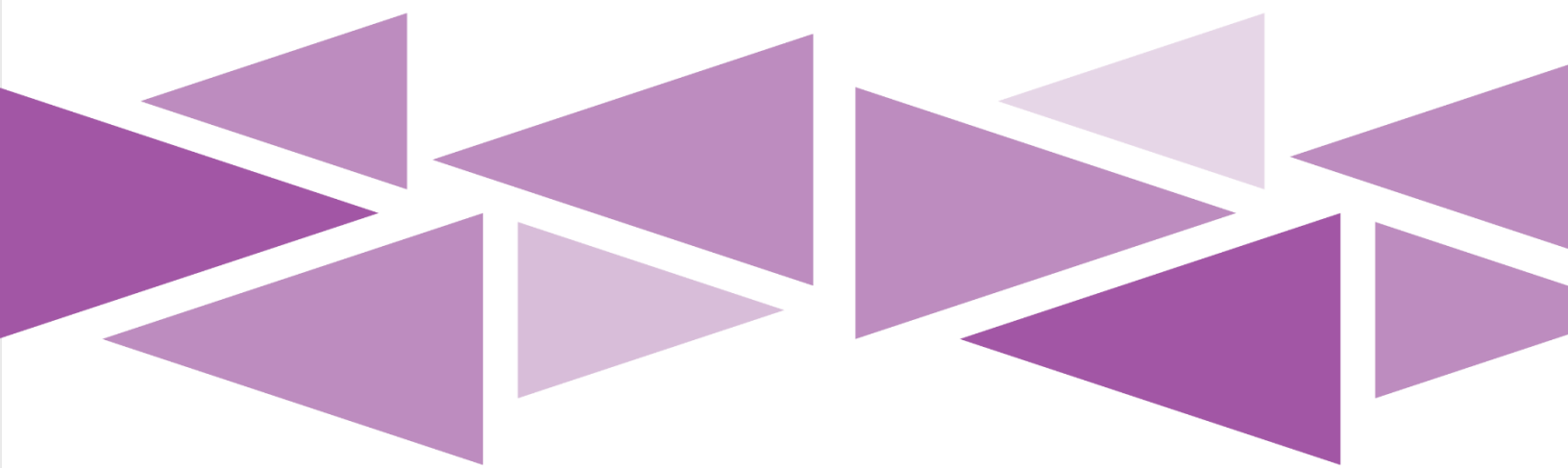




2022

**EMPLOYMENT EQUITY FOR SINGLE MOMS:
Creating Opportunities and Removing Barriers
to Childcare**

MISSISSIPPI LOW- INCOME CHILD CARE INITIATIVE



**MISSISSIPPI LOW-INCOME CHILDCARE INITIATIVE
(MLICCI)**

**EMPLOYMENT EQUITY for SINGLE MOMS
(EESM)**

**Year 2
EVALUATION REPORT**

Submitted To



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March 2022

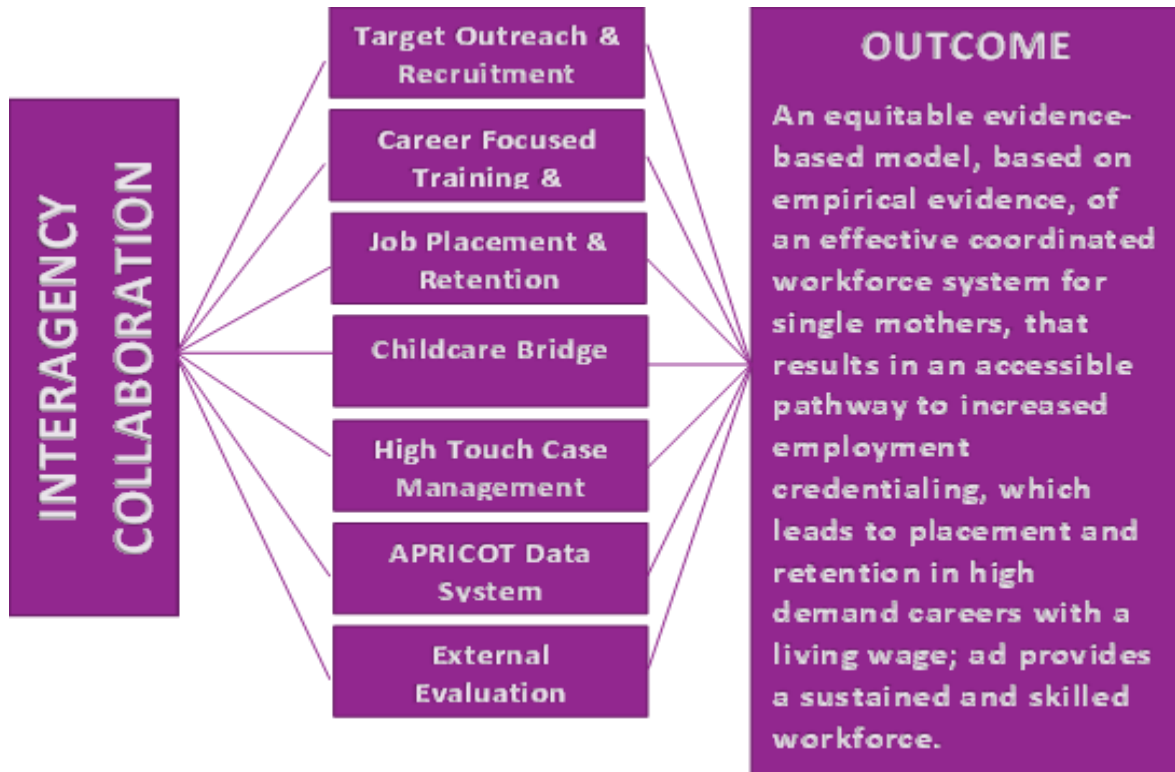
The Mississippi Low-Income Child-Care Initiative (MLICCI) is a statewide non-profit public policy advocacy organization. The organization has been both consistent and persistent in the pursuit of its purpose. Advocacy is the primary strategy MLICCI has used in bringing about a more just and equitable childcare subsidy system in Mississippi. The focus is on systemic change. Through addressing access, quality and affordability, the organization has sought to strengthen the Mississippi subsidized childcare infrastructure by advocating for changes in institutional policies and practices that make childcare more accessible to low-income families.

