Judicial Council of Georgia
Administrative Office of the Courts

Chief Justice P. Harris Hines
Chair

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Memorandum

TO: Elaine Johnson, Executive Program Director, Administrative Office of Courts

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

RE: PAC Court Evaluation

DATE: 8/13/2018

INTRODUCTION

The goal of Child Support Parental Accountability Courts (PACs) 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 Child Support PAC programs have increased in number to a current total of 31 active programs. This evaluation follows up on a 2011 study conducted by Applied Research Services, Inc. on the PAC pilot programs. Five PAC programs have been selected for this evaluation, and the purpose of this evaluation is to determine whether participants in the five selected programs increased child support payments after becoming active in PAC 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 five programs in the Child Support PAC database and matched with payment data from the Division of Child Support Services database collected by the Georgia Commission on Child Support on July 12, 2017. Any subsequent payment history updates to the database will not be reflected in this summary. Five PAC programs from these circuits have been selected for this evaluation based on years of operation and the ability to provide quality data: Stone Mountain Circuit, Enotah Circuit, Macon Circuit, Towaliga Circuit, and Augusta Circuit. These five programs offered sufficient continuous years of operation as well as sufficient numbers of participants to warrant inclusion in the evaluation.

Participants from these five programs with start dates between July 2012 and November 2015 have been included in the sample. These dates also ensure that at least one year of post-program payment data is available for each participant. During this time frame, data is available for 450 NCPs from three

categories: 81 graduates (NCPs who entered a program *and* successfully completed the program); 210 terminated participants (NCPs who entered a program but *did not meet* the requirements for graduation *and did not* complete the program), and 157 NCPs that were terminated in referral status (NCPs who were referred to the five 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 five 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 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 five specific programs.
- Each participant enters the program following a program track designed to address each participant's specific underlying causes for non-compliance. These tracks include: Mental Health Track, Substance Abuse Track, and Literacy Track. Participants across different tracks may require a broad array of different services, and outcomes for participants may differ from one track to another. At this time, treatment track information is not included in reports generated by the PAC database and cannot be analyzed.
- The database does not currently capture changes in participant characteristics in specific areas of interest (education, employment, income, housing status, etc.) as they progress through the program. Future improvements in the database will document these changes and provide a "before and after" snapshot of each participant.
- Arrears amounts cannot be determined without collecting the adjudicated arrears on each case at the time of entry into a program. Showing modifications 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.
- In many cases, data fields for participant characteristics such as education, employment, and income have been left blank. A more complete data set would allow for regression analysis, estimating the isolated effect of each variable of interest.

ANALYSIS

The following sections provide detailed analysis of payment data. Each section features a visual chart, followed by a summary of findings. The report concludes with recommendations for improved data collection.
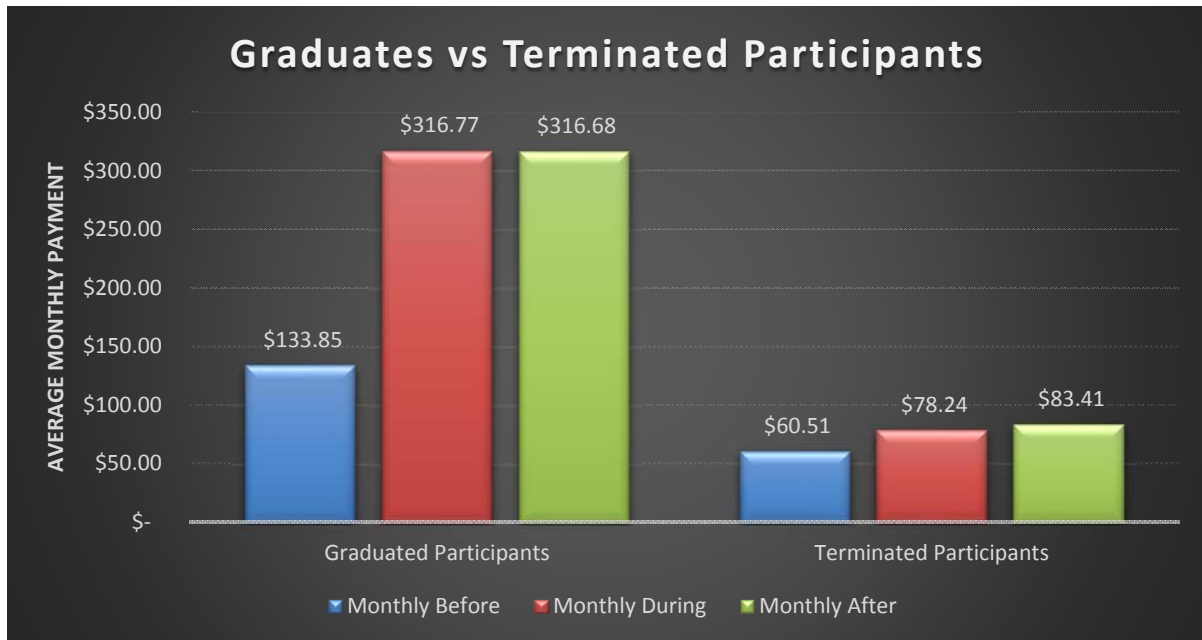
PAYMENTS

The chart above compares payments made by the 291 program participants (81 graduates and 210 terminated participants) from the five selected programs between time periods before, during, and after entering a PAC program. The average monthly payment for all program participants in the 12 months before entering the PAC Program was $80.93. While active in the program, participants averaged $144.63 in payments per month. Overall, this represents a 79% increase in average monthly payment. In the 12 month period after exiting the program, either by termination or graduation, participants averaged $148.34 per month in child support payment.

