

December 16, 1996

Barbara Saunders  
Assistant Deputy Director  
Office of Child Support Enforcement  
Ohio Department of Human Services  
30 East Broad Street, 30th Floor  
Columbus, Ohio 43266-0423

Dear Barb:

In our recent conversation, you indicated that there was some question whether Ohio's child support guidelines have incorporated any adjustment for the amount of visitation that was considered "normal", e.g. 20 percent of the time. In addition, you asked that we provide you with information concerning shared custody and visitation adjustments in other states.

Regarding the question on the current Ohio guidelines, the economic basis for the current guidelines does not include any adjustment for visitation of any kind. Because the Schedule is based on expenditures for children in intact households, there is *no assumption* made concerning visitation costs. Instead, the guidelines are based on the estimated proportion of parental income that would have been spent on the child if the household were intact. No further adjustment has been made to reflect changes to estimated child-rearing costs based on the amount of visitation exercised by the non-custodial parent.

We understand a perception exists that the current guidelines are predicated on the assumption that visitation is exercised for 20 percent of the time. We do not believe that this perception is correct. We have reviewed our files back to the development of the original guidelines in 1986 and we can find no discussion on this issue in earlier communications or notes. The only plausible explanation we can offer for this perception is that we did discuss a time-sharing threshold of 25 - 30 percent for applying a shared custody adjustment. Perhaps, it was misconstrued from this discussion that below this threshold, visitation costs were already built into the guidelines.

Generally states have not made a formulaic adjustment for visitation costs in their guidelines because such costs are highly variable. At a 10 percent visitation level, for example, some non-custodial parents might provide an extra room for the child, while others might roll out a sleeping bag or fold out a couch. Moreover, there are duplicated costs involved with visitation. Although variable costs such as food are reduced for the custodial parent when visitation is exercised, both parents may incur fixed costs such as housing, home furnishings, utilities, and transportation. These considerations make design of an equitable visitation adjustment quite challenging.



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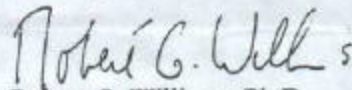
Despite the inherent difficulty of designing a visitation adjustment, a few states are addressing this issue. In addition, many states have adjustments for shared physical custody. The latter issue, shared physical custody, was analyzed in a prior report that we prepared for Ohio in 1993, and there have been very few changes in state practices since then. Nonetheless, we are enclosing a copy of the chapter from the earlier report in the event that it might still be useful. Sections II and III of the report, *Analysis of Selected Factors Related to Child Support Guidelines*, lists which states allowed deviations or had formulaic adjustments for shared custody and visitation in 1993. This report also describes the different approaches used for these formulaic adjustments

We also thought the following more recent information pertaining to visitation adjustments could be useful.

- ▶ Copies of new visitation and shared custody adjustments for New Jersey and Arizona.
- ▶ Although we have not had the opportunity to analyze these new approaches fully, we did provide some preliminary analysis for Arizona. This analysis is contained in Chapter VI of the enclosed report, *Economic Basis for Updated Child Support Schedule: State of Arizona*.

We hope this information is useful in your deliberations concerning visitation and/or shared custody. If you need clarification or further information, please call me or Jane Venohr, Research Analyst. I am looking forward to working with you on guidelines issues in 1997.

Sincerely,



Robert G. Williams, Ph.D.  
President