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Quick Facts: Intergovernmental 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 that seeks to promote economic stability for children whose parents live apart. The program collects \$5.51 for every \$1 in public funds invested. In FY 2020, \$33.6 billion was collected in 13.2 million cases for 13.8 million children.²

Cases in which parties reside in different states or jurisdictions pose unique case processing challenges. While intergovernmental child support encompasses interstate, international, tribal, and at times, military cases, this Quick Facts guide focuses specifically on interstate case processing, where the parents reside 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. Just over 866,000 cases were sent from one state to another in FY 2020, totaling approximately \$1.6 billion dollars in child support collections.^{3,4}

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 2008). Each state was required by Congress to pass UIFSA, which provides a common framework for interstate establishment, enforcement, and modification of support obligations to increase consistency across state lines.⁵ 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. The federal regulations outline responsibilities for initiating and responding jurisdictions, provides timeframes to ensure prompt compliance, and work in conjunction with UIFSA to provide states with instructions regarding intergovernmental 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 oversight ensures that only one valid child support order that can be enforced for current support exists, thereby eliminating the

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

² [Office of Child Support Enforcement \(OCSE\) FY 2020 Preliminary Report](#)

³ FY 2020 Preliminary Report to Congress-Table P-34

⁴ FY 2020 Preliminary Report to Congress-Table P-33

⁵ All 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.





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 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 other states, as well as the recognition and enforcement of child support liens. These requirements expedite and simplify 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.⁶ The federal Office of Child Support Enforcement also operates the Federal Parent Locator Service, which is an invaluable locate and enforcement resource across state lines. 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.

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⁶ 28 U.S.C. 1738B

