



## COUNTY OF EL PASO Domestic Relations Office

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**Ouisa Davis**, Chief – Friend of Court Division  
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**March 2, 2009**

### QUARTERLY REPORT

#### Second Quarter FY 2008- 2009

#### **I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The volume of cases served by the DRO continues to increase. Services related to enforcement functions especially have grown. The current and projected revenue in these enforcement functions exceeds 100% of the cost of all related positions. By direct revenue and cost savings, the services of the DRO are without cost to the County.

The growth of the DRO is the result of support in the Courthouse, particularly from Commissioners Court, and the dedicated work of an exceptional staff of employees.

In addition to this summary, please consider the following specific matters.

#### **II. REVENUE AND BUDGET:**

- a) In addition to direct revenue, there are significant **cost savings** resulting from DRO services, e.g., the role of DRO probation as a **jail diversion** program to avoid costs (\$58/per person/per day) for litigants on probation. Enforcement of health insurance and uninsured expenses avoids healthcare at the County expense. The cases served by the DRO are substantially resolved without court action, reducing the need for additional courts. No family law district courts have been added since the DRO was created in 2000.
- b) DRO revenue is from contracts, grants and user fees. In FY 2008-2009, DRO direct revenue is projected to exceed **\$1.1 million**. Revenue is monitored daily by the Director and all revenue is evaluated monthly as to every revenue source and projection.

- c) The enforcement functions, Friend of the Court and Probation, which are the largest DRO services, each return revenue in excess of the total salary and benefits of all staff associated in these areas. Revenue already meets or exceeds the total cost of all positions, including those added in the FY 2008-2009 budget, and the revenue will continue to grow.

### **III. COMMUNITY CONTACTS:**

In addition to assigned cases, the DRO has community traffic as follows:

- a) An increase of **70%** in telephone calls FY 2007-2008 over 2006-2007, averaging over **7,700** calls to the DRO each month. In the present FY, telephone calls have further increased to **8,500** per month.
- b) An average of over **500 walk-ins** per week.
- c) ITD reports the DRO website is receiving over **3,000** "hits" per month.

### **IV. CHILD SUPPORT MONITORING AND CUSTOMER SERVICES:**

- a) Staff previously assigned to local processing of child support have been retrained to provide monitoring of child support payments and local customer service. Therefore, these services have been managed without adding staff. The "monitoring" provides early intervention to avoid the development of large delinquencies in child support payments. This growth in child support monitoring has produced an increase in the litigation handled by Friend of the Court.
- b) The DRO is connected to the State Disbursement Unit and the following services are done locally by the DRO Child Support Monitoring and Customer Service staff:
  - 1. Creates the new final child support order at the SDU. The DRO scans the court records daily to identify new orders and creates the SDU file. There are over **19,000** child support cases that have been created by the El Paso DRO in the Texas Child Support Enforcement System.
  - 2. Provides local customer service to families, courts, employers, and attorneys including current information regarding child support accounts. The DRO handles over **1,000** such events each month.
  - 3. Provides monitoring of child support orders and records of payment to maintain compliance. When the monitoring of payments indicates a delinquency of more than 30 days, the case is referred to DRO enforcement. The majority of these problems are resolved within 30 days by the monitoring staff.

### **V. FRIEND OF THE COURT ENFORCEMENT:**

- a) The DRO Friend of the Court Division is responsible to enforce the **19,000** parent-child orders referred to above. Increased monitoring of child support orders has resulted in a **35%** increase in cases handled by the Friend of the Court unit over the prior year. This FY, judgments for delinquent child support through January 31, 2009

exceed the 2008 FY judgment total by **\$194,000** year to year, an increase of more than 50%.

- b) As a result of the sharp increase in case volume, a third paralegal position has been approved for this division. This position has now been staffed increasing production and reducing the backlog of cases.
- c) The Friend of the Court (FOC) division enforces periodic child support by application from a litigant or by referral from DRO child support monitoring. The FOC division also enforces visitation upon application and health insurance upon application and monitoring. Over 90% of all cases handled by DRO enforcement are resolved before court hearing.
- d) **100%** of visitation cases this fiscal year, have been resolved by the DRO staff without court hearings. The DRO is the only public agency enforcing visitation.

## **VI. COMMUNITY SUPERVISION:**

- a) There are more than **1,650 open probation cases** now being managed by 4 officers, including the newly approved position “Senior Probation Officer”. The current year revenue already exceeds the total cost of the current positions including newly approved positions and revenue will continue to grow. Indeed, recent months indicate the probation caseload and revenue are growing more rapidly than anticipated.
- b) The probation officers, clerks and supervising attorney have a total monthly cost to the County **less than** the revenue they generate.
- c) In order to service growth at the lowest cost, ITD has assisted the DRO with a locally produced case management system. All active probation cases have been entered into the case management system and final adjustments are being made. This system is being implemented in phases. Phase I is now complete and the improvements in Phase II are being designed.

## **VII. FAMILY COURT SERVICES:**

DRO social workers perform many services, including;

- a) Cooperative parenting group sessions, in the Title IV-D court, in Spanish as well as English, with parents in high conflict cases. DRO social workers are developing additional groups which will triple the number of groups provided. Specifically:
  - a) modification of the curriculum for the non-IVD population.
  - b) modification of the curriculum for the specialized population referred from the Mental Health Collaborative.
- b) Access and visitation grant services indicated at “VIII” below.
- c) Leading the DRO participation in the Border Children’s Mental Health Collaborative indicated at “IX”, below.