MLICCI recognizes that childcare is a means to an end, not an end within itself. It is a means to: educational equity and the American Dream for children, economic equity for low-income families, economic viability of low-income childcare providers **and** an essential support for the economic security of low-income working mothers and their families.

Employment Equity for Single Moms

While honoring its original mission, the work of MLICCI has expanded to addressing a range of intertwined issues related to childcare and the needs of low-income families. Employment equity and economic security are at the forefront of Employment Equity for Single Moms (EESM), the project discussed herein. As reflected in the following Theory of Change and Logic Model, EESM is a collaborative system designed to assist low-income single mothers in preparing, securing and retaining high demand jobs with a livable wage. Emphasis is placed on the mitigation of systemic policies and practices which are barriers to unabridged access to eligible work supports.

Schematic 1: Mississippi Low-Income Child-Care Initiative Employment Equity for Single Moms Theory of Change



MLICCI EMPLOYMENT EQUITY for SINGLE MOMS				
Logic Model				
<p>Mission: Establishment of an evidence-based collaborative workforce system that prepares single mothers for high demand jobs that result in sustained systemic change, through targeted outreach and recruitment, training and credentialing, and job placement and retention, which is undergirded by interagency collaboration, leveraged and aligned resources, streamlined processes, child care vouchers, and intensive case management; all designed to mitigate barriers to employment in high demand careers.</p>				
OBJECTIVES	OUTPUTS	INDICATORS	METHODS	OUTCOMES
<p>INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION</p> <p>To develop an effective workforce coordinated system.</p>	Workforce Advisory Group	Number, roles, type, and level of partner participation, Systems aligned, resources leveraged, policy changed, barriers mitigated, Advocacy outcomes	Partnership meetings, Reports, Key staff in-depth interviews	<p>An equitable evidence-based model, based on empirical evidence, of an effective coordinated workforce system for single mothers, that results in an accessible pathway to increased employment credentialing, which leads to job placement and retention in high demand careers with a sufficient living wage; and provides a sustained skilled workforce.</p>
<p>TARGETED OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT</p> <p>To increase single mothers' awareness of and access to career information.</p>	Cross Referral and Co-Enrollment Model	Aggregate Participant Data	Apricot EESM Entry Survey	
<p>EMPLOYMENT TRAINING AND CREDENTIALING</p> <p>To increase the number of single mothers completing job training.</p>	Career Focused Training	Number enrolled, completed, credentialed	Apricot	
<p>JOB PLACEMENT AND RETENTION</p> <p>To increase the number of single mothers with sustained career employment.</p>	High-Touch Case Management Childcare Bridge (CCB)	Case Aggregate Data Number and type of placements, length of employment, Case Notes Number of CCB families and children	Apricot	
<p>EVALUATION</p> <p>To conduct a rigorous evaluation which captures the quantitative and qualitative data.</p>	External Evaluation	Evaluation Plan and Timeline	Periodic and Final Evaluation Report	

METHODOLOGY

This is the second year (2021) report of EESM, a data- driven project; and includes both quantitative and qualitative data. It is noted that, as deemed appropriate and relevant, Year 1 information is included herein for contextualization.

Apricot Essentials Case Management and Reporting (AECMR) that offers case management, client tracking and outcomes management is the data system used by MLICCI. As detailed in the previous evaluation, this centralized system allows the program to have access to a real time plethora of client and program data. It has the functionality of enabling staff to track participants' progress toward the achievement of specific client goals, as well as generate outcome analytics. Specific to EESM, the system tracks case management services, activities, and outcomes, as well as SNAP 50/50, CCPP and TANF participation. It provides a definitive means of systematically capturing quantitative and qualitative data which can be used to assess program effectiveness and outcomes. Most importantly, Apricot enables the empirical testing of the efficacy of EESM.

In addition to Apricot, separate focus groups were conducted with the EESM Case Managers (CM) and program participants. In addition to the CM focus group, three focus groups were conducted with eleven (11) single mothers of eighteen (18) children. Content analysis, including themes and patterns, were used to analyze the focus group data.

FINDINGS

Quantitative Findings

Single mothers make initial contact with MLICCI EESM through the organization's webpage by completing the contact form; which is inviting, simple, short and user friendly. CMs use the Contact Form to follow-up with the applicants to determine their specific needs. Table 1 reflects the race/ethnicity and employment status of mothers contacted. The significant majority, 72.6%, were African American, 14.7 White, 5% Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, 1.6% Hispanic, and .4% Native American. Relative to employment status, 71.6% were employed, 25.3% unemployed, and 2.5% were not in the labor force. It is noteworthy that the overwhelming majority of these women were employed; but still had a need for program assistance.

Table 1
Race/Ethnicity and Employment Status
of the Single Mothers Contacted
by Percent (N=730)

Race/Ethnicity	Percent
African American	72.6
White/Caucasian	14.7
Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders	5.0
No Race/Ethnicity	4.1
Hispanic, non-white	1.6
Native Americans	.4
Employment Status	Percent
Employed	71.6
Unemployed	25.3
Not in Labor Force	2.5
Other	0.6

As a result of the initial outreach, the Case Managers, as reflected in the table below, were able to successfully reach 68% of the applicants, and unable to reach 32% through use of the contact form. Among those contacted, 79% enrolled in EESM, and 10% indicated a disinterest in program participation, and 11% were engaged in the enrollment process.

Table 2
EESM Outreach and Enrollment
(N=1,077)

EESM Applications	Number	Percent
Successful Contact w/ Applicants	730	68%
A. Contacted and Enrolled	578	79%
B. Contacted, not Interested	75	10%
In Progress	77	11%
Unsuccessful Contact Attempts	347	32%

On the initial contact Form, applicants indicated the type of service needs they were seeking; respondents (N=578) could indicate multiple needs (N=886). As indicated below 82% of the respondents identified childcare as one of their assistance needs, 30% specified education as a need, and 24% needed help with job search and job readiness.

Table 3
Number and Percent of Service Needs Identified (N=886)
During Initial Contact (N=578)

Services Needed	# of Times Indicated	Percent*
Child Care Assistance	475	82%
Jobs Search/Job Readiness	138	24%
Education	173	30%
Short-Term Vocational Training	100	17%
Transportation and other Support Services	73	13%

* Percentage based on multiple-response item.

