



Judicial Council of Georgia

Administrative Office of the Courts

Chief Justice Harold C. Melton
Chair

Cynthia H. Clanton
Director

Memorandum

TO: Elaine Johnson, Executive Program Manager, Judicial Council, Administrative Office of Courts

FROM: Matthew Bishop, Research Analyst, Judicial Council, Administrative Office of the Courts

RE: Parental Accountability Court Evaluation 2, for the Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Child Support Services (DCSS)

DATE: June 10, 2021

INTRODUCTION

The goal of the Parental Accountability Court (PAC) program is to address the underlying issues facing non-custodial parents (NCPs) which cause them to be chronically delinquent in payment of child support obligations. Since the pilot programs began in 2009 and 2010 in Carroll County and Coweta County, respectively, Georgia's PAC programs have increased in number to a current total of 43 active programs. This evaluation follows up on a 2018 evaluation by the Administrative Office of the Courts which included five PAC programs. Six programs have been selected for this evaluation, and the purpose of this evaluation is to determine whether participants in the six selected programs increased child support payments after becoming active in PAC, benefited from resources and court interactions, and to determine the extent to which the PAC database collects information that is both useful and up to date.

The data set discussed here was extracted from six programs in the Child Support PAC database and matched with payment data from the Division of Child Support Services database collected by staff of the Georgia Commission on Child Support. Any subsequent payment history updates to the database will not be reflected in this summary. Six PAC programs from these circuits have been selected for this evaluation based on years of operation and the ability to provide quality data: Alcovy Judicial Circuit, Appalachian Judicial Circuit, Coweta Judicial Circuit, Flint Judicial Circuit, Northeastern Judicial Circuit,

and the Southwestern Judicial Circuit. These six programs offered sufficient continuous years of operation as well as sufficient numbers of participants and graduates of the program to warrant inclusion in the evaluation.

Participants from these six programs with start dates between January of 2012 and December of 2016 have been included in the sample. These dates ensure that at least one year of post-program payment data is available of the 615 program participants from these two categories: 250 graduates (noncustodial parents who entered a program *and* successfully completed the program); 365 terminated participants (noncustodial parents who entered a program but *did not meet* the requirements for graduation *and did not* complete the program). Additionally, data was collected from 47 noncustodial parents that were terminated in referral status (NCPs who were referred to the six programs but *did not* enter or become active in a program). NCPs who entered and became active in a program, namely graduates, and terminated participants, will hereafter be referred to as “participants,” while those who terminated in referral status will be called simply “referrals.”

DATA COLLECTED

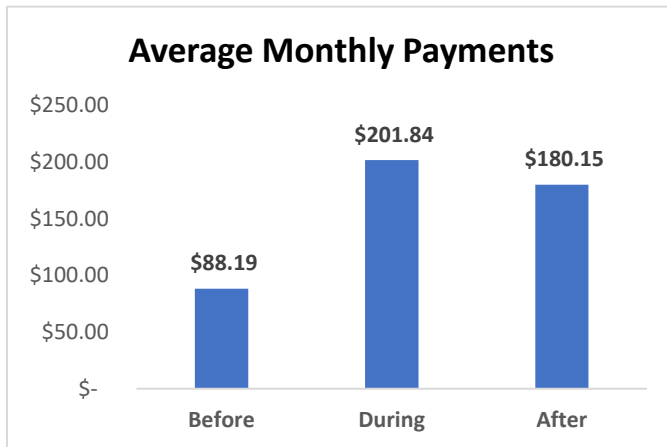
- **Payment summaries** - Payment amounts for both participants and referrals beginning 12 months before entering a program, payment amounts during program participation, and payment amounts during the 12 months after leaving a program are being analyzed.
- **Services** - records from the PAC database show services provided to each participant from the six selected programs. These services are intended to help address the root causes of chronic nonpayment and can include resume assistance, GED classes, referrals to employment programs, ID/License assistance, referrals to counseling, and access and visitation mediation, among others.
- **Participant Characteristics** - The PAC database captures personal information for each participant, including, but not limited to, age, education history, employment history, income, monthly support obligation amount, monthly arrears amount, and housing information.

LIMITATIONS

- This evaluation provides a snapshot on the performance of participants in six specific programs.
- The database currently captures changes in participant characteristics in specific areas of interest (education, employment, income, housing status, etc.) as they progress through the program, but those areas of interest could not be captured for participants active during the timeframe of this report. The database has been modified to capture this information and future reports will document these changes, providing a “before and after” snapshot of each participant.

