

Children Come First



Working together for the benefit of Ventura County families

From the Director



At the Ventura County Department of Child Support Services, we believe thriving families are the foundation of a vibrant and healthy community. We know our children are our future, and raising our children takes the love and support of both parents. Our mission is to ensure that all children receive consistent and reliable support from both of their parents. We believe the best way to achieve this goal is by engaging with parents to gain an understanding of their current life circumstances and helping them provide for their children.

Our office is made up of dedicated child support professionals whose number one priority is delivering excellent customer service with compassion and integrity. Our child support services include establishing parentage, setting the child support amount, receiving and distributing payments and reviewing orders for modification, without having to pay court filing fees or hiring an attorney.

We understand the dynamics of the family, and know that juggling your children, your relationships and your finances can sometimes become challenging, but we are here to help you navigate the child support process. It is our desire to gain your trust and help you to ensure your children's needs are adequately and fairly met. We believe in transforming lives through the true power of child support.

Sincerely,

Marcus R Mitchell
Director, VDCSS



Ventura County Department Child Support Services staff are dedicated to serving parents and children with professional assistance and consideration.

PHOTO BY SUZAN WEININGER

A Path Forward

BY
THEA
MARIE
ROOD

Separated families can find new connections by working with case managers

The phrase “child support” can stir up mixed emotions — and Ventura County Department Child Support Services (VDCSS) is intent on changing that.

“We’re not here to ‘get you in trouble’ — take your license, throw you in jail, ruin your life,” said Oriana Lopez, a case manager. “We’re here to help. We’re here to be a bridge when there’s a separation of a family. And there’s always room for compromise, for finding a solution, even if we can’t immediately solve the problem on the spot.”

Some actions can occur automatically if parents owe money for child support, such as freezing a bank account or revoking a driver’s license or passport. But most actions can also be resolved once a parent starts talking with a case manager and plans to make payments on their arrears.

“Especially with a license, we can be a lot more flexible, because you don’t have to pay off your entire balance,” Lopez said. “We can assess, with the client, their financial situation.” Case managers can make accommodations for parents who

owe back-support and give them the option to make partial payments until they are financially stable.

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Oriana Lopez
Child Support Case Manager,
VDCSS

VDCSS can also help parents come to an agreement on past due child support. In some cases, it can be greatly reduced if it’s owed to the state, which happens when a child

received public benefits during a period when child support wasn’t paid.

VDCSS can help with court issues too — collecting documents from both parties, scheduling hearings and filing modification orders — all at no cost. And while case managers can’t deal directly with custody, they know visitation and child support go hand-in-hand.

“We’ll ask you if you want to see your child more and if you do, we’ll schedule an appointment for you with the family law facilitator,” she said.

Mostly, VDCSS wants to see children lead happy, healthy lives. “We had a mom come in saying she couldn’t afford medicine for her sick child, and we told her we had just collected \$5,000 for her,” Lopez said. “This is a great example of how child support can be life-changing, even life-saving.”

It's What We Do

BY
ANNE
STOKES

Ventura County Child Support Services offers many ways to help

Ventura County Department of Child Support Services' (VCDSCS) first priority is families. As a public agency, its role is to work with parents to establish and enforce support orders that benefit children throughout the county through free services and programs.

"It's not about trying to get the largest order possible," said Tyler Petrangelo, child support services case manager. "If someone can't afford to pay, what good does it do to charge them a high amount of child support? They're just going to get more discouraged and be less likely to pay. Getting an *appropriate* amount of child support is our mission."

Establishing orders of support

The process starts when a parent submits an application. VCDSCS works with parents to calculate an appropriate amount — see "How Support is Calculated" on page 6. Case managers facilitate conversations with both parents to find out if they are both agreeable to the order. If so, both parents sign it, and VCDSCS files it with the court for free. If parents do not agree with the calculation, they can work with the case manager and come to an agreement. When parents do not come to an agreement, the case manager will schedule a court hearing where both parents are given an opportunity to speak before a judge.

