post-COVID-19, and our request for approval for implementation of that model.

#### PRE-COVID-19

The following accounts for the means by which BCSS has historically measured performance and productivity.

##### **Federal Performance Measures**

Child Support programs are administered in every state in the U.S. and governed by federal law and regulations. Each program is measured annually and reports its performance to the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) towards meeting certain goals and standards. Meeting and exceeding standards qualifies the Bureau of Child Support Services (BCSS) to receive financial incentive awards. Underperformance places BCSS at risk of fiscal penalties and loss of federal funding. Key performance indicators (KPIs) are (1) paternity establishment, (2) support order establishment; (3) collections on current support owed; (4) collections on support arrearages; and (5) cost effectiveness.

##### **Self-Assessment**

States are required to perform annual assessments of their child support programs and to submit the results of these assessments and corrective action plans to OCSE annually (due by 3/31 of each year).

##### **Federal Audits**

###### Data Reliability Audit

Section 452(a)(4)(C)(i) of the Social Security Act requires OCSE's Office of Audit to conduct audits at least once every three years to determine the reliability of performance standards. The Office of Audit evaluates the completeness, reliability, and security of performance indicator data reported by the states and the accuracy of the reporting systems used in calculating the performance indicators.

### IRS Safeguard Audit

BCSS receives Federal Tax Information directly from the IRS and from secondary sources (e.g., Social Security Administration [SSA]). Pursuant to IRC 6103 or by an IRS-approved exchange agreement BCSS must have adequate programs in place to protect the data received, which is subject to an IRS safeguards audit.

### Other Federal and State Audits

BCSS also is subject to other audits including Single Audits, Program Standards Audits and legislative performance audits.

### **Staff Vacancy Rate**

BCSS monitors its vacancy rate regularly which is typically around 5-6%. Resources are continuously evaluated to determine proper allocation for sufficient work productivity. Adjustments to resource allocation (reassigning existing BCSS staff resources) are made as needed.

### **Influencing Factors**

There are numerous internal and external factors that influence BCSS operations, performance and productivity. Any analysis of past, current and future productivity must take into account these factors, particularly ones that impact KPIs, yet cannot be controlled. Some examples of influencing factors in BCSS include:

- State of the economy
- Unemployment rate
- Labor market
- Stakeholder support levels
- Parent's ability to pay
- Parent's barriers to pay (e.g. unemployment, incarceration, homelessness)
- Legal obligation amounts
- Child Support Guidelines (set by law)
- State budget effects (on resources)
- BCSS impacting "seasons": emancipation, back-to-school, Christmas, seasonal employment, and federal tax filing

## DURING THE CRISIS

Starting mid-March 2020, BCSS implemented its COOP Plan to support operations, and prepared to respond to the crisis to ensure mission essential functions would continue, specifically processing of support payments to families. By Department initiative, since the week of March 23, 2020, all but 7 staff (including 1 part-time) have detached from their field or administrative offices to work remotely. Ninety-five percent (95%) of staff have been working from their homes, although all offices and units have implemented rotating "skeleton crew" coverage to process inbound and outbound mail from each location.

BCSS has experienced the following impacts and effects on its business operations and administrative functions during COVID-19. These impacts are being considered to determine its level of productivity during the crisis.

### **Federal Performance Measures and Federal Reporting**

BCSS' ability to submit all federal reports on time has been unaffected by the COVID-19 crisis. Note: OCSE authorized extensions to states for quarterly reports, which was not needed by NH. In a year-to-year comparison of January – April 2019 and 2020, federal KPIs for paternity establishment and support order establishment have increased slightly. However, collections for current due and on arrearages have declined, 67.4% to 61%, and 33.7% to 29.3% respectively.

### **Self-Assessment**

BCSS' ability to prepare and submit its annual Self-Assessment report by the 3/31/2020 due date was unaffected by the COVID-19 crisis. Note: OCSE authorized an extension to states for submitting this report, which was not needed by NH.

