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Overview of the Child Support 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 quarter (over 17 million) of the nation's children from all socioeconomic backgrounds**. The program increases family self-sufficiency, reduces child poverty, and encourages both parents to be involved and committed to their children.

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

- 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 these 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**. Seventy-four percent of collections come 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**, veterans and those facing barriers to meeting their child support responsibilities, including incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parents.

This Federal, State, Local and Tribal Partnership Works!

- Efficiently administered, **the program collected \$28.5 billion** from non-custodial parents in FFY 2015 and **distributed 93 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, \$5.26 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 2014 Congress passed HR 4980, the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act" and President Obama signed the bill into law. The law incorporates the adoption of the Hague Convention on the International Recovery of Child Support. NCSEA testified on and supported passage of earlier bills containing the language that was ultimately included in the new law. in the year. The law contains procedures 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.
- NCSEA provides information about child support issues and successes with congressional members and provides input to the federal Office of Child Support. In the last two years, NCSEA has provided detailed feedback to the administration on





proposed rulemaking, and to their strategic plan. Annually, NCSEA provides a Child Support Policy Forum in which child support leaders from across the country share with state, private, tribal, and federal partners the various policy improvements and challenges to implementing and improving the program.

- 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.