- The database currently does not capture arrears balance for each participant at the time of entry into the program or departure from the program. Showing compliance of support order amounts as well as reductions in arrears amounts would show whether participants are meeting their payment obligations.
- Regional economic conditions, such as concentrated poverty at the local level and the number of job opportunities available, potentially play an important role in the effectiveness of PAC programs. This analysis does not account for those factors.

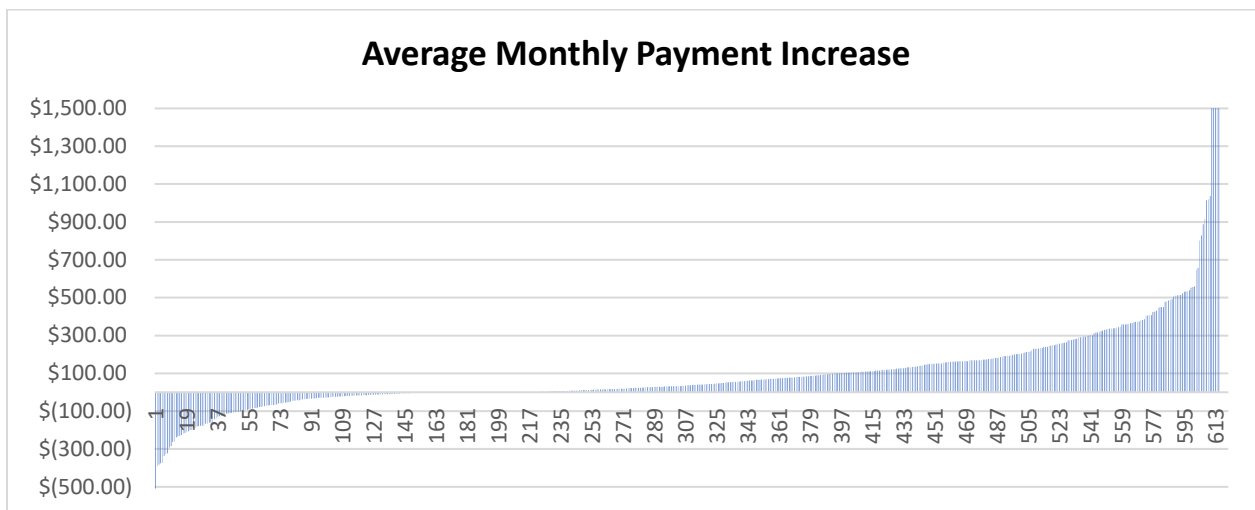
ANALYSIS



PAYMENTS

- Data was collected from 615 program participants, from the six selected programs comparing monthly payment amounts before, during, and after program participation.
- On a monthly basis, PAC participants increased the average amount of child support payments by 128% after entering a PAC program.

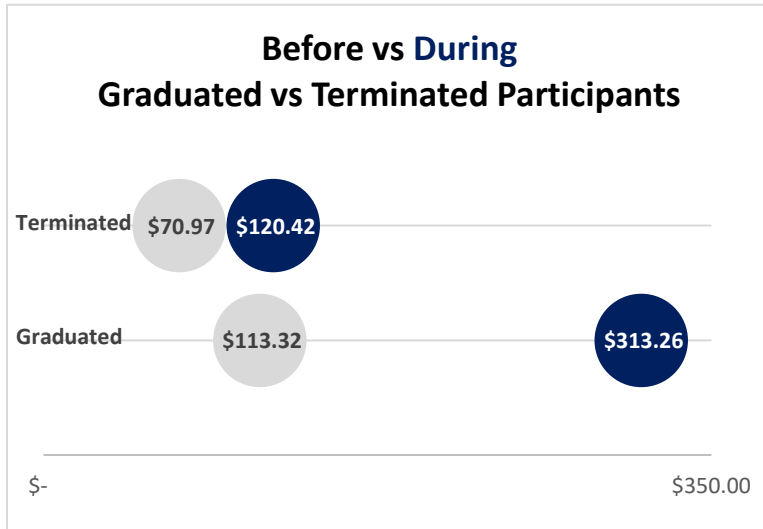
PAYMENT INCREASES



- The chart above compares changes in the average monthly child support payment amount for each participant in the 12 months before joining the program and the average monthly payment amount