### **Audits**

There are no audits pending during this crisis.

### **Vacancy Rate**

BCSS is currently operating with a 6% vacancy rate, and not able to obtain waivers for recruitment at this time due to a Governor's Emergency Order. Chief of Operations and Regional Administrators conduct regular needs assessments to make any necessary changes in resource allocation. Changes have been minimal. Some staff have received temporary reassignments based on higher-than-normal work volume and resource deficiencies due to staff illnesses and quarantines.

### **Data Collection**

BCSS has been tracking certain data and information during the crisis. See attached Power Point "Child Support COVID-19 Performance and Productivity Report."

- caseload count
- applications count
- percentage of orders established
- genetic testing count
- total collections
- federal offset collections
- unemployment intercept collections
- income withholding collections
- income withholding count
- modification requests count

Analysis: By year-to-year comparisons of January – April, 2019 and 2020, caseload and applications for services have declined. The primary cause to the decline is believed to be the reduction of Medicaid Referrals since a policy change was made in June 2019. Otherwise, trends are consistent. BCSS' ability to establish support orders appears unaffected. Genetic testing has been suspended during the COVID-19 crisis to protect the health and safety of customers and staff. Thus the number of tests has declined in March and April 2020. Total collections appear consistent with a slight increase in 2020 over 2019 for the months of January – March. However, April shows a decline in collections, likely the result of fewer income withholding orders in place. Collections from Unemployment Intercepts (UI) has increased 721% in April 2020 over April 2019, and a 606% increase from March to April 2020 alone. Despite this significant increase

in UI, the dollar amounts collected by UI are typically a fraction of the Monthly Support Obligations owed. BCSS has anticipated an increase in requests for modification of support orders, however there is no evidence at this time to support an increase in these request types, or any delay in that process with the court. Federal Tax Offset (FTO) collections typically increase during February – April, and there appears to be little difference in 2020 compared to 2019. The CARES Act Economic Impact Payment (EIP) (aka federal stimulus payment) intercepts began with FTO Cycle 15 (received the week of April 20), although these collections have decreased from March to April. FTO Cycle 16 and 17 however contain an unprecedented volume of intercepts, likely the result of the EIP. As such, it is anticipated that the volume of collections from FTO in May will be higher than usual.

## **Productivity**

BCSS has reviewed and analyzed the status and circumstances of all administrative and operational functions of the agency during the COVID-19 crisis.

### ➤ **OPERATIONS**

- Central Information Unit services uninterrupted
  - intake volume of calls and emails increased
  - most common inquiry topics: customers reporting inability to pay (paying parents) and no support being received (receiving parents)
  - volume of Governor, Commissioner and Legislative inquiries unchanged
  - unprecedented volume of Unemployment Intercepts being processed
- Mission Essential Functions uninterrupted
  - Payment Processing
  - Order Enforcement
- All Child Support Services uninterrupted, except for 3 areas:
  - Genetic Testing
  - Civil Contempt (NH Judicial Branch officially suspended this activity)
  - BCSS Prison Outreach program – presentations and inmate meetings at prison facilities suspended
- All Intergovernmental operations (Initiating and Responding) uninterrupted
  - Note: some other states and countries experiencing delays in processing
- Processing and filing legal petitions and legal activities uninterrupted
  - Court hearings rescheduled by the court to telephonic hearings

### ➤ **ADMINISTRATION**

- Child Support Information Systems (CSIS) enhancements and promotions uninterrupted
- NECSES Help Desk services uninterrupted
- All systems interfaces uninterrupted
- All stakeholder interfaces uninterrupted
- State Disbursement Unit services uninterrupted
- Pending audits completed
- Federal reporting uninterrupted
- Processing Affidavits of Paternity and Putative Father Claims uninterrupted
- Policy development uninterrupted
  - Unprecedented volume of quality Policy developments and releases produced very quickly.

