

Child support: Can it reduce welfare load?

By Tim Richard
Staff writer

Michigan and Oakland County are doing some of the best work in the nation collecting child support. But it doesn't mean they're doing a good job.

"The payment of child support is a national disgrace," said Kim Bateman, chief assistant in Oakland's Friend of the Court office in Pontiac. Oakland's good record, he said, simply "gives a perspective on how bad the rest of the world is."

MICHIGAN WAS ranked No. 1 among 50 states and four territories in collecting child support payments in divorce and paternity cases for its ever-intensifying efforts to make absent parents pay their kids' bills.

Passing out the grades was the subcommittee on public assistance of the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee, chaired by Rep. Thomas Downey, D-New York.

"Under the Constitution, domestic relations are reserved to the states," said Bateman, a lawyer.

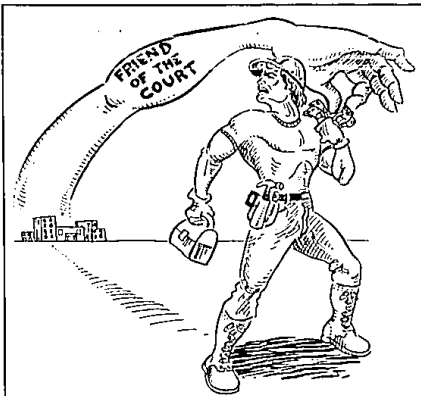
"But we have a program of federal laws with incentives to the states to collect child support payments," he said, pointing to the 1982 Family Support Act and the 1984 Child Support Enforcement amendments to the Social Security Act.

"This (1988 law) is part of the welfare reform act. The feeling is that if you improve support programs, you can reduce welfare."

SO HOW IS Oakland doing?
• In state fiscal year 1988, Oakland collected 79 percent of court-ordered support in non-welfare cases — \$32 million out of \$79 million ordered.

• Oakland collected 45 percent in cases the family is on AFDC (aid to families with dependent children) — \$4.8 million out of \$10.8 million ordered.

Of the federal incentive bonuses earned by Michigan the last two



committee on Interstate child support, "we have a mobile population," said Bateman. "A custodial or non-custodial parent will move around. Some states looked less kindly on enforcement than others."

Where other states have passed a model law called the Uniform Reciprocal Enforcement of Support Act, a Michigan court can send a wage deduction order to that state.

Oakland officials say their interstate unit is the most active in Michigan, serving as a model for other counties. "In 1987, the interstate unit had contact with 43 other states and Canadian provinces," according to the court's annual report.

The Friend also uses an "absent parent locator system," in cooperation with the state Department of Social Services and Michigan Employment Security Commission, to track down parents who are in arrears and gainfully employed.

IT'S EARLY to judge whether im-

proved child support payments will hold down social services costs, which in Michigan consume 22 percent of the state budget.

While Michigan was class valedictorian and got an A from Congress — along with Delaware, New Jersey and North Dakota — Downey observed that it doesn't "appear that we have any potential Rhodes scholars in our midst."

"In the U.S. today, there are nearly nine million mothers with children whose fathers do not live with them."

"Only about two million of these families received their full child support in 1985. Another one million families received partial payments, and almost six million received nothing."

DOWNEY, OF suburban Long Island, is known as a brash liberal who was first elected to Congress in the 1974 "Watergate class." His voting record gets high marks from the American Civil Liberties Union and

Americans for Democratic Action. Downey talks tough on child support and family values. In one committee hearing, he said:

"In the past 15 years, we have seen an unprecedented growth in children living with never-married mothers. It is estimated that today two million such families exist."

"And the problem is growing. Each year, about 800,000 children are born to unmarried mothers. Paternity is established in only about one-fourth of these cases. These children are highly likely to be poor, and many will receive public assistance."

Here is how the panel ranked other nearby states:

- B — Iowa, Minnesota.
- C — Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, New York, Illinois.
- D — Kentucky, Florida.

Flat F's were given to Mississippi, Oklahoma, Texas, the District of Columbia, West Virginia, New Mexico and Guam.

years, Oakland was awarded \$1.6 million and \$1.4 million respectively — 40 and 35 percent of the state totals to a county with 11 percent of the population. It was "a significant tribute to the work of our staff," said the court's annual report.

Circuit court administrator Judy Cunningham said states were rated by Downey's panel on the bases of cost effectiveness, reduction of welfare costs and support collections.

Downey called Michigan "valedictorian of the class," but added, "this exam was marked on a curve."

TWO REASONS Michigan's program is strong, Bateman said, are that it is experienced and court-dominated.

"The Friend of the Court has a 70-

year history in Michigan," he said.

In 50,000 divorce paternity and domestic relations cases a year, the Oakland Friend investigates and makes recommendations to the 14 circuit judges on child custody, visitation and support. The Friend also enforces court orders on these issues.

The Friend has a staff of 56 — 14 attorneys, one assigned to each judge; 14 family counselors, 14 secretaries, seven accountants and seven paralegals.

THE 1988 federal law gives courts legal tools to collect payments across state lines, Cunningham said. Among them: mandatory income withholding and establishment of a

Troy hosts municipal officials

Troy today is hosting a regional meeting of the Michigan Municipal League, an organization of mayors, councilmembers, managers and village officials.