Low-income single mothers often do not have a network to draw upon when seeking employment. The lack of information on where and how to find a job and other related supports is a critical barrier to employment. EESM seeks to address this void by providing employment information, educational and vocational training opportunities, job searches and childcare assistance.

The inputs for the EESM program include the provision of a range of informational services. Information on subsidized childcare, the labor force and career action planning were highly sought materials. Job searches are also critical to securing employment with a livable wage. Information related to EESM and CCPP were most frequently provided. Information is power. The volume of participants receiving job related information speaks to the need for low-income mothers to be empowered through access to job essential employment information.

Table 4
Employment Services

Type of Information	Number Receiving Information
Rec'd EESM, CCPP, Labor Force Information	730
EESM Career Action Plan	314
Job Search	
Career and Living Wage Tools	339
Other Labor Market Information	396

Outcomes provide evidence of the efficacy of a program. Retention is a standard performance measure in the employment industry. At the time of program follow-up, 77% of the participants had retained their jobs. Additional data indicate 27% of those working had obtained employment after program entry, and 16% had experienced an increase in their pay or the number of hours worked. Only 2%, including COVID losses, had not retained employment, 17% were unemployed.

Table 5
Employment Retention at Follow-up
(N=425)

Employment Retention	Number	Percent
Retained Employment	327	77%
Lost Employment/ COVID Unemployed	12	2%
Unemployed	73	17%
No Data	13	3%

The EESM Bridge Childcare provides short-term childcare assistance. The table below indicates that at the time of data retrieval, 63% of the eligible participants had successfully completed the application process and their children were enrolled in the Bridge Childcare program; 37% had applications in process or were awaiting the beginning of their employment or education/training program.

Table 6
EESM Bridge Childcare
Participants

Bridge Childcare Status	Number	Percent
Active	166	63%
In Process	99	37%
TOTAL	265	100%

Childcare makes a difference. Among Bridge Childcare participants, 82% were employed at follow-up, compared to 77% of the overall group of participants. Furthermore, over one-third, 39% of Bridge Childcare participants were enrolled in an educational program; academic (20%) and vocational (19%). These data suggest that with childcare, more single mothers are able to retain employment as well as receive needed academic and vocational training.

Table 7
EESM Bridge Child Care Participants
Employment and Education Outcomes
(N=162)

Employment Status	Number	
Employed at Follow-Up	133	82%
Unemployed	27	16%
No Data	2	1%
Education Status	Number	
Enrolled in Academic Studies	32	20%
Enrolled in Vocational Training	31	19%

Qualitative Findings

A Focus Group was conducted with the EESM Case Managers who are strategically located throughout the State in regions geographically aligned with the four workforce regions. These four professional women are well grounded in social work, childcare, and social justice. They have both professional and life experiences which equip them to work effectively with low-income single mothers. The purpose of the CM focus group was to elicit their insights, observations, and experiences in working with single mothers seeking to gain meaningful employment.

High touch case management is the central strategy of EESM which is threaded throughout the program. It is an intensive, collaborative social support process that assesses, plans, implements, coordinates, monitors, and evaluates the options and services required to meet the client's human service needs. It is characterized by advocacy, communication, and resource management targeted toward attainment of desired program outcomes.

The MLICCI high-touch case management approach has several nontraditional features. Different from the more traditional approach, high-touch case management is personal and highly relational. Rapport, trust and partnership are essential undergirding features. These individuals work in partnership with the mothers to develop strategies that will best suit her family. This includes setting goals, making decisions, navigating fragmented services, garnering resources, and accountability coaching. A written Client Action Plan (CAP) becomes the blueprint for achieving desired goals. Case managers also interact with the child care providers, workforce partners and other relevant service providers.

Stereotypes of Single Mothers – In addition to addressing the historical realities of economic inequalities, single mothers must also address the age-old stereotypical views of single mothers and specifically those of color. This social stigmatization is part of the lived experiences of African American single mothers. Such unfounded perceptions include immorality, economic irresponsibility, brokenness, dishonesty, fraudulent propensities, parental inattentiveness and inadequacy, and apathy. Furthermore, they are assumed to have an adversarial relationship with the non-custodial parent. These unsubstantiated myths of single mothers all too frequently transfer to their children who are presumed to be academically, emotionally and behaviorally deficient.

Why is the stereotyping of single mothers important to their economic well-being and specifically their employment? Stereotyping is a form of marginalization, and often racialization. Furthermore, such characterizations become embedded in institutional policies and practices. Effective social change includes challenging and dismantling these perceptions and corresponding behaviors and practices which often lead to restrictive access to needed services and supports.

Having worked with single mothers for two years, the CM focus group commenced by asking them to share word characterizations of the single mothers with whom they worked. The facilitator posed the question thusly: "Recognizing that single mothers are very different with unique experiences, strengths and challenges; what are the descriptors that come to your mind when you think of the women with whom you work? How would you describe them as a group?"

The CM described the duality of trying to navigate the realities of being a single mother, and employee. Participants were described repeatedly as resilient, motivated, loving and committed mothers, eager learners, goal oriented, determined, hard workers and skilled in multi-tasking. Conversely, these same young mothers were viewed as overwhelmed, stressed, confused, and lacking in knowledge, connections and supports.

This characterization is significant because it counters the traditional stereotypical view of low- income mothers in Mississippi. This is particularly important when these unexamined assumptions and stereotypes seep into policies and practices. Consequently, there is a clear need to reframe the narrative which is used to describe young single mothers.

SOCIAL SUPPORT The participants were also asked to provide descriptors which characterized their CM. The characterizations include: strong, encouraging, motivational, inspirational, supportive, helpful, knowledgeable, non-judgmental, straightforward, and persistent. Roles include: counselor, advisor, and accountability coach. Participants repeatedly affirmed the value and importance of having a support system. Such a system not only includes assistance with childrearing, but also psychosocial supports such as encouragement, affirmation and accountability. The Case Managers were viewed as an invaluable support system.

The participants' portrayal of the CMs point to the alignment of their attributes and roles; and the significance of support and guidance for these young women. The implication here is the need for human service and employment agencies, as well as other organizations, to model values and attributes which align with their roles as service providers and affirm the service recipients. The following story was shared during the focus group.