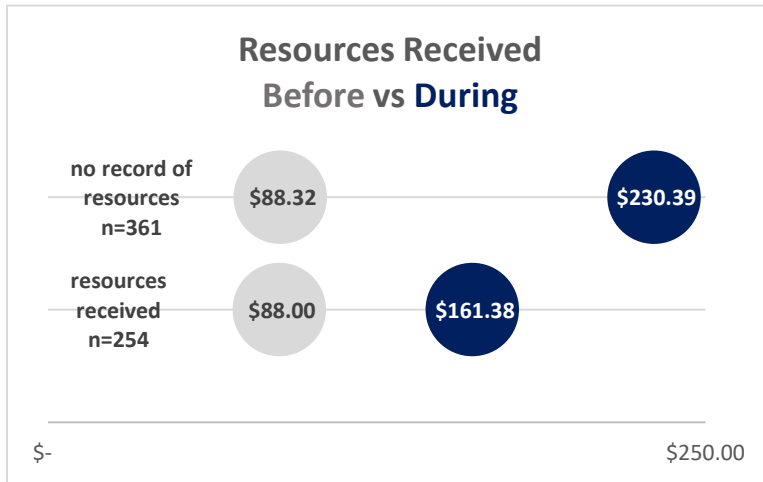
while active in the program. Each bar represents a single participant and shows the amount of payment increase or decrease for that individual.

- Of the 615 program participants, 168 (27%) decreased the average monthly child support payment after becoming active in PAC.
- Forty-five participants recorded no payments at all, both in the 12 months before joining PAC and also did not make any payments during the time they were active in a PAC program.
- The remaining 402 participants increased their average monthly child support payment amount after entering a PAC program.



COMPARING GRADUATES AND TERMINATED PARTICIPANTS

- Graduates entered the program making higher monthly payments, on average, than did participants who did not graduate.
- Both graduated and terminated participants increased their average monthly payment amount after becoming active in a PAC program, though this increase was more dramatic among graduates.

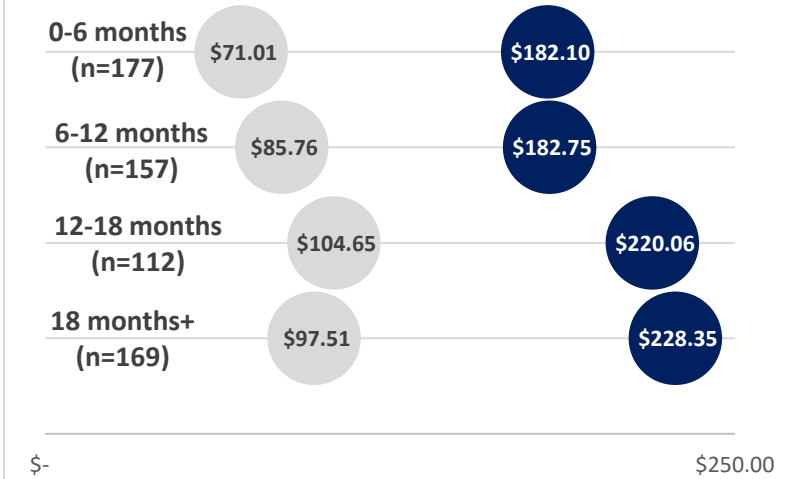


RESOURCES RECEIVED

- The PAC database tracks community resources provided to each participant. Resources provided typically include referrals to local clothing programs, resume assistance, job search assistance, assistance acquiring transportation, etc.

- Of the 615 program participants, 254 were reported to have received at least one resource provided by PAC programs. The remaining 361 participants had no record of any resources provided by PAC programs.

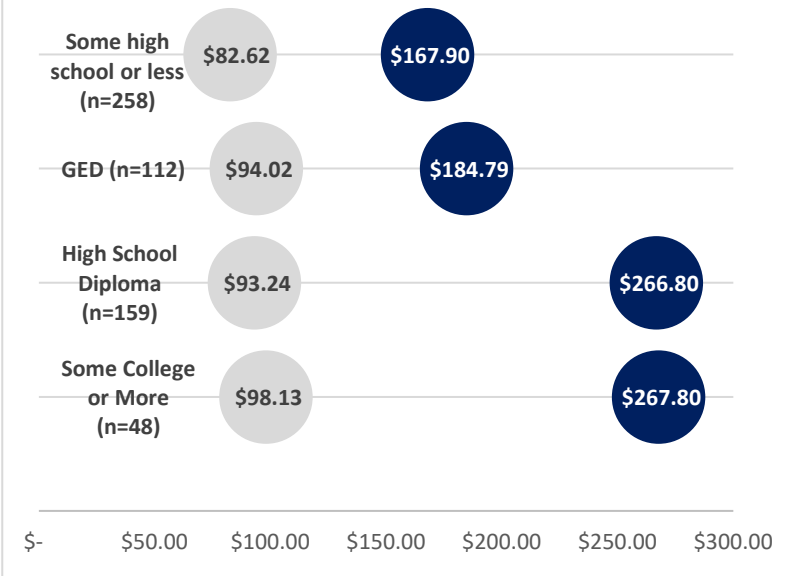
Payments increased Before vs During program based on amount of time spent in program