PAYMENT INCREASES
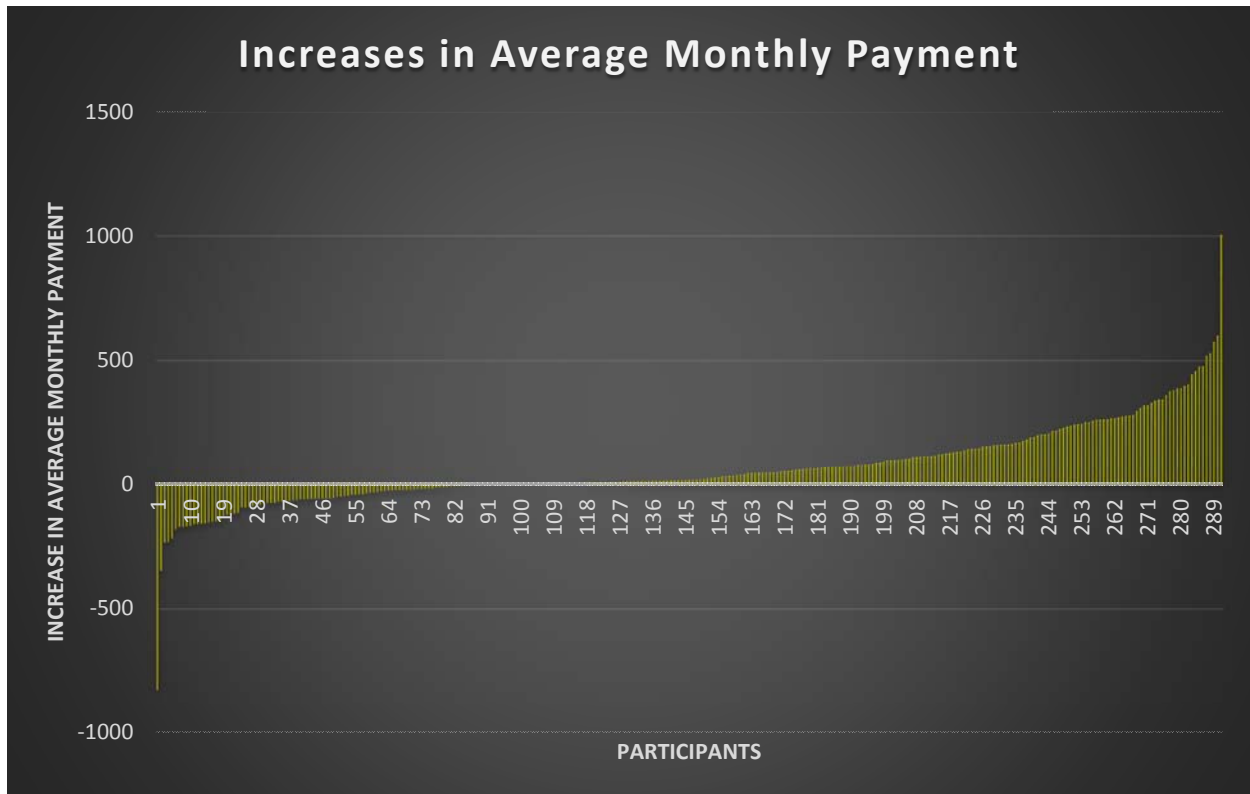
The chart above compares changes in the average monthly child support payment for each participant in the 12 months before joining the program to the average monthly payment while active in the program. Each bar shows the dollar amount by which an individual participant's average monthly child support payment amount increased or decreased while active in a program. Results varied greatly from participant to participant. Of the 291 participants, 88 individuals averaged less in monthly payments after joining a PAC program compared with their average monthly payment in the 12 months before joining PAC; 28 participants recorded no payments at all either before or during the time they were active in PAC; and the remaining 175 participants increased their average monthly child support payment after joining PAC.

GRADUATES VS TERMINATED PARTICIPANTS

Graduates vs Terminated Participants

The chart above compares the average monthly payment rate for participants who graduated from a program to participants who were terminated from a program. On average, graduates entered PAC programs with a higher average monthly amount of child support payments. In the 12 months before entering the program, individuals who would become graduates entered the program averaging $133.85 per month in child support payments. Comparatively, individuals who would eventually be terminated from the program entered with average monthly child support payment of $60.51.

While active in the program, individuals who graduated increased their average monthly child support payment to $316.77, representing an increase of 136%. In the 12 months following their graduation date, graduates maintained a similar average monthly payment rate of $316.68.

Comparatively, individuals who would eventually be terminated from the program increased their average monthly payment amount by roughly 29% after joining the program. These individuals averaged $78.24 in monthly child support payments while active in the program. In the 12 months following their termination date, these individuals averaged $83.41 in child support payments.

