

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Where are They? Unable To Locate Parents or Guardians, VIDOJ Child Support Division Says They Can't Disburse Over \$1M in Payments

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Approximately \$1.2 million in child support is going uncollected by parents and guardians of children born in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

That's what acting Director of the V.I. Department of Justice Paternity Child Support Division (PCSD) Kathryn Jensen-DeLugo told lawmakers in the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety during this week's hearing. The money remains in the custody of the PCSD because they don't have updated addresses for the parents or guardians of the recipient children.

“People leave the territory and don’t report their whereabouts or people die and people don’t notify us of the death,” she said. “People move to the states or they move down island or wherever, they pass away, the family doesn’t inform us that the custodial parent is deceased. The money sits there, we have no place to send it and we can’t find the non-custodial parent to send them back the money,” she explained.

“In the order for child support, it tells the parties that if there are any changes, address, employment etcetera, they are supposed to notify us,” she added.

Ms. Jensen-DeLugo told senators that the law does allow the Division to keep the money, however in hopes of eventually getting the funds to the children they are meant to support, PCSD prefers to keep trying to track down the parents.

While there has been some success within the past year through the use of software, the acting PCSD director said that despite being able to make some payments, incoming money they are unable to disburse keeps piling up.

“We have an investigative staff that is diligently working on locating individuals, utilizing all [tools] necessary, including the purchase of a program called CLEAR so that we can bring that amount down,” Ms. Jensen-DeLugo told legislators.

According to the acting director, PCDS is also using the Federal Parent Locator Service and the Child Support Enforcement Network to locate custodial parents.

Meanwhile, Committee Chair Sen. Kenneth Gittens said the child support division also needs to ramp up efforts to locate parents who are within the territory but are not paying their obligations to their children.

“I’m talking about those that [are] sitting right here and we still don’t know where they’re at. And they work in the government agencies and we still don’t know where they’re at. People need to get up off what they’re sitting on and do what they need to do,” he remarked.

“I expect for people to be doing what they’re being paid to do,” he warned, vowing that he would hold the agencies under his oversight authority to a high standard of accountability.