LENGTH OF TIME IN PROGRAM

- The chart on the left groups participants by the number of months in between program start date and the program exit date.
- The average participant spent 13.6 months in the program.
- All groups averaged higher monthly payments after joining PAC. The increase was larger for participants who spent more time in the program.

Average Monthly Payment by Education Before vs During

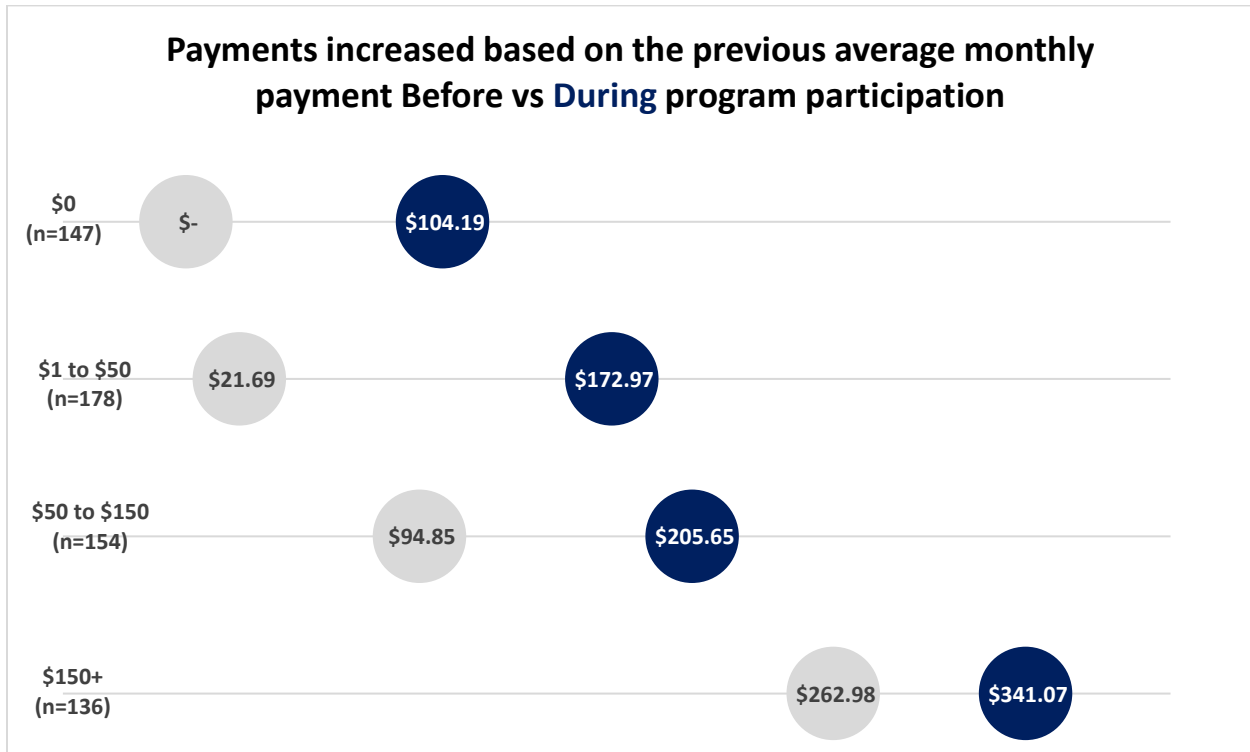


PAYMENT BY EDUCATION LEVEL

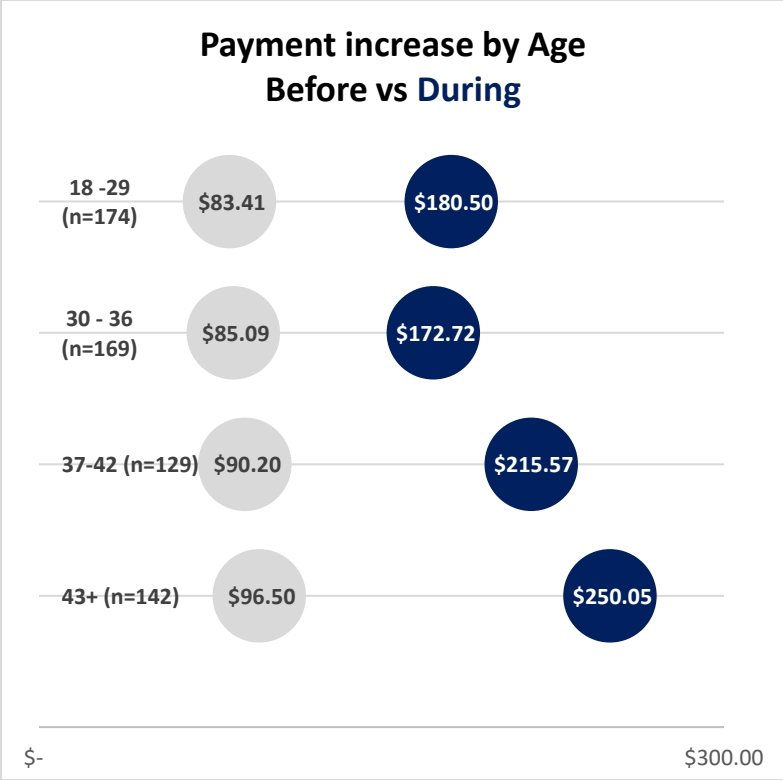
- The chart to the left compares average monthly child support payments for each education level¹.
- The largest group was “some high school or less. Only 48 participants reported any level of college education.