RESOURCES RECEIVED
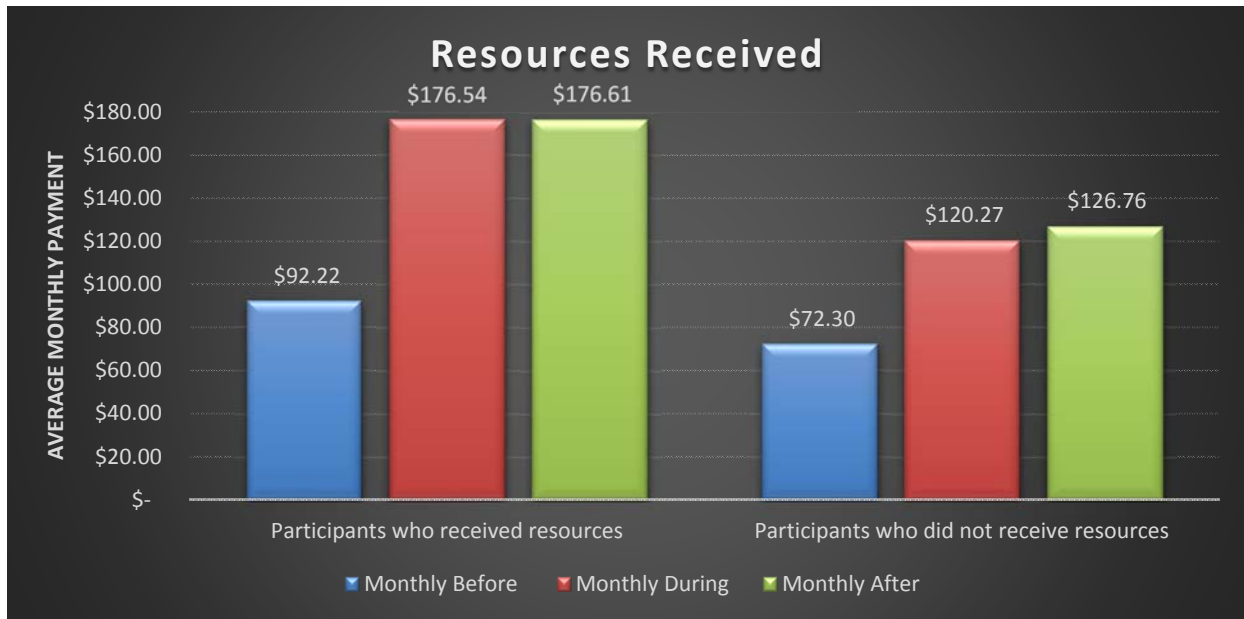
The chart above compares participants listed in the Resources report, for whom there is a record of utilizing at least one of the resources provided by PAC programs, to participants who are not listed in the Resources report. The types of resources typically provided include referrals to local Clothes Closet programs, resume assistance, job search assistance, assistance acquiring transportation, etc. Of the 291 participants involved, the resource report lists 126 individuals who received at least one resource from PAC programs. For the remaining 165 participants, there is no record of program resource utilization. As shown in the chart above, these two groups performed differently when comparing average monthly payment.

Participants who received at least one resource increased their rate of payment from $92.22 in the 12 months before entering the program to a monthly payment rate of $176.54 while active in the program, representing an average increase of 84%. In the 12 months after leaving the program, these individuals averaged a monthly child support payment rate of $176.61.

Comparatively, individuals for whom no record of utilizing resources exists, increased their monthly rate of payment from $72.30 to $120.77, representing an increase of 67%. On average, these participants were paying less in monthly child support before entering the program, and while they increased payment rates after becoming active in the program, the increase was smaller in magnitude when compared with participants who utilized at least one of the program's resources.

LENGTH OF TIME IN PROGRAM
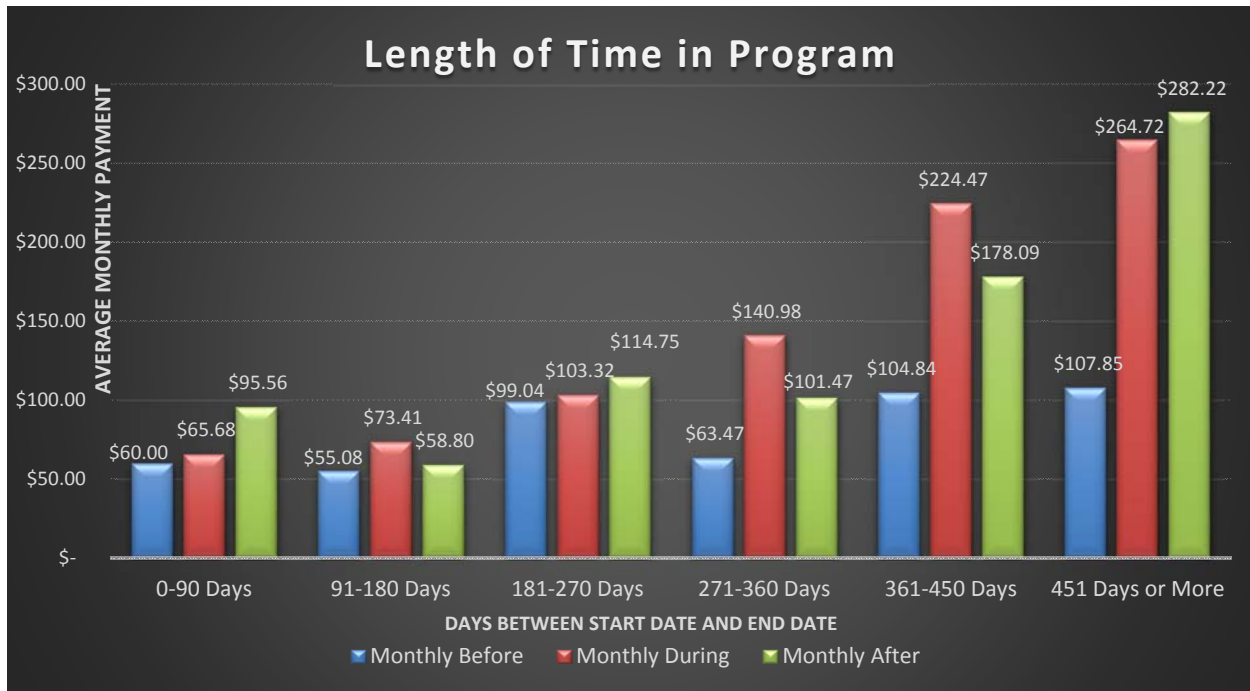
The chart above groups participants by the number of days between entering and leaving the program due to graduation or termination. The number of days spent active in the program is tied to different outcomes with regard to the average amount of child support paid per month. Among all participants, the average number of days spent in the program was roughly 294 days. All groups increased the average monthly amount of child support payment to some extent after starting the program, but this effect becomes larger as the number of days spent in the program increases.