When Mary, mother of a child with a learning disability, enrolled in EESM she had been unemployed for 3 years. She felt lost and without direction, and was ready to give up on being employed. She enrolled in EESM; with the encouragement and assistance of her CM she enrolled in a community college. Mary proudly shared that, “today, with the assistance of my CM, determination and faith, I am a certified medical assistant. I deserve it. “

The CM related a range of challenges which young single mothers experience at varied points, from seeking to retaining employment. The following examples are offered:

A parent shared how her excitement about getting a job was callously dismissed by the prospective employer. After securing a job interview, she called and confirmed it the day before. Upon arrival she was told the person interviewing her would be available shortly. She waited 30 minutes, and without explanation, was told that the person was not coming in that day. She expressed how this affected her self-esteem. However, her CM told her that she could not give up, but must “try again.” She subsequently secured a different job as a substitute teacher in the local school system.

The challenges of single mothers are amplified by a work environment that is often not supportive of single mothers. A CM explained that for a single mother, her child's illness often has grave implications for her employment and long-term well-being. *“Women are scared to be off work to take care of a sick child because of fear of losing their job. So often parents end up quitting the job and starting back over at square one. They become stressed about how they are going to make it.”* Another CM amplified this dilemma thusly:

“ Even when they (single working mothers) need to leave their job to take care of an emergency they are often penalized, they will get demerits at work within certain industries.”

ACCESS TO CHILDCARE

The EESM design is predicated on the premise that eligibility for subsidized childcare does not always equate to timely access to childcare. The Childcare Bridge was therefore built into the EESM project. It is not an entitlement. Metaphorically, it is “a temporary detour around a structural barrier” which is often an elongated application process with disruptions that slow down and sometimes derail one’s pathway to employment, and thus their destination of economic security.

This short-term intervention allows single mothers to receive a time-limited childcare voucher to assist with childcare costs for children birth through age 12, and for youth with exceptional needs up to age 21 after enrollment in an EESM activity. Approval for payment of childcare services may be provided for up to three months or until the child is successfully enrolled into long-term, subsidized childcare. Eligibility may be extended for a maximum of six-months, if the family is unable to secure long-term, subsidized childcare during the initial period. During this timeframe, the case manager has the critical role of assisting the mother in navigating the pursuit of state subsidized childcare through the Child Care Payment Program (CCPP). As reflected in one EESM participant's story, this pathway can sometimes have unanticipated “bumps in the road”.

The CMs and program participants identified multiple challenges to preparing for, securing and retaining meaningful employment. Non-traditional working hours, lack of transportation, and low wages were noted. However, the major challenge which was most frequently identified by both groups was access to childcare.

The CCPP eligibility process is the primary childcare access menace. For example, a participant applied two times for subsidized childcare. The first time she was placed on a waiting list for two years. The second time she was denied due to a missing form which she had completed and submitted. Upon receipt of denial notification, she shared her copy of the “missing form” with the state agency. No childcare voucher was received. The loss of documents, which resulted in a protracted process, was noted frequently by CM and participants.

CHILD SUPPORT COOPERATION

In Mississippi, and in only 12 other states, state policy requires child support cooperation with child support enforcement unit by the custodial parent (usually single mother), as a condition of eligibility determination for a child care certificate and other public assistance. The mother must apply for and cooperate as specified in the application process. See Appendix - Mississippi Department of Human Services Application for Child Support Services. Information required on the non-custodial parent (father), provided by the custodial parent, includes: name, contact information social security number, height, weight, date of birth, place of birth, scars/tattoos, eye color, education, health insurance, employer name, address, phone number and past addresses. Further, the custodial parent is asked to provide additional information on the father's finances, other income sources, work history, current location and other names used.

Given Mississippi's history of racism, and the emasculation and degradation of African Americans particularly African American men, fathers are distrustful of state institutions and systems; and are not receptive to their personal information being entered into a state database. Regrettably, when the custodial parent has to disclose non-custodial parents' information, this frequently engenders misplaced distrust and conflict between the parents. Given that these are more often than not African

American men, this practice is viewed by some as another mechanism to diminish the Black family structure.

In addition to disclosing information a mother seeking subsidized childcare is required to complete and sign the Child Support Cooperation Application which implies legal, including criminal, consequences. A moral question which begs an answer is: Why must a young, single, low-income mother, place herself in legal jeopardy (for reporting information on another individual) in order for her child(ren) to receive subsidized childcare, so that she can be profitably employed? The following is an excerpt from the application:

“My signing this application, I understand that:

- I have assigned to MDHS any and all rights and interests in any cause of action past, present, or future that I or the child(ren) included in this application may have against any parent failing to provide for the support of the minor child(ren);*

- If I do not cooperate with MDHS, my case may be closed after advance notice, and public assistance offices will be notified, if applicable. Public assistance includes, but is not limited to, the SNAP/TANF office, Medicaid office, and/or Child Care office.*

- I understand the criminal penalties for making false statements and false swearing and do hereby attest to the truthfulness of the information provided. [False swearing is punishable by a fine of not more than \$1,000 or by imprisonment of one year or both.];” (Mississippi Department of Human Services, Application for Child Support Services, Mississippi MDHS-CSE-675, Revised 05-01-2021)*

During the focus groups, the CMs and program participants indicated that the Child Support Cooperation process is one of the most challenging aspects of seeking subsidized childcare assistance. The requirement that the applicant must complete the lengthy process, irrespective of the status of the noncustodial parent was very perplexing. This includes deportation, incarceration and even in one instance, the father’s *documented* demise. Further, it was indicated that the process can be insensitive. With a deep sense of incredulity, a CM shared an instance in which a frightened teenage

mother seeking childcare, shamedly acknowledged uncertainty regarding the paternity of her child, and was glibly told by the agency worker to “pick one.”

The implication of the child support cooperation is that it often has an antithetical and counterproductive effect on families. In many cases, amenable family relations where two parents are engaged in co-parenting their child (including financially), the insertion of state *mandated* child support can be viewed as accusatorial by the non-custodial parent and disrupt voluntary support. More importantly, it can damage parental as well as father-child relationships. Damaged family relationship should not be a risk factor when seeking affordable childcare.

