

**Georgia Commission on Child Support
Low-Income Deviation Work Group
Friday, August 27, 2021**

Meeting Minutes

The Low-Income Deviation Work Group (“Work Group”) of the Georgia Commission on Child Support (“Commission”) held this meeting via videoconferencing using Zoom. Elaine Johnson, Executive Program Manager for the Commission, called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. and welcomed the ten Work Group members as well as the nine guests who attended this open meeting. Elaine stated for the members that the purpose of this work group is to identify ways to simplify the low-income deviation calculation process in Schedule E of the child support calculator pursuant to the current requirements in O.C.G.A. § 19-6-15(i)(2)(B). Staff Attorney, Noelle Lagueux-Alvarez, and Program Coordinator, Latoinna Lawrence, also served as staff for the meeting. Work Group members in attendance were:

Audrey Bergeson	Sabrina Rivers
Ryan Bradley	Jamie Rush
Barbara Briley	Elizabeth “Liz” Schriber
Shirley Champa	Kenneth Sleets
Deborah Johnson	Erica Thornton

Through screen sharing, Elaine Johnson provided a demonstration of how the low-income deviation currently functions on Schedule E of Georgia’s child support calculator. She reviewed instructions at numbers 48, 49(a), 49(b) on the schedule, and using two separate worksheets, demonstrated how one may request the deviation, how the judge may include the deviation sua sponte, and how to edit the deviation. She pointed out how the calculator currently is programmed to preserve the minimum amount of child support required in a worksheet when the low-income deviation is requested. Noelle Lagueux-Alvarez reminded the members that feedback across the board is that individuals will use the non-specific deviation in place of the low-income deviation. So, when we review numbers of the deviations used, the numbers of low-income vs non-specific deviations are misleading when considering what deviations are used in our state.

Following that demonstration, Elaine asked the Work Group for suggestions on how the child support calculator could be improved to make it more user friendly.

- Ryan Bradley said that in practice, a lot of judges he has spoken with have a number in mind for the child support, and even most people also have a number in mind for child support. He asked would it be better if you could take the amount of support that they're trying to get to and input that number in the calculation? And then have the calculator provide all the proper numbers that are required by the statute? He provided an example, i.e., if they're trying to get a support amount of \$250, wouldn't it be easier to have them enter that \$250 in, and then have the calculator determine the appropriate reduction, instead of making the person calculate what that reduction would be. Deborah Johnson agreed with Ryan’s suggestion.

- Audrey Bergeson echoed an agreement with Ryan and Deborah as well. She also suggested that we do not necessarily have to eliminate what exists now but offer Ryan's other method of selecting the support amount the parent(s) want to reach, with the minimum still preserved. This way people are allowed to request a deviation amount -OR- enter the amount they think child support should be.
- Deborah Johnson added that there should be a field in the calculator providing a way for the custodial parent to oppose the deviation requested by the noncustodial parent. Elaine asked Barbara Briley, from DCSS, if she would speak to how DCSS handles input from the custodial parent on agreeing or disagreeing with the requested low-income deviation. Barbara explained that very seldom do custodial parents attend court hearings and even if they do, they don't have evidence to support a claim that the noncustodial parent earns more income and should have the low-income deviation. Elaine recommended Deborah's idea should be further explored to resolve the logistics of input from the custodial parent when a low-income deviation is requested.
- Deborah also suggested a tool within the calculator, akin to the self-employment calculator, to help draw out of people the reasons why a low-income deviation may be appropriate in their case. This information would then be used by the court to determine if the statutory requirements of proving an extreme economic hardship have been met.
- Liz Schriber shared an excel spreadsheet she had prepared and agreed for staff to circulate it to all members for future discussion. She explained that her spreadsheet suggestion begins with the idea of identifying the desired child support amount. The spreadsheet also considered the needs of both parents and the child.

Staff noted that the next Work Group meeting will be held on September 21, 2021, from 10 to 11 a.m. Elaine asked the members to submit any ideas in writing for the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.