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News

Child support bureau having driver's license amnesty program

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ELYRIA — The Lorain County Child Support Enforcement Agency is hoping people who have had their driver's license suspended due to missed child support payments will take advantage of an amnesty program.

The ninth annual driver's license reinstatement program is taking place throughout August and features a special clinic at the end of the month with attorneys from Legal Aid on hand to offer legal advice. Those behind in payments, who pay an entire month's worth of child support — regardless of their past due amounts — will get their licenses returned under the program.

"I would say about 75 to 80 percent of our obligors pay on time," said Ann Eckstein, the agency's administrator.

When payments are continuously in arrears, the agency turns to the county prosecutor to press a contempt charge or revoke the person's driver's license, she said.

Licenses are revoked after the agency looks at the past three months of payments for employed child support payers. If less than 50 percent of the total owed has been collected, a letter is sent out revoking the driver's license.

"At the start of August, we sent out about 5,500 letters," Eckstein said.

Since the amnesty program began two weeks ago, the agency has "collected right around \$17,000," she said.

Although the amount collected, so far, is low by standards in past years, Eckstein said they receive a rush of payments during the last week of the month.

The program generally takes place in late summer and early fall due to the "added expense" of starting school back up and the strain it puts on parents and guardians who rely on child support, she said.

In 2011, the Lorain County CSEA collected approximately \$120,500 through the amnesty program alone. The most they've collected, Eckstein said, was around 2009, when the agency received \$140,000 or so.

The program which reinstates a suspended driver's license for at least three months, has had a positive impact, Eckstein said. Those who pay at least a full month of back child support during the amnesty program sometimes change their behavior and begin paying on a more regular basis.

"We do it for the benefit of the children," she said.

The Legal Aid Clinic will take place from 4 to 6 p.m., Aug. 30 at the agency, 42485 North Ridge Road, Elyria. Those wishing to take part can call (888) 817-3777 to make an appointment, but walk-ins will not be turned down.

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