Participants that entered and exited a program in 90 days or less increased average monthly child support payment from $60.00 per month to $65.68 after entering a program. Comparatively, participants who spent at least 450 days in a program increased average monthly child support payment from $106.20 to $280.15.

The numbers of participants in each category were as follows: 65 Participants with 0-90 Days; 47 participants with 91-180 days; 41 Participants with 181-270 days; 40 Participants with 271-360 days; 36 participants with 361-450 days; and 62 participants with 451+ active days in a program.

Graduates averaged 526 days (approximately 17.5 months) between start date and graduation date, while terminated participants averaged 205 days (approx. 6.8 months) between start date and termination date.

PAYMENT BY EDUCATION LEVEL
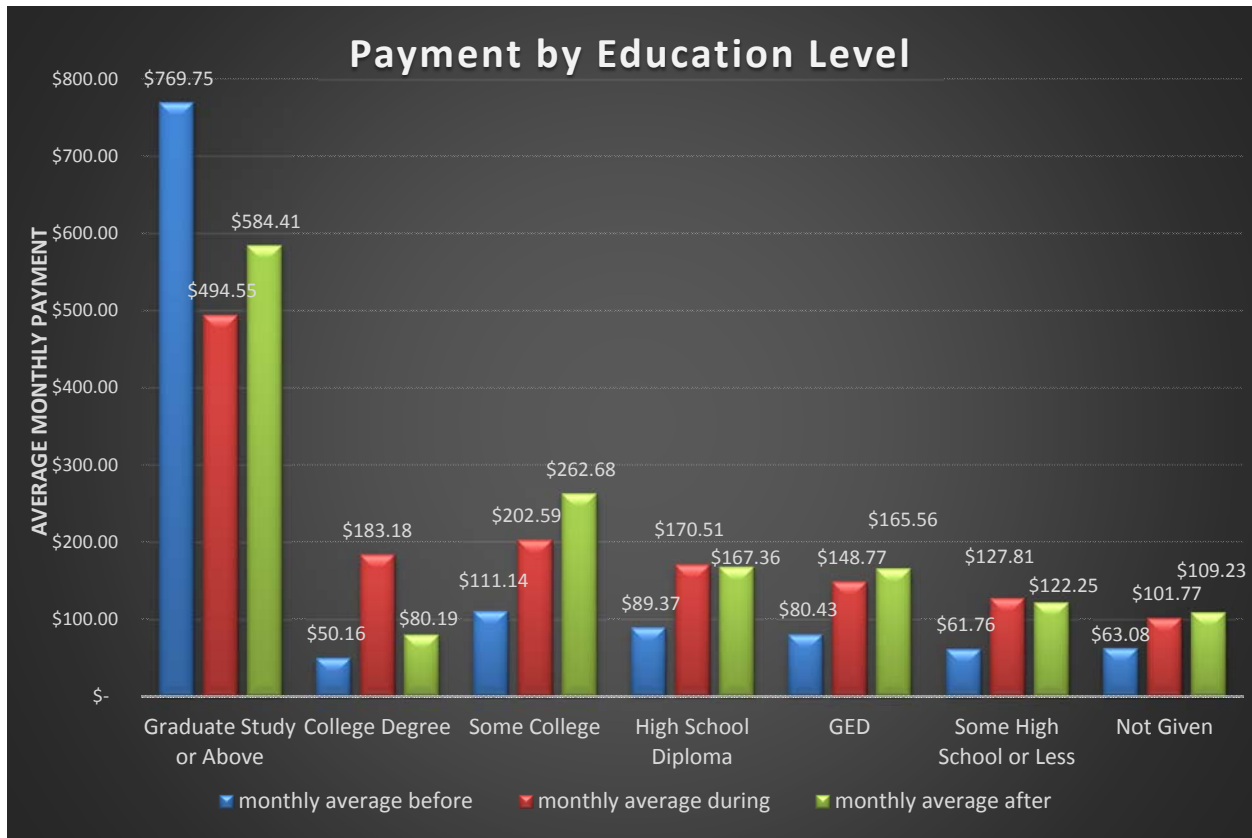
The graph above shows average monthly child support payments for each education level[1]. Participants with either graduate study experience or a graduate degree averaged higher monthly payments than all other groups before, during and after program participation. The graduate study group also failed to increase average monthly payment levels after joining the program. All other groups increased average monthly payment levels after joining the program.

The largest group was "some high school or less" with 101 participants, while 66 participants held a high school diploma, and 47 held GEDs. No education data was available for 54 participants. There were two categories with extremely small sample sizes, as there were only 5 participants with college degrees, 3 with graduate study or above, and 15 participants with some college coursework.

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[1] Education level may change over the course of program participation. Currently, these changes are not being captured by the database.

