

Office of the Governor

PO BOX 004
TRENTON, NJ 08625

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: Wendi Patella
609-777-2600
Jacqueline Tencza @ DHS
(609) 292-3703

RELEASE: March 10, 1999

Governor Whitman Announces New State Child Support Campaign, Tells Parents: "Child Support. It's More Than Just Money"

Governor Christie Whitman and Human Services Commissioner Michele K. Guhl today unveiled an innovative campaign on child support in New Jersey at the Union Industrial Home.

This one-of-a-kind campaign combines a statewide community and social outreach with a focused advertising and communications program. The program aims to involve non-custodial parents in their children's lives to foster an environment in which child support obligations will be met more willingly and readily.

The advertising message is captured in the theme, "Child Support. It's more than just money."

"This program will remind non-custodial parents to strengthen the bond with their child and encourage them to fulfill their legal responsibility to provide child support," the Governor said.

"There are more than 500,000 children in New Jersey who depend on child support payments, but in more than half of those cases the non-custodial parent is delinquent or fails to meet his or her obligations at all," the Governor said. "This simply is not acceptable, and has impacts that affect everyone."

The Governor also announced that in the first quarter of the federal fiscal year 1999, New Jersey saw an 8.5 percent increase in child support collections - a \$13 million increase. Approximately \$6 million of that comes from a new law that requires employers to report the hiring of new employees to the state within 15-20 days.

The Governor said the tough new law is only part of the solution. She said the thrust of the new \$1.5 million program "is to substitute the threats and warnings of previous campaigns with reminders that in addition to financial payments, child support means being involved in the lives of their kids and giving them the encouragement and emotional support they need and deserve. It's a lot harder to walk away from your child support responsibilities when you're closely involved with your kids."

"The program's message will be delivered statewide on cable television, on New Jersey Transit bus placards, and through in-theater advertising, supplemented by

a concerted effort to gain public service announcement exposure on broadcast television and radio," Commissioner Guhl said.

"But in this program we will expand and follow through our advertising with a direct investment in community training and education about child support," Guhl said. She explained that twice a week, teams of trainers will spread out across the state to train others in making child support educational presentations. Other trainers will travel the length and breadth of the state to make three child support information presentations each week to church, civic, and community groups and organizations.

Commissioner Guhl noted also that child support is an important element in achieving success for Work First New Jersey, the state's welfare to work program. "Child support is owed equally in the welfare and non-welfare communities, but for custodial parents striving to move from welfare to work, regular payment of child support by the other parent is essential if they are to make the transition successfully. We all have a stake in their success."

As part of the event, the governor and the commissioner watched a portion of the train-the-trainer presentation, which was conducted by Calvin Thomas, who will be the lead trainer for the program. Thomas is a father who has been both the custodial parent and the non-custodial parent.

They also previewed two television ads. In one, a young boy telephones his absent father to say he has hit two home runs and wishes his father could have been there to see it. The father is shown, hesitating at first as he listens to his son leave a voice message, and then picking up the phone receiver. In the second a young girl is seen writing to her father to tell him she has made the cheerleading squad. The father in turn is shown reading the letter and then reaching for the phone to call his daughter. Both spots end with a voice over of the message, "Child Support: It's more than just money."

The program was developed by the Office of Child Support and Paternity Services in the Division of Family Development of the Department of Human Services. It will continue over at least the next two years.

