

Child support— from page 1.

held in contempt of court and sent to jail.

When a person denies an order of support, Spicer said, "I do what I have to do to enforce it."

Spicer said support payments are made through the county clerk's office so proof can be made that the payment was given.

According to a letter from Attorney General James A. Redden, a new law this year will reduce the cost of the welfare system.

Before the new law, an absent parent was not held liable for child support until the amount of support obligation was established by the courts. The parent with custody of the children could receive a public assistance grant until the support obligation was established in a court.

Now, the absent parent will be liable for the entire amount of the public assistance grant so it will be to the advantage of the absent parent to reach a support agreement as soon as possible because support obligations are determined by ability to pay and are generally less than the public assistance grant.

"The only problem with the new law, Spicer said, is that she can't use it."

"Only the SED (Support Enforcement Division) can use it," she said.

SED is an administrative body of the Attorney General's office for establishing and enforcing support obligations for Aid to Dependent Children families. The SED collects \$3 for every \$1 it costs the taxpayers. The money that is collected is used to reduce the cost of public assistance programs. Anticipated collections for the 1979-81 biennium are for more than \$36 million.

Morrow County is not a part of the SED program. Umatilla County is one of only six counties in Oregon that have an SED program. The state legislature decided which counties need it the most and then uses state funds to pay for those programs.

The policy of the SED, which began in 1955, is that, "All children have an inherent right to be supported by their parents and all parents have the duty to support their dependent children," and it will do anything within its powers to make sure the money is paid.

The goal of the SED is to increase child support payments to reduce the number of families on welfare. In 1978, state and federal taxes supported 31,400 single-parent Oregon families at a cost of \$105.7 million. The 1979 budget for SED was \$5 million and it helped to collect \$15 million with a staff of 261 persons in 13 offices with 43,500 cases.

Unpaid child support can be obtained by holding the absent parent in contempt of court, wage withholding orders, draw from bank accounts, liens on property and as a last resort, criminal non-support charges, which carry a maximum sentence of five years. Income tax refunds or homeowners refunds on property taxes can also be held by the state for non-support.

Finding the absent parent of a child born out of wedlock is a real challenge for the SED. Since 1940, illegitimate births have increased 473 percent while the overall population has increased 66 percent.

Spicer does not have an SED to work with but she does have access to a statewide parent locator unit which finds 75 percent of the parents it looks for. The parent locator unit has all kinds of resources to work with to track down the absent parent but Spicer said its not as easy to find them when they leave the state.

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