AGE
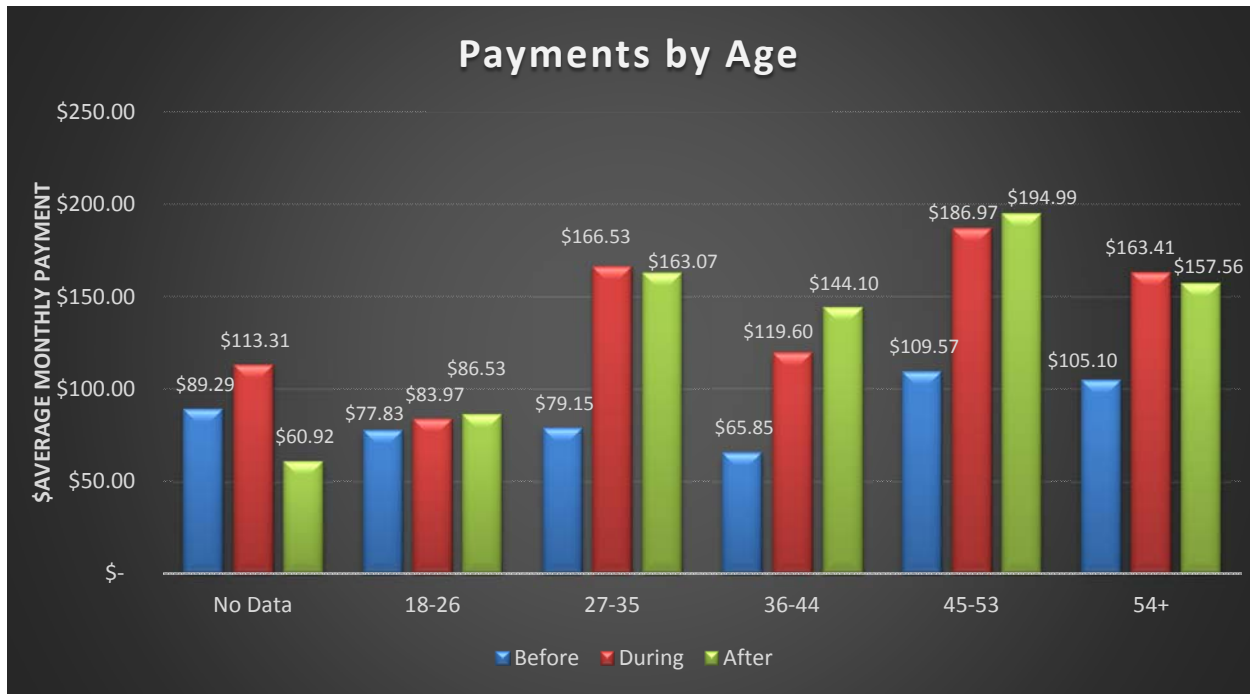
Of the 291 participants in the sample, the average participant age at the program start date was approximately 37 years, and there were 19 participants with no date of birth available. There were 27 participants aged 18-26 at entry, 110 participants aged 27-35, 85 participants were 45-53, and seven participants were 54 years old or older.

The chart above shows how average monthly payments varied with participant age. Payment increases after joining the program were least pronounced in the youngest age bracket, where participants entered between the ages of 18 and 26. Conversely, participants aged 27-35 were paying at a similar level before entering the program, but were more successful in increasing average monthly payments after entering the program.

Participants in the oldest two age brackets, 45-53 and 54+, averaged higher monthly payments than younger groups in the 12 months before joining the program and increased average monthly payments by 71% and 55%, respectively.

PAYMENT BY EMPLOYMENT LEVEL
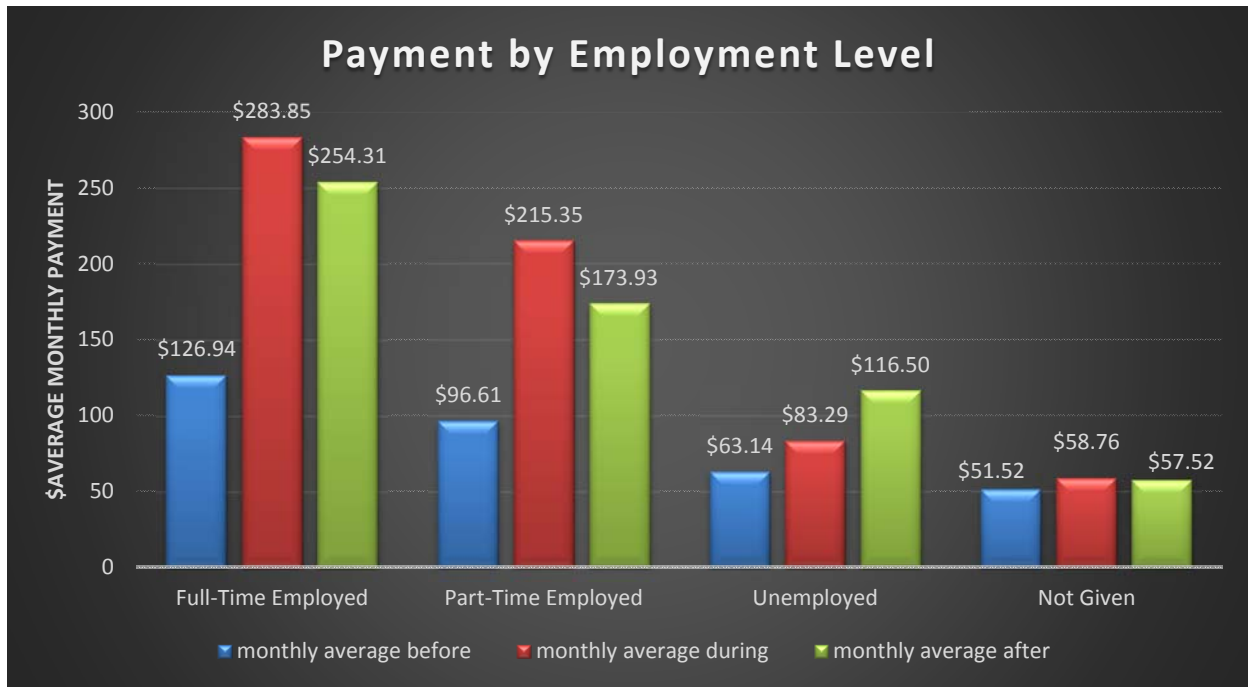
The graph above shows the average monthly child support payment for each employment level[2]. While participants at all employment levels increased average monthly payment to some degree after entering the program, participants who were employed full-time increased average monthly payments from $126.94 in the year before entering the program to $283.85 after entering, an increase of 124%. Part-time employed participants increased monthly payments from $96.61 to $215.35, representing a 123% increase.