- All education groups increased the average monthly child support payment level. The amount of this increase was positively correlated with higher levels of education.

¹ Education level was unavailable for 38 participants.

PAYMENTS BY INCOMING MONTHLY AVERAGE

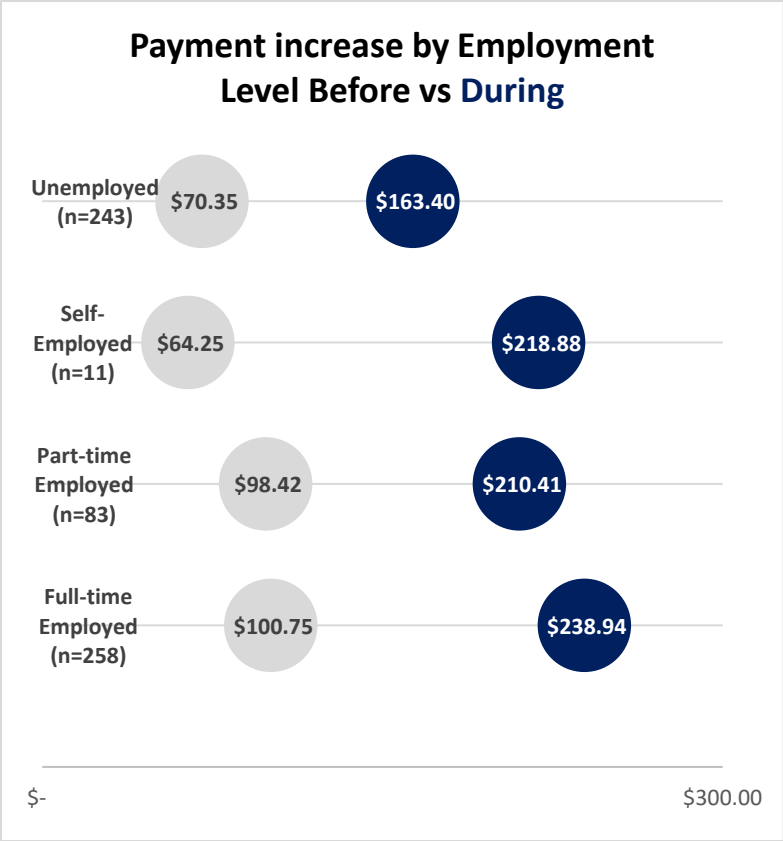


- The chart above groups participants by the average monthly payment in the 12 months before entering the program.
- The average monthly payment amount for all participants was \$88.19 in the 12 months before entering the program. See the Analysis chart on page 3 of this report.
- Participants in all payment groups averaged higher monthly payments after becoming active in a PAC program.
- The average monthly payment amount for all participants was \$205.97 during their participation in the program.



