



Overview of the Child Support Enforcement Program An Intergovernmental Partnership Ensuring Financial Support and Parental Involvement

Created by Congress in 1975, the child support program ensures that children in single-parent households receive a reliable source of private financial and medical support. Today, it **supports a fourth (over 17 million) of the nation's children from all socioeconomic backgrounds**. The program increases family self-sufficiency, reduces child poverty, and encourages both mother and father to be involved and committed to their children.

The program's **core functions** are:

- Locating parents;
- Establishing paternity;
- Establishing child support orders;
- Enforcing those orders;
- Collecting and distributing child support obligations

Child support staff use a variety of methods and tools to carry out the above core functions to support children and their families. Using administrative and judicial processes, child support staff **locate employers and work with them to withhold a portion of wages paid to employees owing support**. In federal fiscal year (FFY) 2011, seventy percent of collections came from withheld wages.

To the extent there may be other income available, child support staff pursue many other strategies to potentially offset public benefit costs by:

- Offsetting Unemployment Insurance Benefits
- Offsetting Federal and State Income Tax Refunds
- Suspending Driver's Licenses
- Seizing Bank Accounts
- Placing liens on Real and Personal Property
- Denying a US Passport
- Denying hunting/fishing and other recreational licenses
- Denying professional and occupational licenses

States also collaborate with each other to ensure that parents living in a state different from their children meet their obligations.

Child Support Does More Than Collect Dollars

During the economic recession, agencies have worked hard with non-custodial parents to find **and maintain work, and modify support orders when necessary** so that parents do not fall hopelessly behind in payments. Agencies try to build a culture of compliance, so that parents support their children voluntarily and reliably.

Child support programs **promote stable, safe, and healthy relationships between parents and children** by participating in the larger community's efforts to strengthen families, and **encourage healthy marriage and responsible parenthood**.

Child support programs have developed targeted, specific initiatives to **work with special populations**, including incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parents.

This Federal, State, Local and Tribal Partnership Works!

- Efficiently administered, **the program collected \$27.3 billion** from non-custodial parents in FFY 2011 and **distributed 94 percent of collections directly to families.**
- Payments have a huge impact on child poverty. Child support received by families is **39% of the income** of those headed by single poor mothers and **reduces their poverty rate by nearly 25%.**
- The Urban Institute has estimated that **\$4 in child support expenditures reduces spending in public programs by \$5.**
- OMB has characterized the child support program as “one of the highest rated block/formula grants of all reviewed programs government-wide....” **For every dollar the government spends on enforcement, \$5.12 is collected in child support.**
- Historically, **child support reaches more children than any federally-funded program, with the exception of Medicaid.** Given the recession, child participation in SNAP (food stamps) is a close third.

NCSEA Supports Continued Improvements to Child Support

- In June 2012, the House of Representatives adopted by voice vote *the International Child Support Recovery Improvement Act of 2012* (H.R. 4282). NCSEA testified on the measure earlier in the year and supported its passage. The bill contains procedures of the 2007 Hague Convention Treaty for processing international child support cases that are uniform, simple, efficient, accessible, and cost-free to U.S. citizens seeking support in other countries. It is founded on the agreement of countries that ratify the Convention to recognize and enforce each other's support orders.
- A bill containing similar Hague Convention language was introduced in the Senate by Senators Menendez (D-NJ) and Grassley (R-IA). The Senate made an effort to include that provision in a year-end bipartisan bill but negotiations were overtaken by the fiscal cliff debate. NCSEA will work this year to revive these bipartisan efforts.
- In addition to supporting the Hague Treaty provision, NCSEA is also preparing other proposals to improve the child support program. They include:
 - increasing collaboration between the child support program and Workforce Investment Act programs;
 - provisions improving the administrative tools and authority to adjust support orders based on the non-custodial parent's ability to pay;
 - improving enforcement tools to identify assets and encourage non-custodial parents to support their children; and,
 - establishing parenting time orders as an allowable activity for federal financial participation so that unwed parents receiving a support order are also given visitation privileges.