

# County-state collaboration nets \$150 million in child support

Parents enrolled the minute divorce granted

By Gabrielle Banks

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Harris County Family District Court and the state Attorney General's office teamed up to collect just over \$150.7 million in child support in 2015 through a program that pins down non-custodial parents the minute their divorces become final.

The program gets 85 percent of parents to pay what they owe. In cases that aren't part of this collaboration, 58 percent of parents who owe child support pay it. In the second group of cases, where less money gets collected, the custodial parents don't receive TANF or Medicaid.

Harris County FOCAS, which stands for Focus on Collection and Services, is a joint effort by family court, the county's Domestic Relations department and district clerk and the attorney general's office, that has been functioning for 12 years to enforce child support through paycheck withholding, federal tax intercepts, liens and contempt proceedings. As soon as a divorce is granted, the program kicks in unless the parties opt out.

IRS intercepts account for \$1.7 million of the money FOCAS has collected.

FOCAS currently has 16,780 open cases. There are 1.5 million child support cases statewide, according to Janece Rolfe, at the AG's office. Although it has been around for more than a decade, many child support cases in Harris County predate the FOCAS program.

Under FOCAS, the Harris County collaboration, parents collect a monthly average of \$766.65 per case. For those parents who aren't in the FOCAS program, the amount collected averages \$530.64.

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