



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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Trial Court Information Services

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Data Standards and Electronic Information Exchange Child Support Enforcement

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I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to present this written testimony regarding data standards and electronic information exchange in Child Support Enforcement cases.

I am the Chief Information Officer for the Massachusetts Trial Court and have had the privilege of serving in this capacity for the past eight years. I offer this testimony based on over thirty years of Information Technology experience in State and Local Government in the Commonwealth's Executive Branch and the Judicial Branch, and in municipalities. During my career I have been fortunate to serve as the CIO for the City of Boston and Mayor Thomas M. Menino, as the CIO for the Executive Office of Public Safety under several public safety cabinet secretaries, and as an Assistant Commissioner at our Department of Social Services (now Department of Children and Families) during our State-Wide Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) implementation. I also served for several years as the Executive Director of our State Criminal History Systems Board which operates the state-wide Criminal Justice Information System for the Commonwealth.

In addition to my “day job” I have the honor of serving as the current Chair of the Court Information Technology Officers Consortium or CITOC. CITOC is a national organization of technology professionals, such as myself, who serve as CIO’s or CTO’s in State, County and Municipal Courts around the country. CITOC currently has active members in over 40 states and provides a forum through which our members can exchange information, ideas, and experiences in information management and the automation of court business throughout the United States.

Lastly, I serve as the Chair of the Standards Committee of the Joint Technology Committee (JTC) of COSCA and NACM. COSCA is the Conference of State Court Administrators (<http://cosca.ncsc.dni.us>) and NACM is the National Association of Court Management (<http://www.nacmnet.org>).

Throughout my career I have had a number of opportunities to observe the benefits that can be realized from the implementation of technology standards similar to those, I believe, that are contemplated by your legislation.

Sound standards establish a technological vocabulary that allows parties with various perspectives to speak the same language when discussing electronic information and data exchanges. Further, the existence of quality standards provides a level playing field for the vendors that provide software and services to the governmental entities using them. If a vendor is asked to build or implement systems in adherence to referenced standards, some of the uncertainty that exists in government purchasing can be removed. As importantly, once a vendor has implemented a system in compliance with a standard, the effort needed for subsequent implementations is reduced, thus preventing agency after agency from having to pay for customized systems in those areas covered by the standards.

One need look no further than Public Safety for long-standing examples of instances where standards have played a key role in establishing a technology vocabulary to the benefit of tax payers. Both with the FBI's NCIC System and the National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (NLETS), states and municipalities have been exchanging information using standards for decades. In both of these cases a vibrant and robust vendor community sells software and hardware solutions to criminal justice agencies nationwide that are compliant with and interoperate with NCIC and NLETS. When an agency purchases a system, they need only indicate to a prospective vendor the nature of the business they wish to transact and reference the applicable NCIC/NLETS standard.

In the case of the court community, the OASIS Electronic Court Filing standard has been evolving since its first version was developed in 2001. In its most recent version, the ECF 4.0 standard covers not only court filings but the electronic service of parties and encompasses a variety of specific case types. This standard, which is now being used by courts and vendors in various jurisdictions around the country, has been updated for compliance with NIEM, the National Information Exchange Model.

When the Commonwealth of Massachusetts recently issued a Request for Information (RFI) for Electronic Filing, our conversation with prospective vendors included a discussion of how we expected the software to utilize ECF 4.0 transactions to communicate with our established case management system. Most vendors selling electronic filing products today understand exactly what this means and what is necessary for their software to use these standards. And, as importantly, many of the vendors in the e-filing space have already built the software needed to interface to existing systems using ECF 4.0, so that the cost to implement such interfaces is minimal compared to the cost of developing a customized solution.

Although I am not testifying on behalf of NIEM today, I am testifying in support of NIEM as it relates to any standards contemplated by this legislation. The NIEM model is now being used in many aspects of government around the country and not just within the Justice domain. In fact, NIEM currently has twelve different domains targeting various disciplines including one of the newer additions "Children, Youth and Family Services." This domain already includes a number of Information Exchange Package Definitions (IEPD) worthy of review before new/different standards are developed. For example there are child support exchanges for "request remedy" and "support order" and several other child welfare exchanges. A list of defined standard exchanges can be found at www.ncsconline.org/d_tech/gjxdm/IEPD.asp. Because we in the courts deal with matters that come before us from a range of other governmental disciplines, we would hope that any standards developed in the child support enforcement area would be developed using the NIEM framework and dictionaries. Finally I would hope any new work builds upon that which has been done already and does not make obsolete the good work already completed in this area.

Electronic information exchanges are occurring today in several exemplar states. I have selected a few I believe to be worthy of specific mention.

In Colorado, I would highlight the Data Information Sharing (DISH) system. DISH allows the Colorado Department of Human Services Division of Child Support Enforcement (CSE) to collaborate with the Colorado Judicial Department. This system facilitates real-time data exchange in child support cases with the court. DISH builds on work conducted by the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) to encourage collaboration between courts and child support agencies, and specifically on work to create an adaptable means of electronic case filing and information exchange.

