

**CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE**

# State launches digital marketing effort to seek child support payments

By  Lance Cohen November 9, 2018

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LANSING — Michigan is creating Facebook and Google ads as part of a new digital marketing effort to encourage single parents to sign up for child support payments.

Michigan is one of 14 states to be awarded a total of \$2.2 million in federal grants to fund the initiative. The state's share is \$170,000.

While not all details have been determined, the focus of the program revolves around creating content for social media, said Bob Wheaton, a public information officer at the Department of Health and Human Services.

This includes Facebook paid ads and Google ads to encourage single mothers to seek child support if they haven't already, and to encourage parents currently involved in the system to continue to contribute, Wheaton said.

More than \$1 billion in child support payments is distributed annually in Michigan, according to state records. Child support is a periodic payment made by a parent for the financial benefit of a child, following the end of a marriage or relationship.

The Office of Child Support will analyze how digital marketing can help child support programs more effectively serve families, Wheaton said.

The office promoted a digital marketing campaign earlier this year — “Give your child the dadvantage” — to encourage unmarried mothers to establish paternity at the birth of their child.

“That campaign was quite successful at reaching this population, and our marketing firm has data showing that a high percentage of the population we're trying to reach has cell phones and is online frequently,” Wheaton said.

The goal of the new program is to increase the number of new child support cases for parents not receiving any assistance by 5 percent over the next two years, Wheaton said.

This includes fathers who are not keeping up with their child support payments along with new babies and single mothers, Wheaton said.

“We are unable to determine how many eligible parents aren't receiving funds for their children,” Wheaton said. “The objective is that every child is receiving the assistance that they need and deserve.”

Low-income single parents are affected the most by the lack of child support, said Matt Gillard, president and chief executive officer of Michigan's Children, an advocacy group for children. That comes in to play especially among single parents with young children.

“One of the biggest costs of raising a kid is child care,” Gillard said. “It is difficult for two-parent households to pay for high quality childcare and is even more difficult for single parents who are not receiving additional funds through child support.”

“We are optimistic that this program will have a positive impact and result in more children receiving the child support they deserve,” Wheaton said. No ads have been created yet.

More than \$6 billion in unpaid child support has accumulated in Michigan, according to the most recent state data from 2015.

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