Despite the challenges, the CMs and mothers were asked if they could pursue a career without safe, dependable and affordable childcare. From their total caseload during the year, the CMs indicated they seldom have a participant who does not need childcare. Instead, they already had CCPP, were applying for it, or had been declined assistance. The mothers agreed, without equivocation, that childcare is an essential work support. Three salient responses:

“ I have five children and no family support. Not having childcare would hold me back from having a career.”

“ Yes, it [childcare assistance] is necessary, I will not leave my children with anybody; and childcare is like a mortgage.”

“ I had a job waiting, but I have two children and needed childcare in order to start working”.

Advocacy of Policy Change

Advocacy for policy change works; and it is an indispensable tool in dismantling institutional barriers. Recognizing that access to affordable childcare is an essential work support, for several years MLICCI has been unrelenting in its advocacy for change in the childcare eligibility process, and is realizing success. Two years ago, the organization was successful in advocating for change in the documentation required for verification of residency in the eligibility determination process.

During this project period, MLICCI has continued to advocate for elimination of the child support cooperation requirement with the governor's State Early Childhood Advisory Council (SECAC) and the leadership of the State Department of Human Services. MLICCI's advocacy efforts, including research, op-eds, and meetings with SECAC and DHS leadership, have again proven to be effective.

On March 3, 2022, local and statewide print and television media (See appendix) announced that SECAC had unanimously recommended to the governor, with DHS concurrence, that the child support cooperation requirement, which is not federally mandated, be eliminated in the state of Mississippi. This is a significant accomplishment which will increase access to childcare for eligible children and their families.

SUMMARY AND HIGHLIGHTS OF SELECT PROGRAM OUTCOMES

➤ **Pre and Post-Employment Needs**

There is an unmet need for employment supports for low-income mothers even after securing a job; childcare is the most essential need. The EESM webpage has attracted approximately 1,007 single mothers who are overwhelmingly African American and White . At the time of contact, the overwhelming majority of these women seeking assistance were working mothers. One can conclude that even with employment there are continuing unmet needs.

➤ **Childcare is an essential work support of low-income single mothers in Mississippi.** This reality is reflected in the EESM data. During initial contact with EESM, mothers indicate the type of assistance needed. Of the needs indicated, 82% were for childcare assistance. Further, the effectiveness of the childcare component is reflected in that 82% of the Bridge Childcare participants, compared to 77% of the total enrollment, were still employed at the time of program follow-up. This affirms the EESM founding premise that childcare is an essential work support that can be determinative in whether a single mother is able to secure and retain a career.

➤ **Stereotypes of Single Mothers and Social Support**

There is a clear need to reframe the narrative regarding low-income single mothers as well as their need for social support, both of which influences the provision of services. It is imperative that service providers reflect a positive and supportive view of single mothers in their organizational culture, behavior and practices. The focus group discussions regarding the characteristics of single low-income mothers defied historical, traditional, and continuing stereotypes. Instead, CMs articulated the dual veracities of being a single mother, and employee. These mothers were described repeatedly as resilient, motivated, loving and committed mothers, eager learners, goal oriented, determined, hard workers and skilled in multi-tasking. Conversely, these same young mothers were viewed as overwhelmed, stressed, confused, and lacking in knowledge, connections and supports. This finding is significant in that it counters the traditional negative narrative of low-income single mothers which often adversely influences policies and practices. Thus, there needs to be intentionality in reframing this narrative.

Social support as a critical need for low-income working mothers is well established in the literature. Participants repeatedly affirmed the value and importance of having a support system. They underscored that such is more than assistance with childrearing. It also includes psychosocial supports such as encouragement, affirmation and accountability. The CMs were viewed as an invaluable support system. The participants expressed the consensus view that “we could not have done it without the CMs.” MLICCI’s advocacy and leadership programs are well suited for elevating this issue and training agency personnel and policy makers on the need to reframe the narrative of low-income working mothers, and its corresponding influence of service delivery and policy development.

➤ **Policy Change**

The advocacy work of MLICCI has effectuate positive changes in the childcare subsidy (CCPP) eligibility determination process.

Policy change is an essential part of the mission of MLICCI in all of its work, including EESM. Access to affordable childcare by low-income working mothers is a critical policy issue. Removing structural barriers which delay, and often obstruct, access to affordable childcare for low-income working mothers is an equity issue. Such is the necessity of advocacy focused on the childcare eligibility process and specifically the child support cooperation requirement of the CCPP.

As documented in prior MLICCI research and reports, the eligibility process continues to be fraught with a multitude of communications and burdensome requirements. Incomplete applications due to missing information, although submitted by the applicant, was a major concern of both CMs and the single mothers. As a way of addressing this longstanding ubiquitous issue, the Department of Human Services could benefit from a focus group discussion with a diverse group of single mothers as a means of garnering end-user feedback that could be used to strengthen the CCPP eligibility determination process.

➤ **Child Support Cooperation Requirement**

Child support cooperation requirement is the most challenging aspect of the CCPP eligibility process. The long-term, consistent, and unrelenting advocacy for changes in this process by MLICCI has been realized, with SECAC and DHS recommending to the governor the elimination of the child support cooperation requirement.

In Mississippi the law requires child support cooperation by the custodial parent (usually single mother), as a condition of eligibility determination for a child care certificate and other public assistance. The mother must apply for and cooperate as specified in the application process. Custodial parents, usually single mothers, are required to provide a plethora of personal information on the non-custodial parents when seeking childcare assistance. This requirement has implications for the parents' as well as parent-child relations. It can be injurious to amenable relationships or exacerbate ones that are adversarial.

As designed by MLICCI, advocacy is significant part of EESM. It seeks to address issues which create barriers for marginalized groups. This includes addressing institutional structures and policies which hinder access to opportunities and resources. Child Support Cooperation is a barrier which hinders low-income single mothers, who are often women of color, from unabridged access to childcare, an essential work support.

MLICCI has been successful in its advocacy for change in the child support cooperation requirement. On March 3, 2022, local and statewide print and television media (See appendix) announced that SECAC has unanimously recommended to the governor, with DHS concurrence, that the child support cooperation requirement, which is not federally mandated, be eliminated in the state of Mississippi. Policy change is one of the EESM goals. This is what MLICCI has been advocating for, and is a significant accomplishment which has the potential, once approved by the governor, to increase access to childcare for eligible children and their families.