Petrangelo says the most important part of his job is to ensure everyone involved knows what to expect and that they have the opportunity to actively participate in the process.

"It's a legal process, and like any legal process, parties have rights," he said. "The best thing we can do as case managers and as program representatives is to explain what's happening, what to expect and why as clearly as possible."

Establishing paternity

VCDSCS is able to help determine paternity. If you are named as a potential father, DNA tests can be done through the department free of charge. If parents are unmarried at the time of their child's birth, VCDSCS also offers parents the opportunity

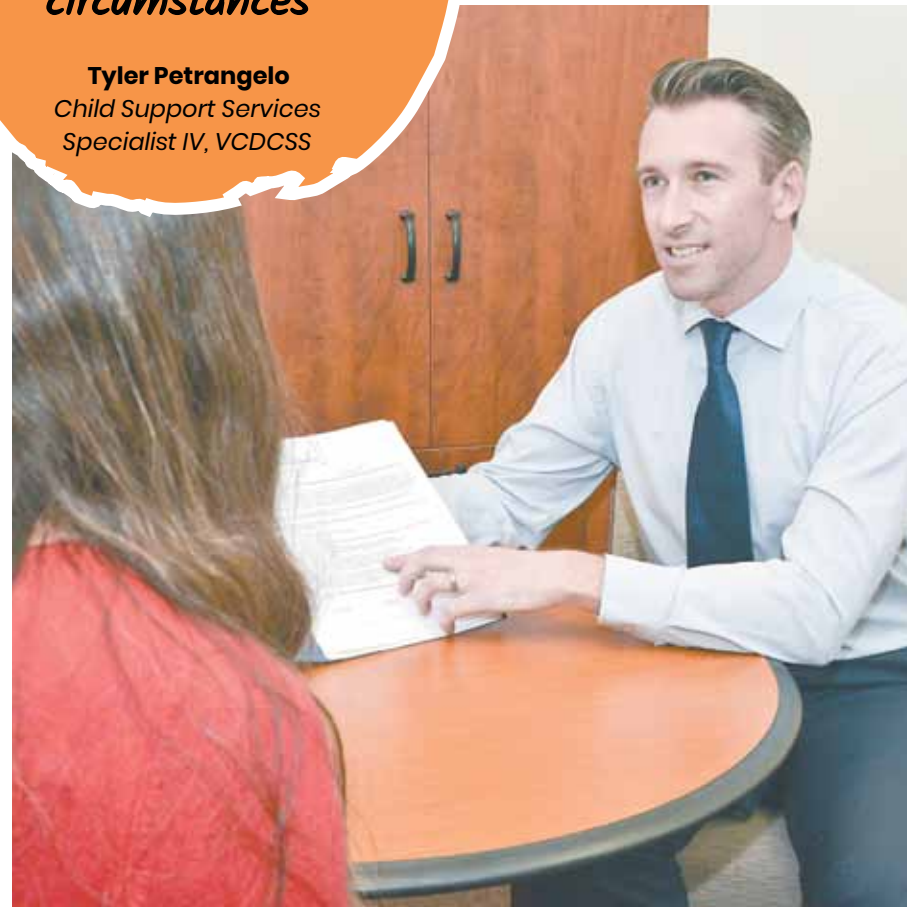
to sign a Declaration of Paternity to establish legal paternity.

"The benefits are numerous: Not only for our own knowledge of where we come from, but for medical reasons, for inheritance rights, if the father were to pass away or something happens, survivor benefits or insurance may require it,"

Petrangelo said. "It's a big deal."

"A child support amount can be reviewed when there's a change in circumstances"

Tyler Petrangelo
Child Support Services
Specialist IV, VCDSCS



Tyler Petrangelo, VCDSCS case manager shows clients just how much the department can do to simplify the child support process.

PHOTO BY SUSAN WEININGER

Order modifications

In the same way VCDSCS can help establish orders of support, the department can also help modify them if and when parents' circumstances change, whether due to an increase or decrease in income, the birth of additional children in households or unemployment.

