



June 2024

Quick Facts: Child Support Enforcement

This Quick Fact guide provides information about how state child support programs enforce and collect child support payments.

The Child Support Program¹ is a successful federal-state-tribal partnership that seeks to promote economic stability for children whose parents live apart. The program collects \$4.37 for every \$1 in public funds invested. In FY 2023, \$31 billion was collected in 12 million cases for 12.7 million children.²

The most important enforcement tool is the income withholding order, accounting for 70% of all child support collections in FY 2023.³ This type of order is part of each state's law and includes a provision that it must be put into effect immediately, with limited exceptions, so that the child support can be deducted from the wages before the balance is paid to the employee. If the parent changes jobs and the new employer reports the employee to the state Department of Labor as a new hire, that information is available to the child support program and an [income withholding order](#) is sent to the new employer.⁴

The Program utilizes numerous additional enforcement tools, broken down as follows:

- [Federal and State Tax Refund Offsets](#)⁵
- Unemployment Compensation Garnishment
- [Passport Denial](#)⁶
- Insurance Settlement Intercept
- Driver's License Suspension
- Lottery Intercept
- Professional License Suspension
- Bank Liens
- Real Estate Liens
- Personal Property Liens
- Civil Contempt
- [Credit Bureau Reporting](#)⁷
- [Gambling Intercept](#)⁸

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

² Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) FY 2023 Preliminary Report

³ *Ibid.*, table P-29.

⁴ For more information about income withholding, see Quick Facts: Income Withholding.

⁵ See Quick Facts: Federal Tax Refund Offset Program, for more information.

⁶ See Quick Facts: Passport Denial, for more information.

⁷ See Quick Facts: Credit Reporting, for more information.

⁸ See Quick Facts: Intercepting Gambling Winnings, for more information.





- Criminal Prosecution

The ability to collect regular payments from a parent owing support depends on the parent’s ability to obtain steady employment. But as the gig economy grows, enforcing child support orders becomes more challenging for parents owing support who work outside traditional salaried employment. A 2022 study, [Noncustodial Parents and the Gig Economy](#), found that gig work is more prevalent among parents owing support than other workers.⁹ The study explains that gig work tends to be short-term and often conducted outside of the traditional employee-employer relationship, making it difficult to enforce child support orders through income withholding. As such, the [January 2022 Child Support Report](#) reported that more states are passing laws requiring employers to report independent contractors as new hires and to withhold and remit payments for child support.¹⁰ Such laws would help bring more parents into compliance with their child support orders.

At the same time, the way in which the Child Support Program perceives its role as strictly an “enforcement” service has also evolved. In 2023, The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) issued a [Press Release](#), renaming the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) to the Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) to reflect the program’s commitment to serving the whole family and promoting family self-sufficiency.¹¹ The ACF announced that this change demonstrates the program is adopting a more inclusive, [family-centered and service-oriented model](#).¹² In addition, the Child Support Program continues to balance the needs of parents owing support by connecting them to [workforce development services](#) that can help them obtain employment so that they can meet their children’s financial needs.¹³ In fact, many state Child Support Programs have already removed “enforcement” from their names.

⁹ Sorensen, Elaine (May 2022).

¹⁰ Jacobsohn, Esq., Alice P. (January 2022).

¹¹ ACF Press Release (June 2023).

¹² For more information about family-centered services, see Quick Facts: Family Centered Child Support Services.

¹³ For more information about workforce development services, see Quick Facts: Workforce Development.