PAYMENTS BY AGE

- The chart to the left compares child support payment levels among different participant age groups. Note: age data was available for 614 of the 615 participants.
- Among all participants, the average age (at the time of program acceptance date) was 37 years old.
- Across all age groups, the average monthly child support payment increased after joining PAC.
- Among all participants, those who paid the highest averages of child support were in the 43 plus age group.



PAYMENT BY EMPLOYMENT LEVEL

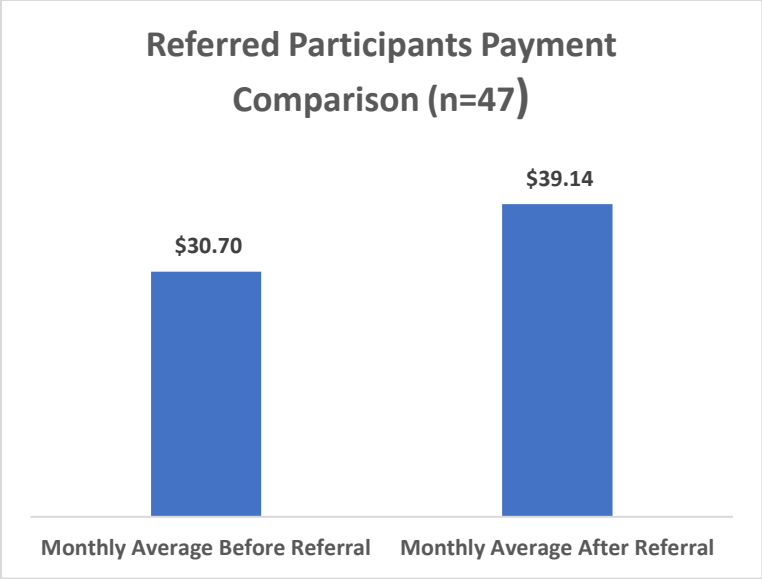
- The chart to the left compares average monthly child support payments among participants at different employment levels. Note: employment data was available for 595 of the 615 participants.
- Though all employment groups increased child support payments, employed participants averaged higher monthly payments after joining PAC.
- Note: it is likely that some participants changed employment status after joining the program, and the information in the database may not reflect this change in employment status.

CRIMINAL HISTORY



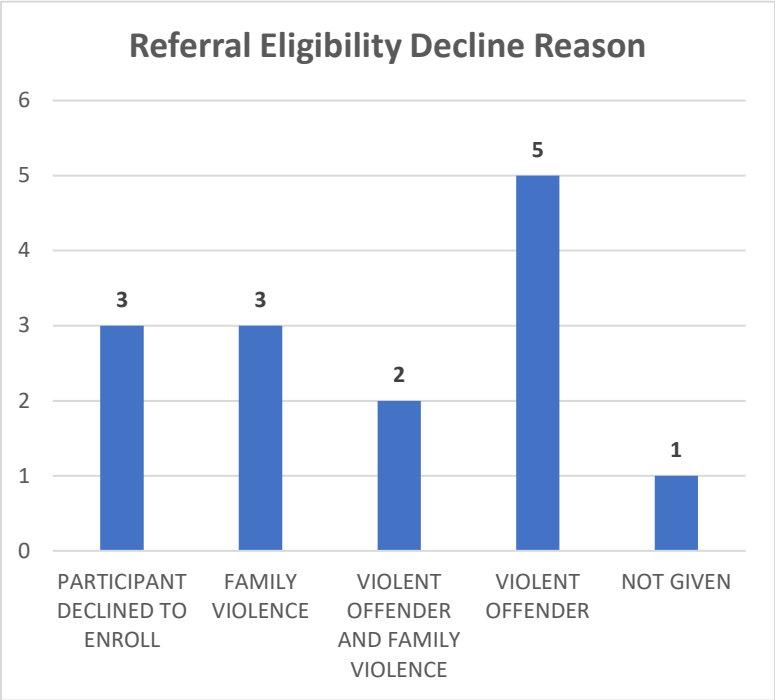
- The PAC database contains criminal history information that tells whether a participant has a prior conviction for a felony or misdemeanor.
- The chart above compares increases in average monthly child support payments among participants with different criminal histories².
- All groups increased the amount of average monthly child support payments. This increase was higher for participants with misdemeanor offenses or no record of prior convictions.

² Criminal history was unavailable for 8 out of 615 participants.



