

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES – 9 FEBRUARY 2010 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Human Services Portfolio

Topic: Percentage of separated parents who are CSA clients

Question reference number: HS5

Senator: FIFIELD

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Question:

Senator FIFIELD – I have some questions about the department in general, but Senator Kroger has also prompted some questions for me about the CSA. At the outset, does the CSA have a handle on the percentage of separated or divorced parents with children that are clients of the CSA? I am wondering whether 95 per cent of families in that situation are or are not clients of the CSA. I know it might not necessarily be an easy thing to put a number on.

Ms Godwin—It is not. I think there has probably been research in this area in the past. Of course, it is hard for us to speculate on the number of people who are not registered who could be if they chose to be, because it is not compulsory to register with the Child Support Agency.

Senator FIFIELD—And the fewer clients the agency has the better, in an ideal world where people can reach agreements amongst themselves without needing the CSA.

Ms Godwin—Indeed. Even if they do register with the Child Support Agency, we still have that objective of encouraging cooperative arrangements. The rate of what we call private collect cases—that is, people who have private arrangements in place where we are not engaged in the collection activity—is going up, so that is a good indicator as well. As to the number of families that could otherwise register but have not, I would have to take that on notice to see if there is any research that might indicate that.

Senator FIFIELD—If you could, that would be interesting.

Answer:

The only analysis conducted by the Child Support Program (CSP) in relation to the Child Support Scheme Coverage of the Australian Population Eligible for Child Support Services, was conducted in 2004. Drawing upon several sets of data from the 1997 and 2003 Family Characteristics Survey of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, it was estimated that the Scheme covered approximately 90-95 per cent of the total population in Australia that was eligible to receive child support services.