

established; all children in IV-D cases to have financial and medical orders; and all children in IV-D cases to receive financial and medical support. For FY 2004, we are looking for projects in which a variety of partners, which may include community and faith-based organizations, collaborate as appropriate. Applications will be screened and evaluated as indicated in this program announcement. Awards will be contingent on the outcomes of the competition and the availability of funds. For FY 2004, approximately \$1.5 million is available for all priority areas. A non-Federal match is not required. The anticipated start date for the new awards is May 1, 2004; projects may go through September 30, 2005, for a period of up to 17 months.

I. Funding Opportunity Description

Legislative Authority. Section 452(j) of the Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. 652(j), provides Federal funds for information dissemination and technical assistance to States, and training of Federal and State staff to improve child support programs and research and demonstration programs and special projects of regional or national significance relating to the operation of State child support enforcement programs.

Program Purpose and Objectives. To fund a number of special improvement projects which further the national child support mission to ensure that all children receive financial and medical support from their parents and which strengthens the ability of the nation's child support program to collect support on behalf of children and families. For FY 2004, we are looking for innovative projects to improve child support program performance and in which new partners collaborate so we can produce greater impacts on child support outcomes (e.g., increasing the establishment of child support orders and child support collections). We invite partnerships, such as courts/tribunals and community- and faith-based organizations, that can address the needs of harder-to-serve populations, such as low-income non-custodial fathers and culturally diverse populations to apply for these projects.

Applicants should understand that OCSE will not award grants for special improvement projects which (a) Duplicate automated data processing and information retrieval system requirements/enhancements and associated tasks which are specified in the Social Security Act; or (b) which cover costs for routine activities which would normally be reimbursed under the Child Support Program (e.g. adding

staff positions to perform routine CSE tasks), or by other Federal funding sources. Proposals and their accompanying budgets will be reviewed from this perspective.

Priority Areas:

Priority Area 1: Improving the Judicial/Administrative Processing of Child Support Enforcement Case Activities

OCSE is looking for projects that would expedite and facilitate courts'/tribunals' processing of child support case actions. In many states, courts/tribunals play a key role in establishing, modifying, or enforcing child support orders. In these jurisdictions, courts/tribunals may find that current rules, practices, or procedures create obstacles to more timely and equitable processing of child support cases. For example, courts/tribunals may require the physical presence of the parents at hearings; may accept only an official employer/corporate verification of earnings statements as evidence of income; or require a formal hearing or otherwise impose procedural obstacles to allowing deviations from guidelines to determine support orders. Under this solicitation, we are looking for projects that would address at least one of the following design elements:

- Design and implement new practices or procedures that enable courts/tribunals to remove barriers to participation in Title IV-D child support proceedings such as requiring the physical presence of the parents at hearings and other legal proceedings. Projects would demonstrate the effectiveness of using more flexible approaches, such as allowing telephone or videoconference hearings when it is difficult for a parent to personally attend a hearing due to distance, health, or other reasons. Projects might show how courts/tribunals can overcome legal and other obstacles to holding telephone hearings, using facsimile machines to transmit evidence, etc., and how other jurisdictions can adapt similar procedures. Possible outcomes include improved customer service; timelier case processing; reduction in continuances, default orders, and use of imputed income; increased collections; and reduction in arrears, especially in interstate cases.

- Develop and implement procedures that could demonstrate the effectiveness of courts' use of Federal or State-certified information from the Federal or State Parent Locator Services (FPLS/SPLS) in Title IV-D cases, including New Hire information, to establish or modify child support orders. These projects would show how courts/

tribunals that allow use of SPLS/FPLS data certified by a child support agency, rather than by an employer, overcome evidentiary or other obstacles to the use of such data. The projects should be designed to assist courts/tribunals or other relevant decision makers to develop and/or implement changes necessary to promote the effective and efficient use of FPLS/SPLS information in the establishment or modification of orders. The projects should show how removing obstacles, such as the requirement of employer/corporate verification of earnings, would lead to improved program performance or customer service, including expedited establishment/modification of child support orders; increased number of orders established; reduced use of imputed income; decreased accrual of arrears; increased collections; and/or increased cost-effectiveness.

- Develop and implement revised criteria, as established by the State, and guidance allowing judicial or administrative personnel greater authority to deviate from State child support order guidelines without a hearing. Projects would demonstrate the benefits of having greater discretionary guidance in this area. For example, such discretion may be warranted when application of the guidelines is considered unjust or inappropriate, such as in cases involving excessive health care costs, child care or education costs or multiple non-custodial parent families. These projects should be designed to assist other jurisdictions to adapt similar discretionary guidance and categories and to show that providing this type of discretion would improve program performance or customer service, including expedited case processing, increased collections, reduction of arrears and/or increased cost-effectiveness. Proposals must be consistent with section 467 of the Social Security Act which governs the application of State child support guidelines.

Funding: A total \$200,000 is anticipated to be available for projects in this priority area and OCSE anticipates funding two grants of approximately \$100,000 each.

Budget Period: For Priority Area 1, the budget period will be up to 17 months.

Priority Area 2: Educating Public on Parental Responsibilities and Promoting Healthy Marriage

The purpose of this solicitation is to educate the public about child support enforcement tools and parental obligations with the aim of increasing paternity establishment, child support