- Training and field office support (coverage) uninterrupted
- Contracts processing uninterrupted, including
  - procurement activities
  - invoices for contracted services

➤ **ANECDOTES**

- Supervisor experiences (unedited comments excepted where noted in “[ ]”)
  - Just a comment that if everything out in the world (courts, businesses) were operating normally, this would be working great. I think we should keep the telework option even after the crisis is resolved.
  - The overall routine of the office has not been affected, we are still handling everything that needs to be done in a timely manner. We have put new processes in place and it is all working well.
  - The only one area that has been altered is the remote worker is printing in the office and office staff is mailing those documents for them. The remote worker stays in contact with the office if there is something they would like handled differently which is working very well.
  - Yes and No. It's been smoother supervising without all staff being at the office together. I do not hear the complaining or he said/she said stuff now that they cannot see or assume what the other is doing. Keeping in touch with staff daily is needed and we have cut down our Zoom meetings to be once weekly for now. We were doing Mon, Wed and Friday prior. Patience is essential and trusting staff to do what is asked of them is as well. I am scheduling individual Zooms for staff yearly evals to keep the process as personal as possible.
  - I have staff who have ongoing health issues but the flexibility allowed by telework have enabled them to be more productive from home.
- Staff experiences (unedited comments excepted where noted in “[ ]”)
  - The ability to be trusted I can still do the job and do it correctly.
  - I really appreciate all the accommodations that have allowed me to work from home. I appreciate the frequent updates about policy changes. I don't have any specific ideas at this time. Thank you again and keep up the great work.
  - BCSS has done a wonderful job equipping us with this technology. [S]hows us that a lot of jobs can be performed mobile.
  - BCSS is [d]oing a great job on providing our service to our clients.
  - I also REALLY think doing centralized mail processing as I stated above would be super helpful.
  - I feel that the communication has been good. I feel that we're all doing the best we can with what we have. Honestly, even with the stressful situation in the world, I don't mind working from home and feel more productive without constant interruptions.
  - [I recommend] Using some of the new telework practices as a foundation for providing ongoing remote support to staff and customers in the future.
  - Working remotely is convenient and I'm feeling more productive.
  - I don't believe [customers] even know for the most part that we are not in the office...Since they are getting mailings and calls back as per usual.

*Indications that teleworking is not for everyone, or a balance is needed:*

- I miss the camaraderie of being together in one office
- I feel less productive and unable to really focus being at home.
- I'm having difficulty with the work/life balance being at home.

- Customer experiences
  - I have had multiple clients express that they are surprised and thankful that we are still open and responding to their questions so quickly.
  - I have had a couple obligor clients in establishment that started conversations defensively, particularly because they are out of work and money was a sensitive subject. They very quickly turned to appreciation when they found out what we are able to do in establishment.
  - I have heard positive comments about call back times.
  - We were quite surprised at the number of people who called in for their establishment hearings today (most called in, as opposed to 50% showing up at court – we think that the phone hearings have better attendance because they take less time than showing up in person).
  - I have heard from Marlene and she said that there have been more showings for telephonic hearings than if they were to show in person.
  - Regarding establishment, from my conversations with customers the feedback regarding delays in process of Paternity Testing has been very understanding and accepting. They know this is beyond our control.
  - I get some people, both [receiving parents] and [paying parents], who are appreciative of the help that I am able to give them, whether it's explaining a notice, or giving them the number to get a new debit card. Some are in general happy that we are still open and working during this time, and they have thanked me for doing so.
  - I would say generally good comments and appreciative of providing info about other possible services that could help the person's family.
  - I have had positive feedback customers appreciate our being available & thanks for your service.
  - I'm not getting a ton of calls, but I'm able to help the people with whom I'm talking. They seem to appreciate what I'm able to do for them. Most of them understand our limitations at this time. I helped a payor yesterday by getting his interception refunded back to him, and he was exceptionally happy with my assistance.

