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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 over 15 million (1 in 5) 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** include:

- Establishing paternity
- Establishing child support/medical support orders
- Modifying child support/medical 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 other income payors, working with them to withhold a portion of income paid to persons owing support**. Over seventy percent of collections come from withheld wages¹.

While income withholding is the primary collection tool, Child Support Staff utilize many other remedies to pursue support for children including:

- Withholding a portion of unemployment insurance benefits
- Offsetting federal and state income tax refunds
- Suspending driver 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.

¹ FFY2017 OCSE Preliminary Report.





The Child Support Program Does More than Collect Dollars

Local child support staff work hard with parents who owe child support to assist them in ***maintaining work, and modifying support orders when necessary*** so that they do not fall hopelessly behind in payments. Child support staff 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 initiatives to ***work with parents in special circumstances who have barriers to meeting their child support obligations. This includes veterans, incarcerated parents, and the re-entry population***.

Federal, State, Local and Tribal Partnership Works!

- Efficiently administered, ***the Child Support Program collected \$32 billion*** from noncustodial parents in FFY 2017 and ***distributed 96 percent of collections directly to families.***²
- Child support payments lifted 743,000 people from poverty in 2017, including 455,000 children. Without it, child poverty would increase by 4.0%.³
- The Office of Management and Budget has recognized the Child Support Program as being highly efficient by characterizing it as “one of the highest rated block/formula grants of all reviewed programs government-wide....” ***For every dollar the government spends on enforcement, \$5.15 is collected as support for children.***⁴
- Historically, the ***Child Support Program reaches more children than any federally-funded program, with the exception of Medicaid.***

NCSEA Supports Continued Improvements to the Child Support Program

- 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. 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.

² Ibid.

³ The Supplemental Poverty Measure: 2017, U.S. Census Bureau, Tables A-6, A-7.

⁴ FFY2017 OCSE Preliminary Report.





- NCSEA provides information about child support issues and successes with congressional members and provides input to the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE). In the last two years, NCSEA has provided detailed feedback to the administration on proposed rulemaking, and 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 for improving the administrative tools and authority to adjust support orders based on the noncustodial parent's ability to pay;
 - Improving enforcement tools to identify assets and encourage parents who owe 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.