"We want to make sure they understand a child support amount can be reviewed when there's a change in circumstances," he said. "If there's been a change in someone's life, then the child support amount should change."

For more information, visit www.ventura.org/child-support-services/ or call 866-901-3212.

How to pay

While the state **requires** payments by wage assignment if a party has an active employer, it may take 45 days to process a new wage assignment. In the interim — and for self-employed individuals — there are many different ways to pay.

Online

www.casdu.com

Pay by credit, debit card or Paypal

Phone

1-866-901-3212 (option 1)

Pay by debit, credit card or with banking information

Mail

Send check or money order (*do not send cash*) to:

**CA State Disbursement Unit
PO Box 989067
West Sacramento, CA
95798-9067**

Be sure to include name and case number or participant ID

Retail locations

MoneyGram (\$1.99 fee)

secure.moneygram.com/locations or call 1-800-926-9400 (English) or 1-800-955-7777 (En español) for locations

PayNearMe code (\$1.99 fee)

home.paynearme.com/locations/ for participating 7-Eleven stores, Ace Cash Express and Family Dollar locations.

In person

Pay in person or through a **Touchpay Kiosk** at the Ventura County Department of Child Support Services office:

**5171 Verdugo Way,
Camarillo, CA 93012**

(Find kiosk locations throughout the state by calling 1-866-901-3212)

Helping Families Work Together

Case managers support children *and* parents

BY ANNE STOKES

In 2008, Ritamarie Haugen and her ex-husband were in the midst of a divorce. Initially, she didn't pressure him for support for their three children – ages 8, 10 and 16, rationalizing that two parents should be able to work together for their children's sake.

"He said he would help me and I was OK with that ... but then he would give me checks that would bounce," she said. "His checks bounced so many times my checking account got closed. I had to turn to other resources and that was Child Support Services."

By the time she went to the department for help, he owed her nearly \$16,000 in back payments. Haugen learned her ex-husband and his siblings were inheriting a house that they planned to sell. Rita didn't know how to ensure she and their children would receive the support they were owed.

That's where Helen Ayala, case manager with the Ventura County Department of Child Support Services, was able to help. Ayala found the property listing, contacted the real estate office and found the house was in escrow and that there was a trust involved.

"We contacted the attorney and let them know that one of the beneficiaries of the trust owed child support and asked what could we do to collect on that amount," Ayala said. "We

"Without child support, I wouldn't have been able to get anything."

Ritamarie Haugen
VCDCCS client

were very persistent and we kept after it and kept checking every couple of days to make sure the house hadn't sold. I was in touch with the escrow company to let them know we were involved."

Haugen says that without Child Support Services' help, she would not have been able to enforce support orders on her own. Even though all three children are now grown,

they're still benefiting from the support: A portion of the arrears paid their youngest son's college expenses.

"Without child support, I wouldn't have been able to get anything," she said.

Ayala says that both parents have a duty to take care of their children and that Child Support Services' job is to work with them both to do so.



How we help



Establishing, collecting and enforcing orders of support

Ventura County Department of Child Support Services (VCDCCS) works with both parties to determine **appropriate** child support amounts. The department also serves as an impartial intermediary to facilitate payments and enforcement efforts.



Paternity

VCDCCS can provide DNA tests to determine paternity, free of charge in cases where paternity needs to be established, as part of any child support case. If a couple is unmarried at the time of birth, parents can sign a Declaration of Paternity form at the hospital or at the VCDCCS office. The legally binding form may be important for future inheritance rights, survivor benefits or insurance purposes.



Modifying support orders

Should financial or visitation circumstances change, child support payments should as well. VCDCCS is able to review and adjust support without having to go to court.

For more information on the many services VCDCCS provides, visit www.ventura.org/child-support-services/ or call 1-866-901-3212 toll free.

On Your Side

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

A VCDCCS case manager helps a father turn things around for himself and his sons

Christopher Poleno was raised by a single mother, so he knows the importance of child support.

"I watched this woman work and work to support myself and my brother," he said. "My level of respect for women and mothers is extraordinary. And child support is essential to me. Whatever my kids need comes before anything I need."

