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April 7, 2005

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
United States Senate
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510 – 6200

Dear Senator:

I write on behalf of the National Council of Child Support Directors (NCCSD) concerning a provision contained in Senate Bill 667, sponsored by Senator Grassley. The bill is entitled the PRIDE Act. Although our organization supports the majority of the bill's provisions, and commends the Senate for seeking to improve the lives of children and families by strengthening the child support enforcement program, we are requesting your assistance in amending Section 322 of the bill. This section allows the state of Texas, and only Texas, to monitor and enforce child support orders without the requirement of a written application for services, provided the custodial parent is given the option to decline such services. Currently a waiver must be obtained from the Secretary of Health and Human Services to deviate from the law that requires an application.

Automatically assigning a newly established child support court order to a state child support agency adds costs to the program. An Office of Management and Budget study concluded this option to be cost-prohibitive. Most recently, for Section 322 that allows Texas alone to continue this program, the Congressional Budget Office estimates the costs to be \$57 million over ten years. However, the Texas pilot project also shows this practice has a good return on investment, because it produces a higher rate of compliance with court orders, and saves costs by allowing the program to intervene early if non-compliance with an order occurs.

On the other hand, allowing one state only to have this option, and to exclude others, would give unfair advantage to that one state. The Texas child support agency's caseload would be inflated compared to other states, which would give Texas an advantage in competing for federal performance incentives, and therefore penalize all other states in their receipt of federal incentive monies. Allowing one state to bypass federal law and regulation in this manner creates a disincentive for all other states.

On behalf of the hundreds of thousands of children and families nationwide who rely on the assistance of state child support enforcement agencies, NCCSD requests your personal intervention in seeking amendment of Section 322 to allow all states this option, or to eliminate this option entirely as unfair to other states. We hope you will take whatever steps are necessary to amend or disallow this exception to federal rules.

If you wish to discuss this matter, please contact me at (404) 657-0634 or reriddle@dhr.state.ga.us. Your assistance in this matter is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Robert Riddle, President
National Council of Child Support Directors

C: NCCSD Executive Committee