

**Georgia Commission on Child Support  
Low-Income Deviation Work Group  
Tuesday, November 9, 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, chaired the meeting and called it to order at 10:00 a.m. Nine Work Group members and two guests attended this open meeting. Staff Attorney, Noelle Lagueux-Alvarez, and Program Coordinator, Latoinna Lawrence, also served as staff for the meeting. Work Group members in attendance were:

Deborah Johnson	Kenneth Sleets
Audrey Bergeson	Erica Thornton
Liz Schriber	Mark Rogers
Ryan Bradley	Laureen Alford
Sabrina Rivers	

Elaine Johnson welcomed the members and commended them for being diligent in their effort to always attend the scheduled meetings. She remarked that this may be the last meeting of this Work Group since the task of reviewing how the low-income deviation could be simplified in Schedule E of the child support calculator should conclude with this meeting.

At the beginning of the meeting, Staff Attorney, Noelle Lagueux-Alvarez, confirmed that a quorum of seven of the 11 Work Group members was present. Elaine Johnson asked if the members had reviewed the minutes from the Work Group meeting on October 19, 2021, and if any corrections were needed? Deborah Johnson raised an issue that because she and Elaine Johnson have the same last name it was confusing when the draft minutes referred to a “Ms. Johnson” in a couple of places. Deborah Johnson moved to approve the Minutes from the October 19, 2021, meeting with the understanding that they would be edited to clarify which “Ms. Johnson” was being referred to. Ryan Bradley seconded that motion and Noelle Lagueux-Alvarez conducted a voice vote. Members of the Work Group unanimously voted to approve that motion with no abstentions. Work Group members Mark Rogers and Laureen Alford joined the meeting after the vote on the approval of the minutes was held.

Latoinna Lawrence created a compilation of all Work Group suggestions for improving the Low-Income Deviation as it functions in the child support calculator and as collected thus far. Ms. Lawrence shared her screen to show that compilation. Elaine Johnson thanked Latoinna for preparing the document and commented that it contains the ideas and concepts presented by Liz Schreiber, Audrey Bergeson, Ryan Bradley, Deborah Johnson, and the draft concept as prepared by the staff that will be shared during today's meeting.

Elaine Johnson and Noelle Lagueux-Alvarez gave a presentation on a concept that basically calls for the way the low-income deviation functions to be inverted. In other words, the low-income deviation would prompt a party to request the amount of child support to be paid rather than the deviation amount currently displayed in the calculation. Ms. Lagueux-Alvarez began the presentation by relating that the members had discussed in one of the very early meetings of the Work Group the idea of a person entering their child support amount rather than entering a deviation amount, as is currently done. She pointed out that in previous discussions the use of a negative deviation amount in the calculation process was confusing for most individuals, but this proposed concept reverses the process. In this idea a person would select the amount consistent with the statute, such as by clicking a box for \$100 for one child, \$150 for two children, and so on. Elaine Johnson stated that this idea would continue to use the existing section on Schedule E of the calculator where the low-income deviation is located now. She added that the calculator would be programmed to know the minimum amounts of child support for the number of children to ensure compliance with the statute. A warning message would display if a parent selected a child support amount inconsistent with the requirements of the statute, and there would be explanations to help guide the parent on what would be a correction selection to comply with the law. Elaine Johnson asked for discussion by the Work Group.

Deborah Johnson said she generally liked the idea that people chose their destination amount rather than a deviation amount to get to a child support amount. She voiced a concern though that the calculator should not provide check boxes defaulting to the statutory minimum, but instead she suggested using a single field that simply asks what the party thought he or she could afford to pay. She also thought the check boxes may encourage parents to select the lowest amount and not think about the number of children or their ability to pay. She added that she'd rather have the minimum child support amounts handled by the calculator in the background. That way if what is entered is too low the person will receive an error message identifying that information and explaining what is required in the statute to comply with the law. Elaine Johnson acknowledged the idea and stated it would be possible to utilize the changes Deborah Johnson has recommended. Ms. Lagueur-Alvarez agreed with the suggestions and believes we should explain at the beginning what the law requires. Elaine Johnson continued the discussion by adding we could display the presumptive amount of child support with explanations addressing "what is a presumptive amount of child support." Ryan Bradley noted that he generally agreed with the staff's suggestion as well. Lauren Alford added that she is concerned about the use of legal jargon and suggested we be very careful in the use of language for instructions and other information in the calculator. Elaine Johnson asked Lauren if she would be willing to help structure language and she agreed to help when needed.

Elaine Johnson asked the Work Group if they wanted to schedule a next meeting or if they felt comfortable concluding the design concepts and ideas by email communications. Ms. Lagueur-Alvarez added that these meetings have served as our collection process for ideas and that the ideas must be fully vetted through the Commission's Technology and Calculator Subcommittee because we are not empowered to make final decisions. She reminded everyone that this Work Group came out of the LID Study Committee to help solve the issues that the current low-income deviation was not user friendly and being avoided and the nonspecific deviation used in lieu of it. She stated that this Work Group was the mechanism to generate how, if we could wave a magic wand and change it, would we change it.

Elaine Johnson stated that we will also have the Technology and Calculator Subcommittee consider the ideas submitted by Liz Schriber and Deborah Johnson to help parents determine if they meet the statutory requirements of an extreme economic hardship, which will also supply the court information needed to ensure there is compliance with the law. She commented further that it would be easy to also add a pop-up box using the idea submitted by Audrey Bergeson as a reminder not to use the non-specific deviation when in fact a low-income deviation may be appropriate. Elaine Johnson stated staff will edit their concept document and redistribute the draft to the members.

- Ryan Bradley suggested we review the statute to ensure our design concepts are consistent with what is required in the child support guidelines law.
- Lauren Alford suggested making the child support calculator more like "Turbo Tax" which just requires the user to answer a series of questions and have the software do the calculations in the background. She explained that self-represented litigants aren't going to understand the intricacies of the statute, because they're not they're not legally trained.
- Mark Rogers shared that he is concerned that the ideas will make the low-income deviation harder to use for pro-se litigants.

The group concluded that email communications would be sufficient to finish this work rather than having to schedule and conduct a next meeting. Elaine Johnson explained that next steps would be for staff to confer with the Commission's Technology and Calculator Subcommittee and set a meeting to present the ideas of this Work Group to that subcommittee. She stated that we may ask a few members from this Work Group to continue working with the subcommittee.

This meeting was adjourned at 10:30 a.m.

Attachment A

On December 14, 2021, at 3:09 p.m. EST, Staff of the Low-Income Deviation Work Group sent an email to all members of the Low-Income Deviation Work Group the following:

Motion: "It is moved that approval of the Minutes from the November 9, 2021, Low-Income Deviation Work Group meeting be voted on by email. A second is not necessary for the motion to be considered. Please find a draft version of those minutes attached. Discussion and debate shall remain open through next Monday, December 20, 2021, at 5:00 p.m. Work Group members wishing to discuss or debate this matter may do so by replying to all by that date. Suggested edits to the minutes may also be made by replying to all. A second email calling for a vote on this matter will be sent to you on Tuesday, December 21, 2021."

On or by 5:00 p.m. on December 20, 2021, there was no email debate received on the minutes. The Staff put the question to an e-vote on December 21, 2021, at 8:31 a.m. The Low-Income Deviation Work Group consisted of 11 members and quorum for voting was six members. By an e-vote of nine members in favor, none opposed, and none who abstained, the motion was approved.