In fact, Poleno recently gave up a management job in the High Desert and moved to Simi Valley so he could be closer to his two boys, Hunter (16) and Harrison (12). When they both came to live with him full-time, he believed

he no longer needed to pay child support.

"Unfortunately, the court order is active until it's modified — until a parent proves in court he has custody, we still have to charge child support," said Karen Guevara, Poleno's case manager. "In this case, it came to a head and he lost his license."

Poleno found this out in a less-than-ideal way. "I learned my driving privileges had been suspended when I took Hunter for his driving test — and as the parent, had to provide my registration and driver's license," Poleno recalled. "I was told, 'Sorry, sir, this isn't going to work.' It was

humiliating. And if I'd been pulled over, my car could have been taken away. It would have impacted my job and getting the kids around."

This pushed him to get in touch with the VCDCCS, where Guevara began to help him unravel his complicated situation, which now included a wage assignment and negative

credit reports. "I was scared and almost retained an attorney, who would have charged me \$750 an hour," Poleno said. "But Guevara was wonderful. She was very clear about what she needed me to do."

At no cost, Karen assisted Christopher in reinstating his license, updating his credit reports and scheduling a court date to modify the child support order. "He's still having money deducted from his paycheck, but now we're able to hold the money for him, and once the modification goes through, it will be refunded to him," Guevara said.

This is good news for Poleno, who is on a waitlist for a bigger apartment for his reunited family. "I didn't know that Child Support Services are more than just going after parents who owe child support," he said. "But they are not biased and are intent on doing the right thing by the parent and child."

"I was scared and almost retained an attorney, who would have charged me \$750 an hour."

Christopher Poleno
Father and VCDCCS client



Christopher Poleno's kids — Hunter, who is 16 (right) and Harrison, who is 12 (left) — are central to his life. Paying child support to ensure they have a healthy upbringing is crucial for him and VCDCCS helps make that happen.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHER POLENO

A Fresh Start

Ventura County Child Support Services is here to help. For example, the Compromise of Arrears Program (COAP) a no-cost debt reduction program can help parents or negotiate a settlement much lower than the original amount owed.

"People tell us it changes their lives," said Cynthia Martinez, VCDCCS case manager. "They get out from under a 'mountain of debt' and can get a fresh start."