Appendices

Gov. Reeves advised to remove DHS child support requirement

Anna Wolfe - 7h ago

Follow

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JACKSON, Miss. (Mississippi Today) – One of the biggest hurdles low-income single moms in Mississippi face when they apply for child care assistance is the requirement, they sue their child's father for child support first.

But on March 3, a group of governor-appointed early childhood administrators voted to recommend that Gov. Tate Reeves and his Department of Human Services remove this barrier from families.

Mississippi leaders often tout family-centered values, but working moms and advocates say the state's child support requirement can cause animosity between parents as the state agency meddles in their financial arrangement.

"It's like you've invited someone else into your home that creates a lot of extra conflict," [a single mother told Mississippi Today](#) in its 2020 [series on child support](#).

A single mom might have struck a deal with her child's father that works for their family, but if she wants to access the federal child care voucher, she must turn her child support case over to the state to enforce. If the mom has ever received cash welfare, the state then seizes and withholds those

child support dollars to pay itself back for the assistance it provided. (The vast majority of low-income custodial parents applying for public assistance are women, which is why this story refers to them as single mothers).

"They try to make the woman the policeman of their division by putting the father under child support. It's not her job to do that. She did not create that rule," said Theophilus King, owner of Christian Mission Learning Center in Jackson [told Mississippi Today last year](#). "They're trying to drive a greater wedge between the two people."

On top of that, the welfare agency [pays a contractor](#) to operate this service, though privatization has proven in some cases to be less effective, according to a recent report by a [legislative watchdog group](#).

Mississippi Department of Human Services has made strides recently to boost benefits to families in need and create a friendlier safety-net atmosphere in a state known for having some of the harshest public assistance policies in the nation. It convinced the Legislature to [increase the monthly cash welfare amount](#) by \$90; it created a [\\$100 "pass through"](#) so that the state doesn't intercept all child support money; and it sent out [\\$1,000 supplements](#) to welfare recipients in December.

But on the issue of the child support requirement, agency officials had remained mum. Until now.

Carol Burnett, founder of the Low-Income Child Care Initiative, has been [advocating for the state to remove this rule](#) for years with little reception from state leaders. She said she was surprised and thrilled when the [State Early Childhood Advisory Council](#) raised the topic and every member expressed support for doing away with the requirement, which [only 13 states currently impose](#). At least nine states have removed this requirement since 2018, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

"Getting this barrier out of the way will help more single parent-headed families get child care, which means more single parents will be able to go to work. And going to work is something that we know he (Gov. Reeves) does care about," Burnett said. "... It's going to make it easier for a lot of parents that we've seen struggle."

Mississippi has imposed the child support requirement in the child care program since 2004. The state enforces the same rule for food assistance, even though it is not required to by federal law.

[Mississippi House leaders kill postpartum Medicaid extension](#)

Burnett and other advocates have criticized the department for [failing to approve applications](#) for the child care voucher in a timely manner. Some of the delay may be attributed to hiccups caused by the child support requirement. Every year, the program serves only a fraction of kids in low-income families.

MDHS received an additional \$200 million for the program under the American Rescue Plan Act that it can use to serve more families, as long as they're eligible.

Last year when Mississippi Today asked Chad Allgood, director of the Division of Early Childhood Care and Development at MDHS, if his agency would consider removing the requirement, he refused to engage on the topic, responding, "It's agency policy. That's the extent of what I can tell you."

At the March 3 council meeting, which Allgood helped conduct, he said he and other child care administrators had been studying the child support rule and agreed it should be removed.

"We've had conversations with her (Holly Spivey, Gov. Reeves' education policy adviser) about approaching the governor with this recommendation," Allgood said. "We do feel that it would make a very powerful statement for SECAC to make this recommendation."

The council voted unanimously. The governor's office did not return several requests for comment about what he plans to do with the recent recommendation.

"I personally think that the Child Care Development Fund (child care voucher) offers some of the most potential for Mississippi of any government program," said Andrea Sanders, Commissioner of the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services, which oversees the state's foster care program for children who have faced abuse and neglect. Sanders is also executive director of SECAC.

"I think that getting children in good, quality child care early, allowing their parents the ability to work without fear of where their children are, without having to leave them with a 13-year-old brother because they don't have options. That's how you start to stop the cycle of violence in households. So I'm certainly a big proponent of this move (to remove the child support requirement)," Sanders said.

The State Early Childhood Advisory Council, established in law during the reauthorization of Head Start in 2007, has a contentious history. Because it is housed under the governor's office and is comprised of governor-appointedees, the board is subject to political whims. The [work of the council](#) under former Gov. Phil Bryant, for example, has been wiped from the internet for the last two years and all but forgotten.

[Mississippi moves toward reviving an initiative process](#)

The council helps craft state plans for programs like the Child Care Development Fund, the federal block grant that funds the child care voucher program, which Mississippi calls the Child Care Payment Program. Under the previous administration, the council, chaired by a [data scientist from Mississippi State University](#), created a new controversial child care center quality rating system and improvement plan that was never fully implemented. Through the plan, centers were supposed to partner the Mississippi Community College Board to train their workers.

Child care centers said the council members disregarded their suggestions for building a effective program. At that time, SECAC was working closely with the research canter data scientist Mimmo Parisi founded called NSPARC, which used to receive millions from state agencies under Bryant but has since fallen out of favor with political leadership.

Child care providers and advocates have long complained about a lack of communication with the council and state early childhood administrators.

Most recently, the Mississippi Department of Human Services awarded Mississippi State University Extension Service \$5 million to develop a new early childhood curriculum for child care centers to use.

Child care centers and advocates remain skeptical about the direction of early childhood programs in the state, but they hope the council's recent vote could signal earnest efforts to craft policy suggestions based on the actual needs of low-income working parents.

"I would support it and hope that this would be a beginning to communication between childcare, parents and the governor's office," said Deloris Suel, owner of Prep Company Tutorial School in Jackson. "This is more than we've gotten out of any governor since this was enacted, so this is a very good first step."

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[Gov. Reeves advised to remove DHS child support requirement \(msn.com\)](https://www.msn.com)

Mississippi MDHS-CSE-675 Revised 05-01-2021
Mississippi Department of Human Services
Application for Child Support Services

I, _____, am applying or have been referred for child support services.

