



Updated February, 2019

Quick Facts: Interstate Child Support

This Quick Facts guide provides information about the special challenges and approaches to establishing, enforcing and modifying child support orders when parties live in different states.

The Child Support Program¹ is a successful federal-state partnership whose mission is to promote economic stability for children whose parents live apart. Cases in which parties reside in different states or jurisdictions pose unique case processing challenges. Intergovernmental cases can be broken down into three categories: interstate, international, and tribal. This Quick Facts guide focuses on interstate case processing, where the parents live in different states. State child support agencies are required to pursue child support results as vigorously for children who live outside their borders as for those under their own jurisdiction. Almost one million cases were sent from one state to another in FFY2017.²

Interstate case processing has evolved dramatically over the past 50 years. Currently, the primary state law to facilitate activity in interstate cases is the Uniform Interstate Family Support Act (UIFSA). Each state was required by Congress³ to pass UIFSA, which provides a common framework for interstate establishment, enforcement, and modification of support obligations to increase consistency across state lines. UIFSA acknowledges that certain laws vary from state to state, such as child support guidelines and ages of emancipation, and provides principles that identify which law is applicable to different aspects of the case. In conjunction with federal regulations, UIFSA also outlines responsibilities for initiating and responding jurisdictions, and provides timeframes to ensure prompt case processing.

Perhaps the most crucial provisions of UIFSA provide strict rules regarding when states can modify child support orders entered by other jurisdictions. This ensures that there is only one valid child support order that can be enforced for current support, thereby eliminating the confusion caused prior to the adoption of UIFSA when multiple valid orders could be entered by different states for the same parent and child. UIFSA also provides for enforcement of orders through direct income withholding, which allows an income withholding order to be sent directly

¹ Created by Title IV-D of the Social Security Act

² FFY2017 Preliminary Report to Congress-Table P-34

³All states originally were required to adopt UIFSA 1996 by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-193).; UIFSA was subsequently amended in 2001 and 2008. In 2014, the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (P.L. 113-183) required all states to enact UIFSA 2008.





to an employer in another state without involving the child support agency or court in that state. This process typically results in a quicker flow of support money to the family.

In addition to UIFSA, states are required to have laws and procedures for the recognition of paternity determinations from sister states, and for the recognition and enforcement of child support liens. This expedites and simplifies child support collection across state lines.

At the federal level, both states and tribes are bound by the Full Faith and Credit for Child Support Orders Act. The federal Office of Child Support Enforcement also operates the Federal Parent Locator Service, which is an invaluable locate and enforcement resource. It includes two federal databases – the National Directory of New Hires and the Federal Case Registry – that facilitate interstate case processing.

While interstate case processing can pose special challenges, the uniform application of UIFSA, combined with federal initiatives to enable communication between and among states, ensure that child support agencies are able to meet the financial needs for children whose parents live in different states.

