

Department of Human Services
Senate Human Services Committee
Senator Judy Lee, Chairman

January 22, 2019

Chairman Lee and members of the Human Services Committee, I am Jim Fleming, Director of the Child Support Division of the Department of Human Services (Department). I am here to testify regarding Senate Bill 2267.

There are many aspects to the Department's approach to customer service for parents who owe child support. The Department expects parents to take responsibility for their own obligation, rather than rely on their employer or Child Support to ensure that the parent complies with the court order. Parents need to read carefully the documents they receive from the court or from Child Support. A child's minority lasts for 216 months (longer if still in high school), and Child Support needs to manage cases patiently with a long-range plan for sustainable collections of affordable amounts. Providing too little information to parents can lead to predictable issues that take longer to fix than to avoid. Providing too much information can undermine the need for parents to monitor their own obligation, and bury important information among less-important details. A parent can also become de-sensitized if the same information is provided repeatedly. Each case is different, including whether a parent prefers to obtain information electronically or in paper, and customer service needs to be flexible to each situation.

As you might imagine, good customer service can be hard to guarantee. Child Support touches on the hot-button topics of money and children. Some parents are more inclined to understand and cooperate with Child Support, and some are convinced they will receive poor customer service before they even first contact Child Support. Child Support tries to foster an open line of communication with parents, which promotes voluntary compliance with the court order and helps Child Support respond to changes in the parent's circumstances.

Regarding Senate Bill 2267, Child Support reviewed its current practices for informing parents who owe child support about the need to pay attention to the alignment of the parent's payroll cycle with the parent's court-ordered obligation. We have [several references on our website on this topic](#) and also include such information in our promotional material for new limited service cases that are not yet being enforced by Child Support. But we can do more in full service cases where there is a new or amended child support obligation. The regional offices were given a sample notice last week and directed to provide the notice when they mail a final child support order to the parent who owes child support.

If the Committee feels Senate Bill 2267 should be enacted, considering this information, we would not oppose the bill, but would suggest an [amendment](#) to require that the information be provided directly to the parent who owes child support when a new or amended child support order is approved by the court. As introduced, the bill would apply to each income withholding order. Income withholding orders are addressed to the employer, with the parent merely receiving a copy. Also, income withholding orders are issued many times in a case as the parent changes jobs or as arrears become due or are paid off, so the notice is more likely to be overlooked because of the frequency. We suggest that such an amendment would be more successful in fulfilling the intent of SB 2267.

I hope this information is helpful, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.