Participants who were unemployed, or for whom no employment information was listed, were able to increase payment levels after entering the program, but were each paying lesser amounts upon entry and showed comparatively modest increases of 32% and 14%, respectively. Payment profiles for these groups resemble those of the terminated participants.

Almost half of all participants were listed as unemployed, with 145 participants designated as unemployed. Also, 66 participants were listed as full-time employed and 42 listed as working part-time. No employment data was available for 38 participants.

Wage data was largely incomplete, as there were only 43 participants for whom wage information was available, leaving 148 participants with no wage data furnished.

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[2] Employment level may change over the course of program participation. Currently, these changes are not being captured by the database.

CRIMINAL HISTORY

The PAC database contains criminal history information that tells whether a participant has a prior conviction for a felony or misdemeanor. Of the 291 participants selected from the five selected programs, 21 indicated having no prior convictions, 88 participants had a prior conviction, and 182 had no data available for this category. Twelve participants indicated no prior misdemeanors, and 68 participants had criminal history including a misdemeanor offense. Misdemeanor data was not available for 211 of the participants. Also, 57 participants indicated prior felony convictions while 37 participants had no record of prior felony convictions. Felony data was not available for 197 of the participants.

Using the available data, participants with prior convictions performed fairly comparably to participants with no prior convictions. Due to a relatively small number of misdemeanor offenders, it is difficult to determine whether prior misdemeanor convictions affected participant outcomes. However, there does appear to be an important difference with regard to felony convictions. Participants with felony convictions entered the program averaging $71.42 in monthly payments, while those without felony convictions averaged $124.78. Upon entering the program, participants with felony convictions increased average monthly payments to $148.28, while those without felony convictions averaged $247.20 in monthly payments.

PREVIOUS PAYMENTS

Previous Payment Amounts
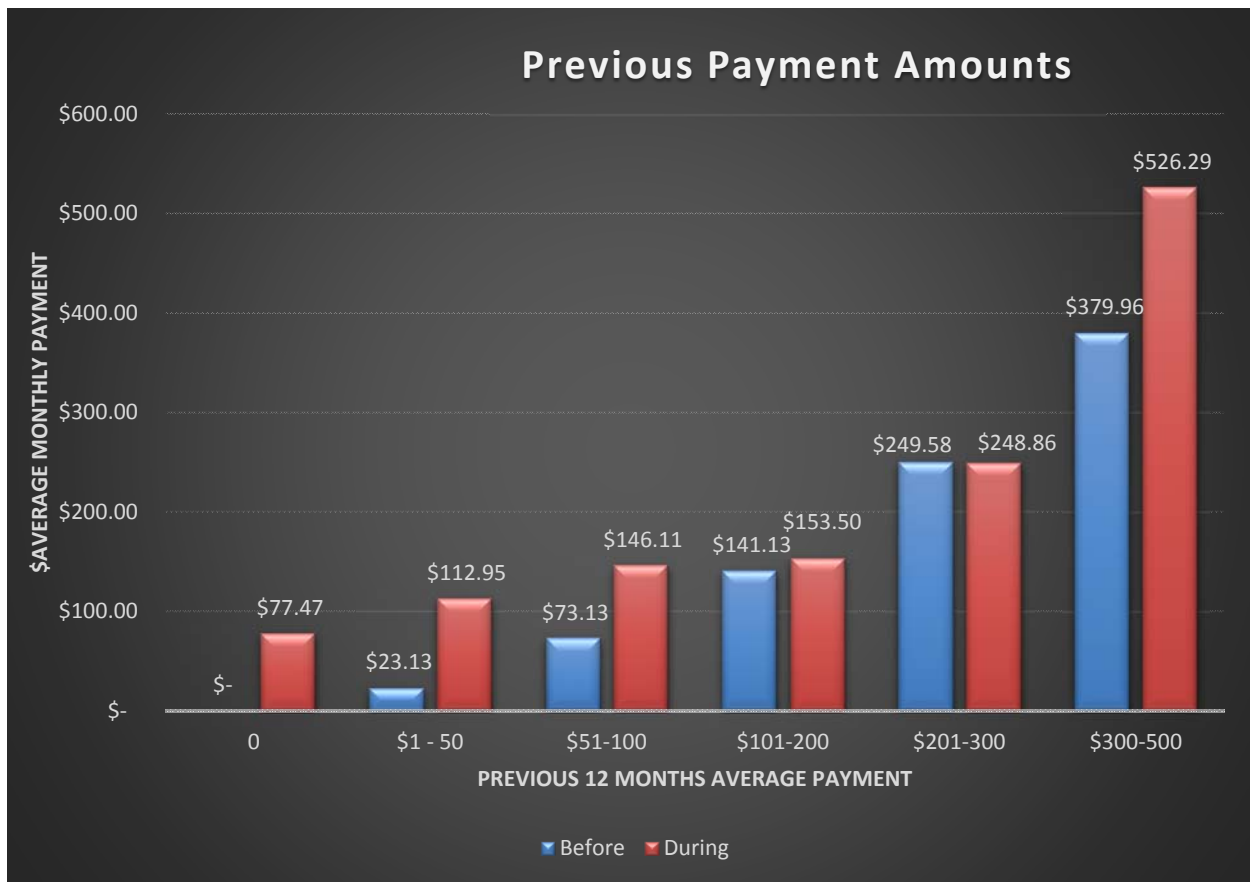
The chart above groups participants by the average monthly payment in the 12 months before entering the program. The average monthly payment amount for all participants was $80.93 in the 12 months before entering the program. Eighty participants averaged $0.00 in the 12 months before entering PAC, and this group increased average payments to $77.47 while active in PAC. Eighty-six participants entered PAC averaging between $1 and $50 and this group increased average payments to $112.95. Fifty-one participants entered PAC averaging between $51 and $100, and this group increased average payments to $146.11 while active in PAC. Forty-three participants entered PAC averaging between $101 and $200, and this group slightly increased average monthly payment amounts from $141.13 to $153.50. Payment increases were less pronounced, on average, for the 18 participants who entered the program averaging between $201 and $300, as this group did not increase the amount of its average monthly child support payment. There were 8 participants who averaged between $300 and $500 in the 12 months before entering a PAC program, and these participants increased their average monthly payment amount to $526.29.[3]

