



News Release

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DELAYS AFFLICT FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY OFFICE AND ITS CLIENTS: AUDITOR GENERAL

(TORONTO) The Family Responsibility Office is still not successfully fulfilling its responsibility for collecting unpaid child and spousal support payments, causing undue hardship for the people who need those payments, Auditor General Jim McCarter says in his *2010 Annual Report*, released today.

“We understand that it is a difficult undertaking to enforce court orders for spousal and child support,” McCarter said today. “However, while the Office is working on a number of initiatives, it continues to struggle with some of the same problems we raised in our *2003 Annual Report*, including not having adequate systems and procedures in place to ensure quick action is taken when payers are in arrears on their obligations.”

Founded in 1987, the Office automatically enforces all court orders for spousal and/or child support issued in Ontario, along with any private separation agreements that have been voluntarily registered with the courts and filed with the Office.

In the last fiscal year, the Office was responsible for administering about 190,000 cases. Each month, it registers between 1,200 and 1,500 new cases, and closes around the same number. Many of those using the Office are among society’s most vulnerable; nearly 20,000 individuals who have their support orders enforced by the Office collect social assistance, often because a former partner failed to pay spousal or child support.

What follows are some of the Auditor’s more significant findings:

- Call volume to the Office’s toll-free call centre—the primary means for customer service—is so overwhelming that 80% of calls never get through.
- As of April 2010, there were 91,000 internal service memos, called “bring-forward notes,” that were outstanding. Each note is supposed to trigger specific action on a case within a month. However, one-third of these notes had either never been opened and read or had been read and not acted upon, and many had been outstanding for between one and two years.
- The Office spent \$21 million over more than three years to develop a state-of-the-art IT system but abandoned the project in 2006 without a new system in place.
- For ongoing cases, the Office took almost four months from the time the case went into arrears before taking its first enforcement action. In total, the Office is acting on about 20–25% of its total cases in any given year.

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