- d) Providing parenting order education classes.
- e) Preparation of home studies in contested custody and visitation cases as well as for adoptions.
- f) Intervention, when ordered by the court, to encourage the parent-litigants to resolve their issues without contested court action.
- g) Accessibility to the courts and court testimony.
- h) Development of the “Fragile Families” initiative, funded by OAG, by working with very young parents in the high schools.

**VIII. ACCESS AND VISITATION GRANT:**

This grant is from the Office of the Attorney General and is to provide services to the AG’s child support enforcement court to improve parenting skills and cooperation between parents. The grant program has been so successful that the El Paso program is being exported both in **Texas and nationally** in the Title IV-D enforcement system as a **model**.

The grant has been renewed for FY 2009, for the third year, at **\$63,876**.

New parental establishment (paternity) and other cases are referred to the DRO to manage the following services:

- a) Education of the parents on the rights and requirements under the parenting orders provided by DRO social workers and attorneys.
- b) 9-hour didactic group training for parents provided by DRO social workers. The training is provided 12 times during the grant year led by DRO social workers in English and Spanish.
- c) Individual counseling with DRO social workers and enforcement staff in problem cases.
- d) Referral to the Child Crisis Center for supervised visits and exchanges, where required in problem cases, pursuant to a contract with the Crisis Center using grant funds.
- e) Court enforcement by the DRO in cases of non-compliance; and
- f) Probation when ordered by the court.

**IX. BORDER CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH COLLABORATIVE:**

- a) DRO increased participation results from recognition that DRO services address many of the issues facing these families.
- b) The Executive Director of the DRO is a voting member of the governance team for the collaborative as well as the planning for the Youth Services Facility.

**X. FAMILY PROTECTION FUND:**

The DRO is the contract administrator of the County contract to provide court ordered supervised visitation and visitation exchanges in family violence cases at not more than **\$20,000** per FY. These “visitation services” are funded through the Family Protection Fund. This fund is based upon a “family protection” fee collected by the District Clerk as part of the court filing fees in new suits in dissolution of marriage and the contract is at no cost to the General Fund.

**XI. ASSISTANCE FROM ITD:**

With the assistance of ITD, the DRO has been able to manage the growth in services without added cost. Among others, ITD has provided:

- a) A local system to sweep and identify all new child support orders;
- b) an enhanced system to monitor child support payments;
- c) enhanced system to enforce service fees owed to the County, and,
- d) the case management system for probation.

ITD and the DRO are presently working on the development of a new child support and uniform office data system which is in the early planning stages.

**XII. TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF DOMESTIC RELATIONS OFFICES (TADRO):**

- a) Kristina Voorhies and Terry Pasqualone are both past presidents of TADRO and both are on the current Board of Directors.
- b) Rita Ruelas now serves as the Vice President.
- c) The Annual Conference of TADRO was held in Abilene, Texas, in October 20-22, 2008. All DRO managers attended this valuable conference and several staff members were speakers, to wit: Kristina Voorhies, Rita Ruelas, Ouisa Davis and Terry G. Pasqualone.
- d) The Attorney General of Texas has established a “County Work Group” consisting of 15 appointees from local and state government and industry. TADRO has 3 positions and Kristina Voorhies has been elected one of them. This is a very valuable appointment which allows El Paso to have input in and monitor the development of child support enforcement at the state and federal levels.

**XIII. LEGISLATION:**

The DRO leadership is involved in legislative efforts both locally and at the state level. El Paso DRO leadership also contributes a leadership role in our state organization, TADRO, which independently provides or supports Legislation concerning DRO authority and issues involving Family Law.

**XIV. FAMILY LAW INFORMATION CENTER:**

- a) The Information Center is the DRO community outreach program. Through this activity, we seek through community presentations, publications and media to reach the underserved in the El Paso community.
- b) The DRO also makes regular presentations to train El Paso Police Department and Sheriff's officers with regard to visitation problems.
- c) Pro Se legal clinics are being coordinated with the Ft. Bliss Legal Assistance Office to provide child support withholding orders and other information to service members with orders to deploy as well as training for Army Command Staff and community education.
- d) DRO has established an attorney referral list. These attorneys have agreed to provide a 30-minute interview at reduced cost or no cost to persons referred by the DRO.

**XV. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:**

In addition to the information provided hereinabove, the El Paso DRO has partnerships with several agencies, offices and entities in order to inform the public and enhance services.

The DRO has served as the Statewide Model for counties to improve and increase access to justice in family law and has been recognized by the Texas Supreme Court, the Texas Access to Justice Commission and Texas Association of Counties.

**XVI. LONG TERM PLANNING:**

The primary planning concerns of the DRO are;

- a) Development of a new child support system to include a uniform data management system throughout the DRO;
- b) Efficiently reorganizing DRO structure and services to respond to the anticipated substantial increase in family law litigation under BRAC;
- c) Provision of visitation services as ordered by the court, to wit, monitored and supervised visits and visitation exchanges.
- d) Development of new programs, as needed.

**XVIII.** Please advise if further information is desired.

Respectfully Submitted,

Terry G. Pasqualone  
Executive Director