Dozens of officials from region IV — covering Oakland, Macomb and Genesee counties — will converge at

3 p.m. at the Michigan State University Education Center in Troy.

The opening session will be on "AIDS in the Workplace: Is Your Municipality at Risk?" It will cover rights and responsibilities of municipal employers and workers.

Other agenda items will be solid waste, legislative issues and the MML's insurance programs.

Welcome remarks will be made by Troy Mayor Richard Doyle. President of region IV is Jeanne Sline, Troy councilmember.

Breast
self-examination --
LEARN. Call us.

AMERICAN
WOMEN'S
SOCIETY

UGLY KITCHEN CABINETS?
DON'T REPLACE... **'REFACE'**
MODERN & EUROPEAN STYLES

FORMICA Solid Colors and Woodgrain SOLID WOODS Oak, Cherry and Birch

SERVING WAYNE, OAKLAND & MACOMB

- FACTORY SHOWROOM
- FREE ESTIMATES

1642 E. 11 Mile Rd., Madison Hgts.
1 Block W. of Dequindre Daily 9-5, Sun. 10-4

Cabinet Clad... 541-5252

RARE OPPORTUNITY
Purchase works of art by one of America's favorite contemporary artists without the high prices of L.A. or N.Y. Galleries.

Appointment only:
CALL 363-6062
435-0633
Ask for Mr. Baker
Home Showings Available

AFRICAN ART
FINE SELECTION OF AUTHENTIC OLD MASKS, FIGURES, ARTIFACTS — OVER 400 PIECES

BARCLAY GALLERY
22932 15 MILE RD., MT. CLEMENS
2 MIN. FROM THE HARPER RD. N. EXIT OFF I-94
TUES.-SAT. 11-5 791-2070

ANTIQUE ART FROM THE WORLD OVER AT WHOLESALE PRICES

CREATE YOUR OWN
BATHING SUIT

A bathing suit designed to fit your body. You choose the color, shape and material!

Beach Bound Ltd.
We're still here to serve you!
31065 Orchard Lake • Hunters Square • 626-0254

Warm up winter
(Cool down summer)

Window Quilt®
INSULATING SHADES

We take pride in offering you the best insulating shade on the market...

- Tight Perimeter Seal
- Improved Room Comfort in Winter and Summer!
- Decorative Flexibility
- Energy Dollars Saved

Shop At Home

ON SALE NOW! 30% OFF
Suggested Retail good through 2/3/89

BESSENER'S designs
23535 Woodward Ave., Ferndale
541-4936

Choosing the right
high school makes
all the difference . . .

- Coed
- College Preparatory
- Catholic Environment
- Disciplined Atmosphere
- Honors Classes
- Community Service
- Extensive Athletic Program
- Academic Scholarships
- Performing Arts Programs
- College Credit Classes
- Financial Aid
- Caring Faculty

OPEN HOUSE
Thursday February 2
7-9 p.m.

SHRINE HIGH SCHOOL
3500 West 13 Mile, Royal Oak, MI 48072
Call 549-2925 for more information

Excellence in Catholic Education since 1941

• O&E Classifieds work! • O&E Classifieds work! •

TONY SPINA
Photojournalist, Chief Photographer
Detroit Free Press

JULIA SPINA-KILAR
Fine Art Photographer

JANUARY 11 — JANUARY 31

SOMERSET MALL
Sunday 12-5 / Monday-Thursday 10-9 / Other Days 10-6
Big Beaver Road at Coolidge, Troy

ALCO Glass and Mirrors
27 YEARS SAME LOCATION

**GLASS - STORM & SCREEN REPAIR
REPLACEMENT
HARDWARE CENTER**

★ SAFETY GLASS ★ THERMOPANES ★ TUB ENCLOSURES ★ GLASS TABLE TOPS ★ MIRRORS

REPLACEMENT PARTS FOR DOORS, WINDOWS & DOOR WALLS
ROLLERS FOR PATIO DOORS & SLIDING WINDOWS
PRIME WINDOW REPLACEMENTS
INSURANCE REPAIRS
NEW SAFETY GLASS

PICK-UP & DELIVERY AVAILABLE
MON-FRI 8:00 TO 8:00 • SAT 8:00 TO 12:00

547-1214

3007 W. 13 MILE RD., BERKLEY
ONE BLK WEST OF BERKLEY THEATER
BETWEEN GREENFIELD & COOLIDGE

**FARMINGTON HILLS • 626-9007
BERKLEY • 547-1214**

ECCLESTONE
THE CLASSIC WOMAN

For A Limited Time Only

**Winter Sale
For Women
Final Markdown
Up To 50% Off**

Selected Items

Dresses, Suits, Coats,
Shirts, Blouses,
Sweaters, Skirts
And Slacks
Accessories-Shoes

Use your American Express, MasterCard or Visa

Somerset • The Mall, Troy • (313) 649-3640
HOURS: Mon., Tues. & Wed. 10-7; Thurs. & Fri. 10-8; Sat. 10-5; Sun. 12-3