First Middle Maiden Last

CHILD(REN) INFORMATION: Information relating to the child(ren) born from the relationship between one set of parents. A separate application will be completed when children are not born to one set of parents. For example: The biological mother is the applicant. She has children by two different fathers. The child(ren) from each father will need to be listed on separate applications.

1st Child's Name SSN: DOB: Sex: Eth:

City & State of Birth: Relationship to CP:

2nd Child's Name SSN: DOB: Sex: Eth:

City & State of Birth: Relationship to CP:

For additional children, please complete the supplemental information form.

Do the children have health insurance coverage? Yes No

If yes, please list who is providing the insurance: Custodial Parent Parent Responsible for Support
 Medicaid

The name of the child's provider _____

Group/Policy number: _____

Are the children citizens of the United States of America? Yes No If no, please list each child's name and country of citizenship:

CUSTODIAL PARENT (CP) INFORMATION: Information relating to the person who has physical custody of the children. The CP could be the child(ren)'s mother, father or another adult.

Name: Social Security Number:

Birth Date: Sex: Ethnicity: Last Completed Grade:

Is the CP a United States of America citizen? Yes No If no, what is the country of citizenship?

Email Address:

Mailing Address:

Home Address:

Home Telephone: Mobile Telephone: Work Telephone:

Employer Name and Address:

Employer Telephone Number: Mississippi MDHS-CSE-675 Revised 05-01-2021

Relationship to the parent responsible for support:

Married: Date of Marriage: County and State of Marriage:

Divorced: Divorce Date: Place of Divorce:

Separated Never Married Other Relationship: Explain:

INFORMATION REGARDING THE PARENT RESPONSIBLE FOR SUPPORT (PRFS): Information of the parent who does not have primary physical custody of the children.

The PRFS could be the mother or father of the child(ren). For example, a child lives with the father. The mother of the child is the PRFS.

Name: Social Security Number: Sex:

DOB: Ethnicity: Height: Weight: Hair Color: Eye

Color: Last Completed Grade:

Describe Scars/Tattoos:

Other names used:

Is the PRFS a citizen of the United States of America? Yes No If yes, please list the city and state of birth:

If the PRFS is not a citizen of the United States of America, please list the country of citizenship?

Mailing Address:

Home Address:

Email Address:

Telephone Numbers for the PRFS: Home: Cell: Other:

Is the PRFS currently incarcerated: Yes No Unknown

PRFS Employer Name and Address:

Employer Telephone Number:

If the PRFS has multiple employers, please complete additional information on the supplemental information form.

Does the PRFS have Health Insurance Coverage? Yes No If yes, please list the children that are covered on PRFS insurance below:

Is the PRFS currently ordered to pay child support for the child(ren) named above? Yes No

If yes, please provide the following details about the order:

Amount: \$ Date of Order: County: State:

PRFS Relationship to Child(ren):

Parents were married when the child(ren) were conceived/born

Alleged parent, paternity not established

PRFS is the mother

Legal father with paternity established by one of the following methods:

In Hospital Paternity (signed the birth certificate) Genetic Testing Court Order Stipulated

Agreement: Other, specify:

What date was paternity established:

Is the name of the parent responsible for support on the child's birth certificate? Yes No

Please use this space to provide additional information about the PRFS, such as information related to the PRFS' finances, location, work history, college degrees or certificates, past addresses and other sources of income:

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OTHER BIOLOGICAL PARENT (OBP)/LEGAL PARENT INFORMATION: The OBP is the other legal/biological parent (not the PRFS above) in cases when the child(ren) live with someone other than a legal/biological parent. This section should be completed

when the CP is someone other than the mother or father. For example, a child lives with a grandparent who has guardianship or custody of the child. The grandparent is the CP. If the father is listed as the PRFS above, the mother would be the OBP below.

Name: Social Security Number: Sex:

DOB: Ethnicity: Height: Weight: Hair Color: Eye

Color: Last Completed Grade:

Describe Scars/Tattoos:

Other names used:

Is the OBP a citizen of the United States of America? Yes No

If yes, please list the city and state of birth:

If the OBP is not a citizen of the United States of America, please list the country of citizenship?

Email Address:

Mailing Address:

Home Address:

Telephone Numbers: Home: Cell:

Is the OBP currently incarcerated: Yes No Unknown

Employer Name and Address:

Employer Telephone number:

If the OBP has multiple employers, please complete additional information on the supplemental information form.

Does the OBP have Health Insurance Coverage? Yes No If yes, please list the children that are covered on OBP insurance below:

What is the OBP's relationship to the CP? Child Married Never Married

Divorced Separated Other, specify

What is the OBP's relationship to the NCP? Married Never Married Divorced

Separated Other, specify

Please use this space to provide additional information about the OBP, such as information related to the OBP's finances, location, work history, college degrees or certificates, past addresses and other sources of income:

I authorize the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) to perform the following type of service:

Please only check one box

Locate only services. (MDHS would attempt to locate the PRFS. Public Assistance cases may not choose locate only.)

Income Withholding Disbursement Services Only. (MDHS would not provide any other type of enforcement, and if the PRFS' employment changes, MDHS would not automatically issue a new withholding order. (Public Assistance cases may not choose this service.)

Full services that are listed below:

- Locate the noncustodial parent;
- Establish the legal paternity of my child(ren);
- Get a legal order for child support, including medical insurance, for the child(ren), or get an amendment to the child support order if one already exists;
- Enforce the child support order by any way permitted bylaw;
- Collect and distribute child support payments according to Federal guidelines and the laws of the State of Mississippi;
- Disclose my circumstances in pleadings or other documents filed in a proceeding to enforce/determine child support for my child(ren). I understand that I am entitled to a determination of good cause if my or my child(ren)'s health, safety or liberty would be unreasonably put at risk if information concerning my circumstances is disclosed as stated above.

In some cases, MDHS may request that the PRFS be ordered to pay support up to one year before application. Not all cases qualify for prior support, and a request does not guarantee prior support will be awarded or paid.

- Would you like MDHS to pursue prior support? Yes No

SAFETY CONCERNS: MDHS takes safety of families very seriously, and can modify some processes to help with safety concerns.

