

Child Support Contract Furthers Implementation of MEC

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In an effort to reduce a heavy caseload, the Mississippi Department of Human Services has contracted with Young Williams Child Support Services (Young Williams) to provide services for approximately 30,000 child support cases throughout 13 counties in Mississippi. According to a staff attorney of Young Williams, Young Williams had obtained approximately 27,000 cases as of March 3, 2010. Approximately 2,200 of those cases will be resolved in Madison County Chancery Court. As of March 3, 2010, Young Williams had filed one half of the Madison county cases, and the remaining cases are expected to be filed by the end of March.

On February 20, 2010, Judge Cynthia Brewer, of the Madison County Chancery Court signed an order allowing the Madison County Chancery Clerk, Arthur Johnston, to designate attorneys from the Mississippi Department of Human Services and give those attorneys authority to open and assign child support cases and docket initial pleadings in such cases by utilizing the Mississippi Electronic Courts system (MEC). Mr. Johnston has authorized attorneys working for Young Williams to electronically open and assign child support cases and docket initial pleadings in those cases. Young Williams attorneys obtained training to file these documents on March 2, 2010, and began filing these documents electronically March 3, 2010.

Arthur Johnston said “This is a huge step in the implementation of MEC,” regarding the ability of lawyers to initiate filings electronically. This is the first time lawyers will have the opportunity to initiate filings electronically in Mississippi. Many of the federal courts allow lawyers to initiate cases electronically, but not the Northern and Southern District Courts of Mississippi. The chancery clerk’s office can allow the lawyers of a government agency, such as the Mississippi Department of Human Services, to enjoy such privileges because this government agency pays court fees in arrears, as opposed to paying in advance which is how private attorneys must pay. The Mississippi Supreme Court is in the process of developing a financial system that private attorneys may use to pay fees in advance, so that these attorneys will be allowed to initiate filings electronically in the future.

Mr. Johnston explained how this step will greatly reduce the workload of the chancery clerk’s office because lawyers will be entering the data from the pleadings, such as the names and information of the parties and lawyers involved, instead of the chancery clerk’s staff. Also, the chancery clerk’s office will no longer be responsible for docketing pleadings from these cases. In 2009, a total of 1,627 cases were filed in Madison County Chancery Court. In 2010, the caseload is expected to double, maybe triple, because the court will handle an additional 2,200 cases, most of which are being electronically filed by Young Williams.

Madison County Chancery Court will begin to hear the cases assigned to Young Williams on April 6, 2010, and continue to resolve these cases through September 28, 2010.

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