



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE  
OF THE COURTS  
455 Golden Gate Avenue  
San Francisco, CA  
94102-3688  
Tel 415-865-4200  
TDD 415-865-4272  
Fax 415-865-4205  
[www.courtinfo.ca.gov](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov)

## FACT SHEET

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# CALIFORNIA'S ACCESS TO VISITATION GRANT PROGRAM

In 1999 the California Legislature enacted Assembly Bill 673 (Honda), which charged the Judicial Council with administering and distributing the federal Child Access to Visitation Grant Program funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration of Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement. These grants, established under section 391 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (“welfare reform”) of 1996 (Pub. L. 104-193, 110 Stat. 2258)—also known as Title III, Subtitle I (Enhancing Responsibility and Opportunity for Nonresidential Parents), Section 469B of the Social Security Act—enable states to establish and administer programs that support and facilitate non-custodial parents’ access to and visitation of their children.

Each year, beginning in 1997, subject to the availability of funding, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awards a total of \$10 million in block grants to all states to promote access and visitation programs that increase noncustodial parents’ involvement in their children’s lives. The grant funds may be used for such activities as mediation (both voluntary and mandatory), counseling, education, development of parenting plans, visitation enforcement (including monitoring, supervision, and neutral drop-off and pickup), and development of guidelines for visitation and alternative custody arrangements. However, AB 673 expressed the Legislature’s intent that funding for the state of California is limited by statute to the following three types of programs:

- Supervised visitation and exchange services;
- Education about protecting children during family disruption; and
- Group counseling services for parents and children.

The federal allocation to each state is based on the number of single-parent households. California has the most single heads of households in the United States and therefore receives the largest portion of federal funds (approximately 980,000 per year). All family courts throughout California are eligible to apply for and receive the

access to visitation grant funds through a competitive request for proposal (RFP) process. The Administrative Office of the Courts' Center for Families, Children & the Courts has the primary responsibility for administering, overseeing, and managing the grant program.

It is the intent of the California Legislature that the programs achieve the goal of promoting and encouraging healthy relationships between noncustodial or joint custodial parents and their children while ensuring the health, safety, and welfare of the children—*irrespective of marital status and of whether or not the parties are currently living separately on a permanent or temporary basis.*

The statewide programs are accomplishing the overall goal of protecting and rebuilding parental relationships after separation and divorce by:

- Providing children with safe access to their parents;
- Promoting parents' sense of financial responsibility to their children;
- Improving compliance with court and child support orders;
- Reducing trauma and exposure to high conflict in children;
- Alleviating children's exposure to further risks or harm where there are allegations or a history of domestic violence, child abuse, or sexual abuse;
- Improving parents' ability to communicate and make decisions with the best interest of their children in mind; and
- Improving parenting skills through modeling and education.