Disclosure is not a criminal allegation against any party in this case, nor a request for MDHS to avoid pursuing services. Instead, this information is used by MDHS to better manage your case and protect your information. MDHS treats this disclosure as confidential, and will not reveal it to any other party, including another parent.

To better understand your safety concerns, please check all boxes that apply:

- The other parent does not know I am applying for services, and I am concerned about the other parent's reaction.
- I have a restraining order against the other parent.
- I am concerned about the other parent getting my address and contact information.
- I am afraid of the other parent.
- I am afraid of seeing the other parent in court or in MDHS offices.
- The other parent has been convicted of domestic violence or another related crime (assault, sexual battery, stalking, etc.)

I am receiving public assistance benefits, such as SNAP/TANF/MEDICAID, and the following circumstances apply to my case:

- The child(ren) were conceived by either rape or incest.
- A child listed on this application has been convicted of a felony and sentenced to two (2) or more years.
- Legal proceedings for the adoption of the child are pending before a court of competent jurisdiction.
- I am receiving assistance from a public or licensed private social service agency to help me determine whether I should allow my children to be adopted.

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By signing this application, I understand that:

- I have assigned to MDHS any and all rights and interests in any cause of action past, present, or future that I or the child(ren) included in this application may have against any parent failing to provide for the support of the minor child(ren);
- A non-refundable fee of \$25 will be charged as an application fee and to recover the costs of any services performed for applicants who are not receiving public assistance [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, (TANF) or Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP)]. No action will be taken until the application fee is paid;
- A non-refundable annual fee of \$35 will be collected from distributed child support in excess of \$550 for each October – September annual period for applicants who are not currently receiving Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and who have never received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits. This amount will be collected from the next distributed payment or payments until the fee is paid in full.
- There may be additional fees necessary, such as: court costs, filing fees, service of process fees;
- MDHS does not guarantee that efforts on my behalf will be successful;
- If I do not cooperate with MDHS, my case may be closed after advance notice, and public assistance offices will be notified, if applicable. Public assistance includes, but is not limited to, the SNAP/TANF office, Medicaid office, and/or Child Care office.
- I understand the criminal penalties for making false statements and false swearing and do hereby attest to the truthfulness of the information provided. [False swearing is punishable by a fine of not more than \$1,000 or by imprisonment of one year or both.];
- If I have an existing support order, upon paying the application fee for child support services, payments will be automatically directed to MDHS. Upon my request to close my child support case, it is my responsibility to have the payments redirected in court;
- It is my responsibility to notify MDHS of any direct payments I receive from the noncustodial parent or any subsequent child support orders I obtain;
- If I receive any money that was sent to me in error, the overpayment must be repaid by me;
- The state staff attorney and/or private contract attorney providing services pursuant to this application for child support services:
 - o Does not represent me in any action which may occur.
 - o Represents only the state and the state's interest.

o Cannot give me any legal advice; further, I understand that if I want legal advice I should contact my own attorney.

o Does not deal with custody or visitation rights.

- That any monies herein paid by me are not attorney fees;
- I and/or the other parent each have the right to request a review, in writing, of the support obligation every three years to ensure the amount is appropriately based on established guidelines, and this review may result in an increase or decrease in the child support obligation; and,
- No fee will be charged for parent locate only cases or Income Withholding Disbursement Services Only cases;
- I must apply for and cooperate with child support enforcement as a condition of eligibility for a child care certificate and other public assistance; and
- I must notify MDHS immediately when I have a change of address.

If I am requesting services as a custodial or other biological parent, I acknowledge that a child support worker will contact the noncustodial parent and set up a meeting with him/her to attempt to reach an agreement to pay child support. The amount of child support will be based on his/her income. If I have any information that has not been provided on this application and MDHS should know prior to this meeting (such as the noncustodial parents' income, employer, etc.), I must contact the child support worker immediately. MDHS will use all information provided when determining the amount of child support to be ordered.

If I am requesting services as a custodial parent, I understand my signature will serve as an authorization for MDHS to issue child support payments to me on a debit card. I have received the disclosures related to the debit card transaction fees.

I understand that I have the option to choose to enter into a direct deposit agreement with MDHS instead. MDHS will issue payments on the debit card until I request to enter into a direct deposit agreement, have completed and submitted the necessary forms, and have given MDHS and my financial institution reasonable time to setup direct deposit transactions.

Under the penalty of perjury, I do hereby swear and affirm that I have read all the information provided on this application and that the information I provided on this Application for Child Support Services is accurate and true to the best of my knowledge.

Applicant's signature: Date: / / _

Please mail your completed application with a check or money order for \$25.00 to:

MDHS-Division of Child Support

950 E. County Line Rd.

Suite G

Ridgeland, MS 39157

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Supplemental Information

ADDITIONAL CHILD(REN) INFORMATION: If you are applying for services for more than two children for the same father, complete the below information for the additional child(ren). You may print as many of these pages necessary to provide all information.

Child's Name SSN: DOB: Sex: Eth:

City & State of Birth: Relationship to CP:

Child's Name SSN: DOB: Sex: Eth:

City & State of Birth: Relationship to CP:

Child's Name SSN: DOB: Sex: Eth:

City & State of Birth: Relationship to CP:

Child's Name SSN: DOB: Sex: Eth:

City & State of Birth: Relationship to CP:

Child's Name SSN: DOB: Sex: Eth:

City & State of Birth: Relationship to CP:

Do the children have health insurance coverage? Yes No

Are the children citizens of the United States of America? Yes No If no, please list each child's name and country of citizenship:

EMPLOYER INFORMATION: Please provide additional employer information below:

Employer Name and Address:

Employer Telephone number:

Employer Name and Address:

Employer Telephone number:

Employer Name and Address:

Employer Telephone number:

Applicant's signature: Date: / / _

Official Use Only:

DATE RECEIVED: / / _

WORKER ID: _

CASE ID:

APPLICANT: CP PRFS OBP

TYPE OF SERVICE: Locate IWO Full Service

FAMILY VIOLENCE INDICATOR REVIEWED AND FLAGGED: Yes No NA

GOOD CAUSE DETERMINATION MADE: Yes No NA

DATE PROCESSED: / /

614 DISTRIBUTED: Yes No

577 COMPLETED: Yes No NA

DIRECT DEPOSIT DISCLOSURES GIVEN: Yes No NA