



NEWS RELEASE – Aug. 5, 2004

CONTACT: Laurie Petrie, HCJFS Communications, 946-2188; petril@jfs.hamilton-co.org

Pay child support or lose driver's license

August "Amnesty Day" makes it easier to get license back

A new push to collect child support by suspending drivers' licenses has brought in more than \$1.4 million to help Hamilton County children.

From January 2003 through June 2004, the Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services (HCJFS) suspended the driver's licenses of 9,753 parents who weren't paying their court-ordered child support. About 1,450 of them paid enough to get their licenses reinstated – a total of \$1.410 million.

"We're serious about increasing child support collections for families," said HCJFS Assistant Director Moira Weir. "It's unfortunate that we have to go to these measures, but when you tell people they could lose their driver's license, they start to listen."

The county hopes an upcoming "Amnesty Day" will encourage even more parents to pay up. On Saturday, Aug. 14, the county will make it easier for non-paying parents to get their licenses back. For that day only, licenses will be reinstated for those who pay one month of child support or bring a pay stub or letter from their employer. The regular rules require parents to pay 10 percent of their total overdue child support, plus one month of current support (for immediate reinstatement) or make payments via income withholding for 30 days.

"Amnesty Day" is one way the county is observing August as Child Support Awareness Month. Parents should come to the child support cashier's office at 800 Broadway, downtown, between 8 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Aug. 14.

The county hopes the project will boost collections over the long term. By encouraging people to come forward and identify their employers, the county can order wages to be withheld for child support.

With increasing frequency, parents who owe past-due child support are coming up against rules that allow counties to use non-traditional ways of collecting support, such as suspending licenses and seizing bank accounts.

Parents who owe at least one month's worth of support receive letters warning them that the county may begin to take a variety of enforcement actions. Parents who have not made payments for at least 60 days risk losing their licenses. Parents who dispute the actions may appeal.

Hamilton County's child support agency began suspending driver's licenses of a few non-paying parents in 2002, but stepped up the practice last year. In 2003, the agency ordered the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles to suspend 5,152 licenses. Of those, 570 parents met the criteria for

license reinstatement by paying a portion of their balance or setting up wage withholding. The agency collected \$641,041. Many parents paid thousands of dollars to get their licenses back.

In 2004, through June, the agency suspended 4,839 licenses and 887 parents paid a total of \$799,160.

Although driver's license suspension is particularly effective, HCJFS uses a variety of ways to collect overdue support. Earlier this year, the agency suspended the passport of a father who paid \$30,000 in past-due support to get it back. Income tax season is especially beneficial because the agency intercepts the tax refunds of non-paying parents. HCJFS has also increased its seizure of bank accounts.

After Medicaid, Child Support is the largest program administered by HCJFS. The agency currently handles more than 90,000 child support cases and in 2003 collected \$153.8 million in support.