➤ **OTHER PRODUCTIVITY MEASURES**

- The BCSS Central Information Unit (CIU) provides administrative support, field assistance, direct customer service and point of contact services for stakeholders. The volume of customer calls and e-mail activity processed by the CIU January – April 2020 increased 8.7% over 2019. This is indicative of the Bureau's ability to continue serving its customers during this crisis.
- Since March 17, 2020, staff have received, reviewed and applied:
  - 12 new resource guides (plus 5 additional guides for managers)
  - 17 new customer resources
  - 18 new HR policies
  - 14 new BCSS policy and procedural documents

## POST COVID-19 VISION

Information and data BCSS has gathered during the COVID-19 crisis demonstrates that BCSS has been successfully productive and capable of conducting business effectively and efficiently in a remote work environment. The majority of staff have expressed that teleworking has been a

very positive experience for them. Numerous staff claim improvements in their work ability, increase trust with supervisors, improvements to their health (some very significantly) and less stress. Their claims are supported by supervisor's evaluations and consistent monitoring of their productivity and needs.

Staff also report that the flexibility allowed in teleworking during this crisis has enabled them to find new opportunities to engage with customers after hours, which we have not tested before in any controlled environment. Customers have stated this has been very helpful for them in light of their own time restrictions, not being able to talk with us during the work day. In addition, the BCSS Interstate Unit staff report this flexibility has also allowed greater communication with other Child Support agencies and with customers who reside in other states or countries in different time zones.

The ability to continue telework for staff is also expected to improve productivity during days of inclement weather, particularly in the winter months, when advisories are issued against traveling on roadways. The ability to telework would reduce the number of hours taken for leave time and loss of productivity due to bad weather. Administrative managers who have been teleworking for several years report this as being an extremely useful benefit.

We propose that the agency be permitted to continue supporting staff who remain interested in working remotely after the COVID-19 crisis has either ended or evolves to a lesser degree.

Preliminarily, and if this proposal is approved, the BCSS Management Team will initiate planning its Post-COVID vision. Several business areas can be evaluated for evolution based on HR policies, stakeholder input, lessons learned, compelling data and national best practices in Child Support Programs.

### **Telework Practices**

- Develop supervisor guidelines for remote work candidates
  - Apply existing DHHS Telework Manual
  - Apply current IRS Safeguard Requirements for remote work
  - Develop multi-directional Communication Plan
  - Include considerations for position, seniority, skill, ability, performance and exclusions
  - Include instructions and tips for managing task assignments and coverage
  - Include expectations regarding performance evaluations
  - Include instructions for maintaining office configurations
- Identify and capitalize on tools, education and training designed for telework environments, including:
  - new methods of knowledge sharing in a telework environment
  - administration and management tools, including NECSES Business Intelligence Tool and Enterprise Content Management (OnBase) manager tools

### **Business Processes**

BCSS will conduct strategic planning that would create greater efficiencies for staff and customers. Strategies will be incorporated into the BCSS 5-Year Strategic Plan 2020-2024, as amended. All planning will include evaluations of resources and expenditures in light of anticipated budget reductions, as well as relative stakeholder input.

- Identify and prioritize best use of Child Support Incentive funds over next 2 bienniums
  - Systems development
  - Procurements
- Develop new business processes/tools exclusively using electronic methods
  - online application for services
  - e-filing liens
  - ability to include attachments to customer and employer portals emails
- Promote services that prevent child support arrearages from building
  - Support order modifications
  - Debt reduction program
- Promote business services already using electronic methods
  - e-Income Withholding Orders
  - Customer and employer self-service
- Prepare for anticipated post-COVID needs and demands from customers and staff, and determine necessary resource allocation
  - Increase in support order modification requests
  - Increase need for employment services
  - Increase in TANF referrals
  - Increase in Foster Care referrals