REFERRALS PAYMENT COMPARISON

- The data set also contains payment summaries for 47 non-custodial parents who were referred to PAC programs, but who did not participate in a PAC program.
- This chart compares the average monthly payment amount for these referred individuals in the 12 months before their referral date and the 12 months after their referral date.



REFERRALS DECLINE REASON

- This chart indicates the reasons why each referred participant did not join a PAC program.
- A case history of violent offenses or family violence offenses are the most frequently reported reason for eligibility declined cases.
- Payment summaries were only available for 14 PAC referral cases. Collecting more information on referral cases would improve this analysis.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Active participants in the six selected circuits increased the average amount of monthly child support payments after becoming active in PAC. On average, active participants increased the amount of child support payments per month by 116%.
- Both graduates and terminated participants increased monthly average child support payments after joining PAC. Graduates increased payments at a higher rate than terminated participants.
- Of the 615 program participants included in the analysis, 402 increased their average monthly payment after becoming active in a program, while 168 averaged less in monthly payments after entering a program. The remaining 45 participants continued to average \$0 in monthly payments after joining the program.
- Payment increases were higher for individuals who stayed in the program longer. Participants who participated for 90 days or less showed the lowest increases in average monthly payment, while participants with 450 plus days in a program showed higher, more sustained increases in payment.
- Payment increases in this sample were more pronounced among participants who had higher levels of formal education. Participants with high school diplomas and GEDs increased payments at a higher rate than participants who did not complete high school as well as those with no education information available.
- Participants with full-time or part-time employment were more successful than unemployed participants in increasing their average monthly child support payments.
- Felony offenders were less successful than participants with no felonies in increasing the monthly amount of child support payments.
- The amount of child support paid by a participant in the 12 months before joining a PAC program appeared to be a strong predictor for the average monthly amount the participant would pay after joining PAC.
- Referrals (NCPs who were referred to the six programs but *did not* enter or become active in a program) also showed slight increases in average monthly child support payments. In the 12 months after the referral date, these individuals increased average monthly payments by 27%.

PROGRAM TESTIMONIALS

The Parental Accountability Court has had a tremendous and positive impact on the lives of the participants who were willing to join the program and ultimately achieve their goal of graduation from the program. The judges and coordinators have provided support and guidance to the participants as the participants learned and grew through their experiences and diligent work. One of the participants has chosen to share his thoughts on the program from his perspective. And a few of the coordinators have chosen to share their experiences with the participants as well. The stories below are a testament to the leadership of the judges and coordinators involved in the Parental Accountability Court program. They are also a testament to the hard work of the participants who were eager and willing to become a more stable presence in the lives of their children, who have chosen now to provide financial support for their children, and who, perhaps for the first time, have now established lifelong relationships with their children. We are pleased to include these reflections in this evaluation report.

Alcovy Judicial Circuit PAC
Judge Cheveda McMamy
Comments written by Kobie Vaughn, PAC Coordinator

In March 2018, Mr. Few had concerns with employment, his child, and making child support payments. The PAC Coordinator spoke with Mr. Few in depth regarding his concerns and possible resources available to address the concerns. Mr. Few had an interest in proceeding forward with possible PAC enrollment, however; was a little hesitant due to there being a Judge presiding over the program as well as there being court involvement to enroll in the PAC Program. Once enrolled, Mr. Few quickly gained employment to start making monthly support order amount payments on his DCSS case. The arrears balance on the DCSS case has been paid in full since February 14, 2020, and Mr. Few did complete the agency-initiated review and modification as an incentive before graduating the PAC Program. The success of Mr. Few is one of many within the DCSS outreach programs. From the initial interaction in March of 2018 and referrals given on behalf of Mr. Few during his timeframe within PAC, further shows his success and many others today in caring for their children as we continue growing stronger families for a stronger Georgia.

Appalachian Judicial Circuit PAC
Judge John Worcester
Comments written by Frank Van Houten, PAC Supervisor

In October 2014, Mrs. April Howard was officially accepted into the Appalachian Circuit PAC program. She was a case transfer from the Flint Judicial Circuit PAC program. Mrs. Howard was accepted by Judge John Worcester based on a request from Judge Brian Amero. Mrs. Howard had issues with her child support, she was a chronic non-payer, and also had numerous run ins with

the criminal justice system. April's appearance was unkept and she appeared very skittish or almost afraid to speak with the PAC coordinator and Judge.