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[3] Not pictured in the chart, there were five participants averaging more than $500 in the 12 months before entering PAC. Average payments for this group decreased from $845.92 to $687.05. The chart doesn't include this group because their initial payments were approximately three standard deviations higher than the average, making this group outliers.
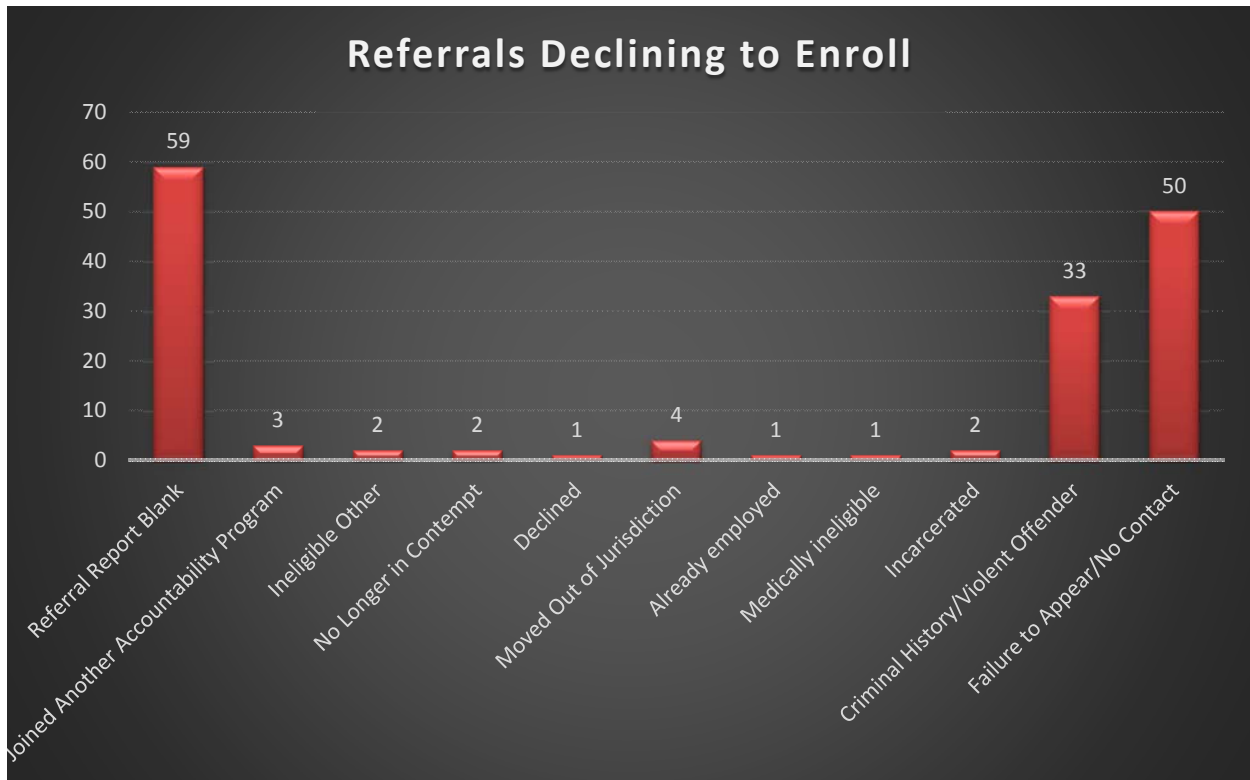
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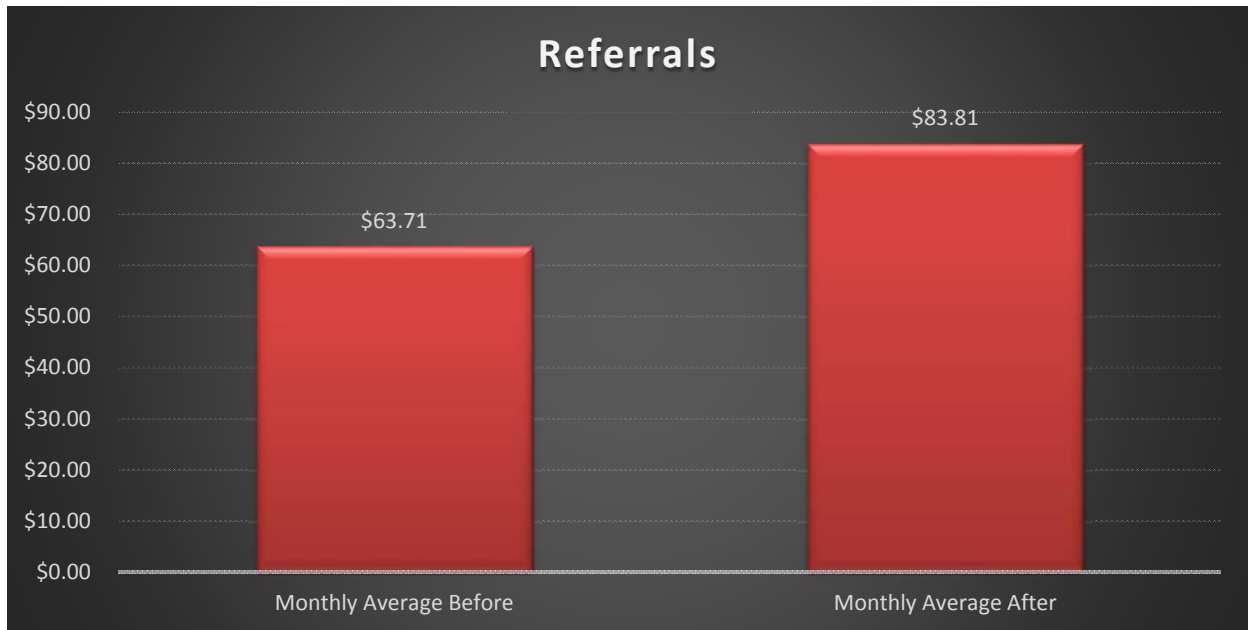
The data set also contains payment summaries for Non-Custodial Parents that were referred to the PAC programs (presumably because they were similarly delinquent in meeting child support payment obligations), but who did not participate in a PAC program. Payment data for these 157 referred individuals is included here for purposes of comparison[4]. In the 12 months before being referred to the program, referred NCPs averaged $63.71 in child support payments per month. In the 12 months after being referred to a PAC program, and declining to enroll, the average monthly child support payment for this group increased to $83.81, an average increase of 32%. In comparison, PAC participants increased payments by 79% after enrolling in a PAC program. While payments by participants who graduated rose 136% after joining PAC, participants that were eventually terminated increased their monthly payments by 29%, a level which closely mirrors individuals who were referred to the program.

