

AUDIT PROPOSAL

Evaluating Whether Services to Collect Child Support Payments in Kansas are Effective and Timely

SOURCE

This audit proposal was requested by the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

BACKGROUND

Child support services help to provide financial support to children after a divorce or birth of a child. In Kansas, individuals can pursue child support services through the Department for Children and Families (DCF), the district courts, or private attorneys. Families who receive public assistance through programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or foster care are required to go through DCF. Individuals also can voluntarily seek assistance from DCF. Individuals who aren't required to or do not voluntarily use DCF services may use private attorneys or district court trustees who are appointed by a judge.

Child support services through DCF have been fully privatized since 2013. DCF is responsible for overseeing those services and doing things like developing policies, providing training, and evaluating performance metrics. However, two contracted vendors—Maximus Human Services, Inc. and YoungWilliams—provide the day-to-day child support services. For example, the contractors staff local child support offices, attend court cases, and establish, monitor, and enforce paternity and child support orders. They also provide call center services and process child support payments. Their current contracts began in October 2021.

Legislators have expressed concern that child support services in Kansas may not be effective or efficient in collecting child support payments.

AUDIT OBJECTIVES AND TENTATIVE METHODOLOGY

The audit objectives listed below are the questions we would answer through our audit work. The steps listed for each objective convey the type of work we would do. These may change as we learn more about the audit issues.

Objective 1: Is the child support services system effective in collecting child support payments? Our tentative methodology would include the following:

- Review federal and state requirements, best practices, or other sources of guidance to identify criteria for measuring the effectiveness of collections processes.
- Talk to DCF, their contractors, and court officials and review their data on things like the percentage of child support payments collected and how they were collected (e.g., wage garnishment, interstate agreements with other states, etc.) in recent years.
- Compare Kansas's data to benchmarks to determine if Kansas's collection services are effective. This would include cutting the data by provider (DCF, court trustee, or

private attorney) to see if one provider is more effective than another. It also would include cutting the data by geographic area to see if collection services are more effective in some parts of the state than others.

- Review information from DCF and the district courts about what providers people can use to pursue child support payments in different areas of the state (e.g., whether court trustees are an option across Kansas). Assess whether people have equal access to the different types of providers.
- Interview DCF, their contractors, and court officials about the reasons for any issues we identify.

Objective 2: Does the child support services system provide timely services and payments? Our tentative methodology would include the following:

- Review federal and state requirements, best practices, or other sources of guidance to identify criteria for measuring the timeliness of collections processes.
- Talk to DCF, their contractors, and court officials and review their data on how long it took them to assign workers to child support cases, establish things like paternity, and collect payments in recent years. If that data isn't available, review a sample of child support cases to identify how long these activities took.
- Compare Kansas's data to benchmarks to determine if Kansas's child support services and collections are timely. This would include cutting the data by provider and geographic area to see if there are any notable differences in timeliness.
- Survey individuals who opened child support cases to understand their experiences with the child support services system, including whether they were satisfied with the responsiveness they received and the effects of any timeliness issues.
- Interview DCF, their contractors, and court officials about the reasons for any issues we identify.

Objective 3: How does Kansas's child support services system performance compare to other states? Our tentative methodology would include the following:

- Review data from the National Conference of State Legislatures or other national sources to determine if Kansas's system is designed similarly to other states' systems. This would include whether states use judicial or administrative processes, have privatized their child support services, and provide services through multiple providers.

- For a selection of other states (some similar, some different), interview officials and review documentation to determine their performance on the effectiveness and timeliness measures we gathered for Kansas in previous objectives.
- Compare Kansas to the selection of other states to determine how Kansas's performance compares.
- Talk to DCF, the courts, and other state officials about any interesting trends or patterns in the data. Also talk to them about how their system design may affect their performance outcomes.

ESTIMATED RESOURCES

We estimate this audit would require a team of **3 auditors** for a total of **5 months** (from the time the audit starts to our best estimate of when it would be ready for the committee).