The Virgin Islands Consortium

Federal Auditors Give High Marks To Territory's Paternity And Child Support Division

VIC News / **Published On April 24, 2017 10:21 AM /**

Staff April 24, 2017

Acting Attorney General Claude E. Walker.

The initiative, “Operation Support Our Children,” has contributed to the Department of Justice, Paternity and Child Support Division’s (PCSD) receiving very high marks in a recent federal audit conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Family, Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), V.I. Department of Justice Public Media Officer Corliss Smithen announced on Sunday.

The OCSE's audit, conducted last year for fiscal year 2015, found that for the first time in many years, PCSD had reliable child support data that make the Virgin Islands entitled to receive federal incentive awards that PCSD had been denied in the past. OCSE's audit was conducted to determine the reliability of the data and the performance of PCSD. With a string of repeated failures for many years before the last audit, the Virgin Islands had obtained the dubious distinction of being the first U.S. jurisdiction to be denied federal incentive payments because of disastrous audit outcomes caused by the inability of PCSD's system and staff to produce accurate data for OCSE's auditors, according to D.O.J.

Attorney General Claude Earl Walker, above, who heads the PCSD, received a formal letter of the audit findings from OCSE's director, Kimberly Smith.

Mr. Walker, in commenting on the results of the audit, said he was confident of a positive outcome as the Division has been working to address a number of outstanding issues.

"I knew that we had a good chance of passing because in 2015, Paternity had made rapid and considerable improvements to its data system, collections and distribution of child support with our 'Operation Support Our Children' initiative, and so, failure was no longer an option," Mr. Walker said. "In 2015, we inherited an agency that could not produce accurate data for our federal monitors for many years, and at one point, for four straight years in a row, Paternity kept failing these audits, but no one knew why. It was rather embarrassing to be the only U.S. jurisdiction to fail in every category of the audit, and the consequences of failing included a denial of incentive payments and penalties for the territory's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program."

However, last year's audit found that the Division outperformed in every area after four years of failures.

"OCSE could not determine Paternity's performance in critical areas such as how much money is collected and then distributed to the children, but this audit found that in every category, Paternity's data is now reliable and performance has significantly improved. In fact, the Virgin Islands received marks between 92% and 100% in all areas covered by the annual audit," Mr. Walker said. "These findings mean that the Virgin Islands is now entitled to its fair share of incentive funds that are distributed to the states, territories and tribal lands."

Program Administrator at the PCSD, Kathryn Jensen-deLugo, gave an insight on how the audit was conducted.

"We were audited on eight performance measures. Of those eight performance measures, we had one score at 92%, two at 95%, one at 96%, two at 98%, one at 99%, and one at 100%," Ms. Jensen-deLugo said. "The eight performance measures include, but are not limited to, cases open at the end of the fiscal year, total amount of current support due, and total amount of support collected and distributed."

U.S. Department HHS, Administration of Children and Family Regional Administrator, Joyce A. Thomas, will be visiting the territory on June 14 and will hold discussions with Mr. Walker.