DISH was created using modern technology standards including NIEM. Unlike the historical paper dependent systems in Colorado, this solution is intended to expedite child support orders, reduce redundant data entry, and improve data accuracy.

In Missouri, the Missouri Juvenile Justice Information System (MOJJIS) also has been developed using the NIEM standards. This centralized system allows participating agencies to easily identify children and families receiving state services by searching a single centralized index. The MOJJIS index includes data from the Missouri Courts as well as the Department of Social Services (Children's Division, Division of Youth Services and Family Support Division), the Department of Health and Senior Services, and the Department of Mental Health.

In my own State of Massachusetts, the Commonwealth's new court case management system, *MassCourts*, is using a NIEM compliant exchange to send copies of judicial orders in Child Welfare cases from our Probate and Family Court divisions to our Department of Children and Families (DCF). This exchange was developed with our Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) and uses a common Executive Branch document management system to securely store these electronic documents. We intend to reuse this standard-based exchange to send copies of other key court documents to other human service agencies under the EOHHS umbrella in the future. In addition to our orders information exchange now in use, we are working to implement two additional NIEM-based exchanges with our DCF. The first additional exchange involves the courts sending information to DCF about scheduled case events in child welfare cases. The second exchange will allow DCF to file specific petitions with the court in child welfare cases. Because these exchanges have been built using NIEM and web services, they can be easily repurposed in the future to send similar information on CSE cases to our I-V D agency (Department of Revenue Child Support Enforcement Division) as they work to bring the Commonwealth's new CSE system online.


As previously mentioned, in many states the OASIS ECF standard is being used by various courts to facilitate Electronic Filing systems. Although not designed specifically for CSE case filings, the standard is flexible enough and extensible such that it can be used to support key filing activities between state I-V D agencies and court systems.

Although each court's business practices and requirements vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, NIEM and the ECF standards provide a robust and flexible architecture that should be included in any conversations regarding the development of further standards for data exchange between Courts and I-V D programs across the country. Also it is important to remember that facilitating interfaces between courts and state I-V D agencies around the country may be easier in those judicial branches, like my own, where a single technology infrastructure supports the entire state court system. This model does not exist in many states and technology and system infrastructures can vary significantly from county to county, jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Standards like ECF and NIEM are not a silver bullet, nor should they be seen as a panacea that should be expected to solve data management or information exchange problems quickly or "out of the box." In fact a standards-based approach may not be the preferred, or most cost effective, approach for some organizations. Instead it provides tools and a framework to assist technology and business practitioners, along with our vendors, to discuss business processes and data requirements using an established vocabulary. How that vocabulary and the standards are implemented will vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and from I-V D agency to I-V D agency. That said, the development of further standards and information exchange specifications in support of CSE activities would build a further technological foundation upon which systems can be created or existing systems enhanced in the future.

In conclusion, I believe the legislation you are contemplating is helpful and important, and I encourage this Committee to continue to advocate for the use of technology standards in future legislation. Such standards can reduce the cost of systems and increase the likelihood of interoperability among systems. As the quantity and complexity of the systems we operate increases, standards can help to insure that a common vocabulary exists for all of us to use in facilitating good and efficient government.

Thank You.



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Information Exchange Package Documentation (IEPD)

Information Exchange Package Documentation (IEPDs) define "reference" information exchanges, intended as models for information exchanges that meet specific business needs. The full specification of a IEPD is detailed in [Global JXDM Information Exchange Package Documentation Guidelines, Version 1.1](#).

Categories

- [Arrest Warrant](#)
- [Bond Document](#)
- [Charge Document](#)
- [Child Support](#)
- [Child Welfare](#)
- [Court Tools Documents](#)
- [Disposition Reporting](#)
- [Protection Order](#)
- [Sentencing Order](#)
- [Traffic Citation](#)
- [Juvenile \(Vermont\)](#)
- [Drug Court](#)

| Child Support Enforcement | Child Welfare |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request Remedy - The Initial Request for Remedy is a formal request for a court or judicial agency to establish a non-custodial parent's ongoing obligation of support of children, typically in the form of a Petition or Application. This GJXDM-compliant IEPD addresses specifically those Requests filed by State Child Support agencies and their local partners (e.g., family divisions of prosecuting attorneys' offices). • Support Order - This GJXDM-compliant IEPD addresses Child Support Orders from a court or judicial agency that establish a non-custodial parent's ongoing obligation of support of children, which can include financial obligations, medical insurance coverage, and other terms and conditions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjudication Order - Developed by the Data Modeling Committee of the Child Welfare Roadmap's Data Exchange Working Group, this NIEM-compliant IEPD provides courts and child welfare agencies with a data-exchange standard for the court's order after an Adjudication Hearing. The IEPD also includes a stylesheet. • Dependency Petition - This NIEM-compliant IEPD provides courts and child welfare agencies with a data-exchange standard for the initial petition that alleges abuse or neglect. The IEPD also includes a stylesheet. |

Existing child support and Child Welfare IEPD overview from National Center for State Courts (www.ncsconline.org/d_tech/gjxdm/IEPD.asp)