Participants in referral status had less complete information available regarding their personal characteristics. Only 105 had a date of birth furnished, and these individuals averaged an age of 36 years old at the date of referral. Only 31 had employment information available while 27 referrals had education data furnished. Of these, three referred individuals were listed as employed and 28 were unemployed, while 20 had achieved at least a high school diploma or its equivalent. More complete information would allow better analysis on differences between referred individuals and those who choose to enter the program.

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[4] Fundamental differences in characteristics between individuals who were referred and individuals who enrolled in the PAC program might make direct comparisons in payment data problematic.

REASONS REFERRALS DID NOT JOIN PAC

Referrals Declining to Enroll

Category	Value
Referral Report Blank	59
Joined Another Accountability Program	3
Ineligible Other	2
No Longer in Contempt	2
Declined	1
Moved Out of Jurisdiction	4
Already employed	1
Medically ineligible	1
Incarcerated	2
Criminal History/Violent Offender	33
Failure to Appear/No Contact	50

The graph above shows the reasons why each referred individual did not join the PAC Program. These entries are recorded in the PAC database. Of the 157 referrals for which payment data is available, 59 have no information explaining why the individual did not enroll. Ranking as the second most frequent reason given for not enrolling, 50 individuals did not enroll due to failure to appear for intake appointment or Coordinator's inability to make contact with the NCP. Additionally, there were 33 individuals disqualified from enrollment due to criminal history either, including felonies or violent offenses. The remaining 16 referrals listed assorted reasons such as joining other programs, moving away from the jurisdiction, being incarcerated, etc. Only two individuals cited an ability to pay the court-ordered amounts on their own as reason to decline enrollment.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Active participants in the five programs increased the average amount of monthly child support payments. On average, active participants from the five included PAC programs increased the amount of child support payments per month by 79%.

- 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 291 participants included in the analysis, 175 increased their average monthly payment after becoming active in a program, while 88 averaged less in monthly payments after entering a program. The remaining 28 participants continued to average $0 in monthly payments after joining the program.

- Participants that utilized program resources increased average monthly payments at a higher rate than individuals without a record of utilizing program resources.

- 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+ days in a program showed higher, more sustained increases in payment.

- Payment increases in this sample were more pronounced among participants that 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 payment.

- Felony offenders were less successful than participants with no felonies in increasing the monthly amount of child support payments.

- Referrals (NCPs who were referred to the five 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 32%. These results compare closely with terminated participants, who increased average monthly child support payments by 29% after becoming active in the program.

- 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.

- Of the 159 referred NCPs that did not enter a program, 59 had no record in the database indicating a reason for declining to join. Also, 50 of these individuals failed to qualify due to criminal history or violent offender status, while 33 did not enter due to failure to appear for scheduled intake appointments.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE DATA COLLECTION

The data provided for this report has been useful in showing the PAC program's effectiveness at increasing payment amounts for participants. Future research could be improved both by collecting additional data and ensuring that all data elements are fully furnished for each participant. Additionally, these suggestions will broaden the scope of evaluation to determine the extent to which regional economic conditions impact the effectiveness of PAC programs. Here are some recommendations to improve the quality of future analysis.

- Improve data collection to show how participant characteristics such as education and employment level change over the course of the program. In the future, the following data points will be collected at multiple intervals between participant's program start date, graduation/termination date, and twelve months post-graduation, capturing changes as they occur:
  - Employment status
  - Income (hourly wage/salary amount)
  - Monthly child support payment obligation amount owed
  - Monthly arrears repayment amount owed by noncustodial parent
  - Government subsidies
- Improve data collection to include the following elements that are currently either not being captured by the PAC database or not being included in automated reports:
  - Number of children in each case
  - More detailed child support payment information on NCPs who paid $0 in the 12 months prior to program start date
  - A report for treatment track information for each participant.
  - Years of work experience
  - Length of unemployment