As the months went by April began trusting the PAC coordinator and Judge Worcester enough to start speaking about some of the trauma in her life. The PAC staffing team modified her case plan to include visits to the local community service board for substance abuse treatment. April seemed to be doing well, she was paying her child support and being compliant with the courts, but unfortunately slipped back into some negative behavior. Judge Worcester and the staffing team had determined that maybe April needed more intensive treatment and services, so the Appalachian Mental Health court staff provided a mental health evaluation. April joined the mental health court program and also moved into the local female housing facility. There she was monitored daily and was able to access Mental health services and counseling daily if needed.

April spent two years in the Mental Health Court and finally managed to overcome her issues. She graduated from there in November 2018 and has a new lease on life. April successfully obtained a full-time job with the school system and was compliant with her child support obligations. If you had seen her several years ago you would not recognize her today, she glows with the possibility of dreams and accomplishments. The collaboration between three accountability courts, including the PAC program, helped her get her life back.

Coweta Judicial Circuit PAC
Judge John T. Simpson
Comments written by Andrew Henderson, PAC Coordinator

Mr. Daniel started the PAC program March 2017. He was ordered into the program, by Judge Simpson, as an alternative to jail. The participant struggled with paying the amount of support due and made the statement that he wasn't going to pay until it was more affordable. Records indicated he really needed help completing the review/modification process. The PAC coordinator was able to assist him with completion of all necessary documents and the case was modified in May of 2018. Shortly after Mr. Daniel became employed full time and has not missed a payment since July 2018. He works for Sunoco and states he was never affected financially by Covid-19 restrictions. Mr. Daniel still reports that he feels fortunate that PAC helped address his barriers. He feels like he now has gainful employment and a reasonable support ordered amount.

Flint Judicial Circuit PAC
Judge Brian J. Amero
Comments written by Alfred Jones, Jr, PAC Coordinator

Prior to entering the program, Bobby Hyde had not made a child support payment in over a year, he was down on his luck, and needed a fresh new beginning. After discussing the PAC program guidelines and expectations, he decided that this was a program that he could strive in. Mr. Hyde entered PAC in May 2019 and was given numerous job leads which landed him a great opportunity to work for Clorox. With his new job, a review and modification, as well as the support from the

PAC program, Mr. Hyde's monthly payments went from \$600 a month to \$292 a month and within a year his arrears balance went from \$7,917.00 to \$0.00. Thank you, Mr. Hyde, for allowing the PAC program to help you break those barriers and become self-sufficient.

Northeastern Judicial Circuit PAC
Judge Bonnie C. Oliver, Patricia Huling, PAC Coordinator

"Wanted to say thank you to the whole PAC program and especially a big thank you to Miss Tyson and Judge Oliver. Those two helped me get my priorities back in check. Keeping me in line and helping me stay focused on the prize. I didn't see my kids for a year and now I've been getting them for the weekends for months now. Thanks for not giving up on me."

Thank ya'll - Brandon DJ Jordan

Southwestern Judicial Circuit PAC
Judge R. Rucker Smith
Comments written by Shelia Hines, PAC Coordinator

Justin Shell entered the Parental Accountability Program in July 2019. He was also participating in Drug Court at the time of his entry. From day one Justin was a model participant. He was already successful in the Drug Court Program and the only thing holding him back from progressing was the suspension of his driver's license. He had an excellent work history, but some negative personal choices which ultimately landed him into not one, but now two, accountability courts. Justin was persistent in getting into the program and the DCSS enforcement agent agreed he would be a good fit. He kept every single appointment required of him, working around his strict treatment schedule with a local substance abuse program. Justin has been lucky in that he had been able to maintain close relationships with his children from both of his cases. In fact, during his participation in PAC, legitimation was discussed at several group meetings. Justin, not letting the grass grow under his feet, took the initiative to pursue legitimation on his own, although he was given access to the Access and Visitation program. He prepared all the necessary legal documents and even found a pauper's affidavit that could be used in the filing of the documents that made it more affordable for him to move forward. He came to a group meeting and shared this information with other participants, which was ultimately shared with other participants in PAC programs across the state. As a result of his persistence Justin was granted visitation rights with his children on both cases, even obtaining shared custody with the custodial parents. The Judge was impressed with Justin for his dedication to his children. Justin obtained employment shortly after entering PAC because he had progressed so well in the drug program and was able to take on full-time employment. He needed very little assistance with job search and was very active in his job search efforts. He was eligible for graduation from PAC in July 2020 but due to the pandemic, this was delayed. It is only a formality because his payments have been consistent and there is no doubt, he will continue to meet his obligations even after he leaves the program.