



HB25-1159 Child Support Commission Recommendations

Background

The Colorado Department of Human Services's (CDHS) Division of Child Support Services (DCSS) is responsible for supervising the Child Support Services (CSS) program which works to ensure that all children receive financial/medical support from each parent by locating those parents, establishing paternity, establishing & enforcing child support orders, and connecting parents to resources to help them overcome barriers impeding their ability to pay child support. The CSS program is administered by counties and serves approximately 124,700 families across Colorado, collecting more than \$213 million for children annually.

Colorado's child support guidelines are the basis for calculating child support orders. The Colorado Child Support Commission is statutorily charged with reviewing the child support guidelines every four years and making formal recommendations for improvement and updates. In its 2023 quadrennial report, the Commission recommended substantive changes to the child support guidelines, including updating the costs of raising a child in Colorado from 2010 costs to 2023 costs, right-sizing child support orders for low-income parents, and accounting for all the overnights a child spends with a parent.

Issue

Colorado's child support guidelines do not reflect the present-day needs or realities of Colorado families. The child support guidelines include a complex calculation looking at factors like income, housing/rent, childcare, healthcare, and other costs of raising a child. The current calculation is based on 2010 cost estimates and doesn't consider that the cost of living has increased 40% since then. Adjustments meant to support low-income parents also haven't changed as the minimum wage has gone up, and the way parenting time is counted doesn't match many real-life schedules. Statutory changes are required to update the guidelines to meet current needs and resources are needed to make corresponding changes in the Automated Child Support Enforcement System (ACSES) used by county child support professionals across Colorado.

Proposed Solution

The Colorado Department of Human Services recommends supporting the Commission's proposal to modernize and right-size the child support guidelines, including updating the guidelines to reflect the increased costs of raising a child and giving parents credit for all overnights they spend with their child(ren) - while ensuring parents have child support orders they are able to pay. When orders are right-sized, parents are more likely to pay child support. When parents pay child support, it decreases their risk of enforcement remedies used to collect unpaid child support and promotes increased child-parent relationships.