

Lancaster County Bench Warrant Initiative

Goals:

- * Reduce overall number of outstanding warrants countywide
- * Reduce the number of outstanding DRS bench warrants
- * Obtain collections on unpaid child support cases
- * Identify/utilize new technologies to facilitate operation
- * Leverage enforcement actions to gain voluntary compliance

Description: Lancaster County Domestic Relations sorted warrants by zip code so the Sheriff's Office could identify geographic areas with concentration of warrants. The non-custodial parents with outstanding bench warrants were identified in particular zip codes and DRS provided the Sheriff's Office with a current address.

The address locations were mapped using **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)** technology. This allowed the deputy sheriffs to develop patterns and group the warrants within geographic locations. For example, the sheriffs noticed a very high concentration of warrants within a two block area.

The sheriffs began executing outstanding warrants using the mapping technology in early September, 2007. The deputy sheriffs provided payoff and child support contact information to the family member left behind which had been prepared by the DRS.

This was followed by providing information to the media about the bench warrant sweep. A typical headline was "Sheriff targets deadbeat parents-18 nabbed for failing to pay child support".

The next step involved a two day amnesty period which included letters to non-custodial parents with warrants and media coverage "Amnesty offered to 'deadbeats' who pay."

Amnesty notices (English and Spanish) were mailed to 398 defendants.

- * 27 defendants voluntarily complied
- * \$7,807.00 collected in cash payments
- * 10 income withholding orders issued
- * 4 job program referrals

The amnesty was followed by another round of bench warrant sweeps to arrest the non-payers and those who did not voluntarily comply and additional media coverage. As a result of media coverage related to the sweeps and amnesty initiatives, a significant number of defendants voluntarily complied.

Results: Between 9/1/07 and 1/25/08, 238 defendants were targeted in sweeps.

During that period:

- * 105 defendants were arrested
- * 38 warrants were dismissed as result of voluntary compliance
- * 61% of the warrants in target group were resolved
- * \$105,633.50 was collected on target cases

Location: Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

Funding: Regular IV-D funds are used.

Replication Advice: There are many child support offices with hundreds or thousands of outstanding bench warrants. Serving these warrants by geographic area is much more cost effective. Also, the combination of the bench warrant sweep, media coverage, amnesty/voluntary compliance initiatives, followed by bench warrant sweep and additional media coverage appears to be very effective.

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