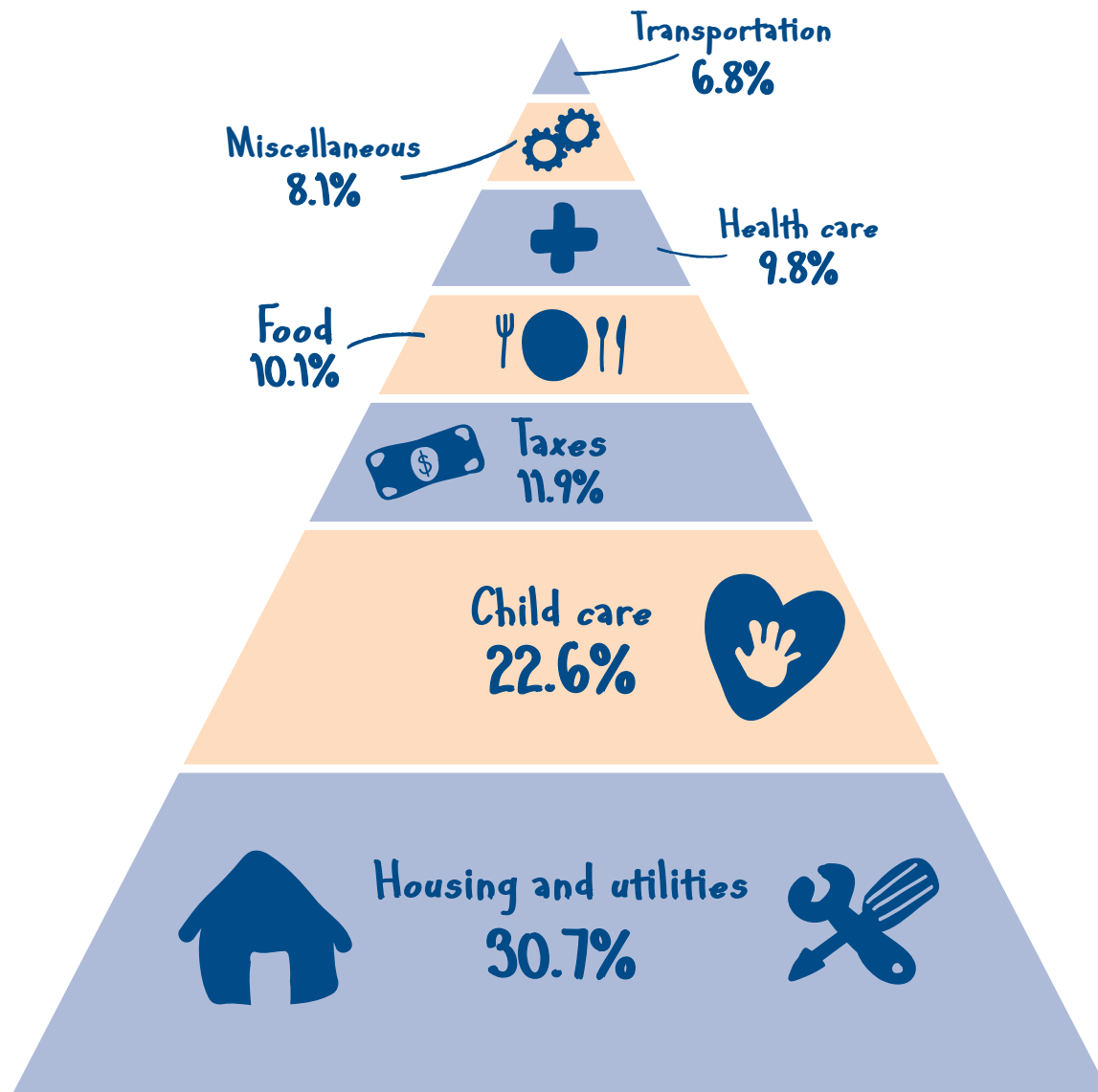
VCDCCS also helps reinstate driver's licenses and release passports — lost when parents are in arrears on their payments. A license can be restored with a note from an employer, even if money is still owed. And passports can also be reinstated, although a zero balance is required.

"We had a case recently where a man owed over \$20,000 to the state and his son was getting married in Mexico," Martinez recalled. "But we were able to settle the debt for just under \$2,000 and his friends and family chipped in. He got the passport released and got to the wedding."



Cost of living for a single-parent household

As most parents know, raising children is expensive: housing, food, clothing and transportation can add up quickly. Reliable child support payments can help make ends meet in Ventura County, where the cost of living for a single-parent household is 4.4% higher than the statewide average.



Source: California Budget and Policy Center

Income needed to cover basic needs:

\$68,889

How support is calculated

In order to determine an appropriate and fair child support order, case managers use an impartial statewide calculation system. Both parents' gross income, some expenses and actual visitation are taken into consideration.

"The biggest elements are what each parent's gross income is, what the actual visitation is like and if they have any other court-ordered child support obligations," said Yolanda Galvez, early intervention specialist. "We take all of those factors into consideration and we are able to calculate an amount based on the information provided."

Galvez says it is important for both parents to provide their most recent information and to communicate with their case manager. This ensures their support order is based on accurate information and an amount that both parties are agreeable to. This communication is vital so that both parents have the opportunity to collaborate and resolve the child support order at the Ventura County Department of Child Support Services office, instead of going to court.

Monthly income

- ✓ Gross wages, including tips, commissions, bonus and self-employment earnings
- ✓ Social Security or pensions
- ✓ Public assistance, including unemployment and disability
- ✓ Interest and dividends
- ✓ Spouse's income
- ✓ Rental income

Monthly deductions

- ✓ Additional child or spousal support obligations
- ✓ Health insurance and medical expenses
- ✓ Federal and state tax filings
- ✓ Property taxes
- ✓ Mortgage interest
- ✓ Union dues
- ✓ Retirement contributions
- ✓ Job-related expenses
- ✓ Child care

To see what information you need to calculate child support, visit

childsupport.ca.gov/calculate-child-support/
or call the Ventura County Department of Child Support Services toll free at **1-866-901-3212**.

Q&A with Outreach Specialist Vanessa Perez

BY
THEA
MARIE
ROOD

Sharing a passion for the families of Ventura County

What is your connection to Ventura County?

I'm a lifelong resident of Ventura County — I was born and raised here and now I'm raising my family here too. My husband and I have two boys, ages 6 and 8, and a 1-year-old puppy. I play softball in an adult league — two nights a week and some tournaments. I've been in public service for many years — I worked for the state in different agencies until I found my way to Child Support Services, where I started in 2013.

Can you describe your job as an Outreach Specialist?

Certain days we are out in the courts on cases where child support orders are established and modified, and if I see someone who is expressing frustration — “The other parent won't even let me see my child! It's not fair!” — I work with them. A lot of these young fathers are really lost, and we tell them, “Yes, this is the order, but you have rights and options to pursue visitation.” I'm passionate about that, because I met my father for the first time at a child support hearing when I was 13, so I tell my clients it's not just about the money, it's about building the relationship with your child and possibly opening a new door that can change your lives. I really try to impart to these fathers that you have rights but you have to want to do the work. Sometimes they just need a little push. That's what's rewarding for me.

It seems like VCDCCS also wants to educate people in general that your office is here to help parents and is not some kind of scary, punitive place. What are some ways you do that?

Our mission is to help families thrive — and the whole idea is that a child needs to receive support from both parents. We're not trying to punish you — child support is not a punishment. Part of being a good parent is supporting your child. So we have a big push out in the community, go to various community resource fairs, trying to meet people in a non-threatening environment.

We also do high school presentations. Teachers have us come in right after they do sex education. We say, “If you have a child with someone and you break up, you'll be paying child support.” High school students may look checked out, but suddenly you see they are paying attention. We also encourage them to be careful around the issue of paternity. “If you think you're not the father, make sure — don't just sign papers at the hospital.” We also stress in the presentation, “Don't ignore paperwork from our office — it won't make it go away.” It leaves some information there for them to refer to if five or 10 years down the road, they do have a case with us.

What is one thing you wish more parents knew about your office?

We'll work with you. Some things we do are system automated. So stay involved in your case, don't wait. If you lost a job or have primary custody now, come into our office or phone us. You need to help us manage the case.

Vanessa Perez knows all too well the significance of child support and is deeply committed to assisting families.

PHOTO BY SUZAN WEININGER

“Our mission is to help families thrive — and the whole idea is that a child needs to receive support from both parents.”

Vanessa Perez

Outreach Specialist, Ventura County
Child Support Services



Committing to Your Child's Well-being



Open a Case:



By phone:

Request an application by calling us at 866-901-3212



By mail:

Print your application at home by clicking on the Apply for Services link at ventura.org/child-support-services/open-a-case/



In person:

Walk in our office during regular business hours to pick up an application. Located at 5171 Verdugo Way, Camarillo, CA 93012



Online at:

Scan the QR code or go to childsupport.ca.gov/apply-for-child-support/



*Scan Here
to open a case!*

Ventura County Department of Child Support Services is dedicated to establishing appropriate support for children. The department recognizes that sufficient support starts with facilitating an easy and just process for the parents involved. Among the department's services, parents can determine the legal fatherhood of a child, create an agreement for child support without going to court and have current child support orders reviewed for modification in light of a change in relevant circumstances. VCDCSS provides a hassle-free and efficient process for parents to meet their children's needs with online applications and automatic payments. Please contact the office by phone, email or in person to discover which services would apply to ensure your family thrives!

Ventura Department of Child Support Services

5171 Verdugo Way
Camarillo, CA 93012
(866) 901-3212

