Journal of Policy Practice and Research
https://doi.org/10.1007/s42972-020-00016-9

ORIGINAL PAPER

Too Much, Too Little, or Just Right? Recent Changes to State Child Support Guidelines for Low-Income Noncustodial Parents

Leslie Hodges[1] · Lisa Klein Vogel[2]

Accepted: 5 October 2020/Published online: 10 November 2020

Abstract

There are growing concerns that current child support guidelines may result in "too high" orders likely to go unpaid and resulting in substantial debt. Recent federal legislation reflects these concerns by requiring states to consider the noncustodial parent's ability to pay when setting child support orders [45 C.F.R. § 302.56(c)(1)(ii)]. However, this legislation leaves states to determine how to balance the economic needs of paying parents and their children. This paper explores how this flexibility affects the extent of variation in order amounts for low-income parents across states. To better understand how states interpret this new ruling and implications for order amounts, we conducted a cross-state comparison of recent changes to state child support guidelines for low-income payors and calculated order amounts for several types of cases. We find that states fall on a spectrum of how they conceive of parental financial responsibility versus parental self-sufficiency in their policy. Some states view noncustodial parents' responsibilities for their children's financial needs as secondary to parents' abilities to meet their own basic needs; others view children's needs as coming first; and many fall somewhere in between. Our findings add to current understanding of how child support agencies and lawmakers attempt to address the financial needs of low-income families through policy and statute. We find that having generous self-support reserves and no minimum orders allows states to maximize noncustodial parent income. However, if states seek to maximize financial contributions to children, more graduated adjustments to order amounts may be preferable.

Keywords Child support policy · Child support guidelines · Child support order amounts · Child support order burden · Noncustodial parents · Low-income children and families

Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at https://doi.org/10.1007/s42972-020-00016-9.

✉ Lisa Klein Vogel
lmklein@wisc.edu

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

Introduction

This study examines recent changes to state child support guidelines and child support order amounts for low-income noncustodial parents. It is increasingly common for children in the USA to live in single-parent households (U.S. Census Bureau 2019), and it is well recognized that living in a single-parent household is a risk factor for child poverty (National Academies of Sciences 2019). One in four children lived apart from one of their parents in 2016 (U.S. Census Bureau 2017), and 30% of children in custodial parent families lived in poverty, compared with 11% of other children in 2017 (Grall 2020). Child support paid by the parent living apart from the child (the non-custodial parent) to the parent living with the child (the custodial parent) is often a significant source of income in single-parent households and can act as a buffer against the risk of poverty (Grall 2020; Ha et al. 2018; Meyer and Hu 1999). Whereas informal cash support typically wanes in the years following relationship dissolution (Berger et al. 2012; Nepomnyaschy and Garfinkel 2010), the formal child support system can help keep a steady stream of income flowing into the child's home. Consistency of support helps custodial parents meet the regular costs associated with raising a child, such as rent, food, and clothing (Ha et al. 2010).

The federal child support program, established in 1975, was founded, in part, to recover costs for children receiving public assistance from parents living outside the home (Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives 2018), and it has an explicit goal of ensuring that parents living apart from their children contribute to their financial well-being. The child support system collected and distributed over $28 billion in child support in 2018 (OCSE 2019). However, non-payment of child support is a significant problem. More than half of custodial parents with orders received less than the full amount of support due to them, and 30% did not receive any support at all in 2017 (Grall 2020).

Although willingness to pay and characteristics of the child support enforcement system are important factors in nonpayment of support (Bartfeld and Meyer 2003), ability to pay support is increasingly recognized as critically important among researchers, with some researchers identifying ability to pay as the largest factor in non-payment (Mincy and Sorensen 1998; Vogel 2020a, 2020b). Salient for this analysis, previous research has identified ability to pay as especially important among noncustodial parents with limited economic resources, even in strong enforcement environments (Bartfeld and Meyer 2003; Goldberg 2015; Huang et al. 2005; Nepomnyaschy and Garfinkel 2010). In recognition that many parents behind in their child support payments have limited financial resources, nearly all states include special considerations for low-income noncustodial parents in their child support guidelines (Venohr 2013), which are used to specify the amount of child support owed at various income levels.

Yet, how exactly states should respond to noncustodial parents with limited abilities to pay remains a complex issue, especially given that accounting for the financial needs of the paying parent may be at direct odds with the goal of ensuring that parents living apart from their children contribute to their financial well-being. The traditional perspective that accompanied the development of the child support enforcement system through the 1990s centered on parental financial

responsibility and stressed the needs of the child as the most important component in determining the child support order amount. More recent conversations on child support orders have leaned toward parental self-sufficiency and suggest that, in some circumstances, the needs of the noncustodial parent should precede the needs of the child. These conversations were largely sparked by declines in earnings and increases in incarceration among less-educated younger men, many of whom are noncustodial parents (Cancian et al. 2011). They have been further motivated by billions of dollars in child support arrearages, most of which are owed by low-income parents ($118 billion in 2018 (Office of Child Support Enforcement 2019)); a number of high-profile accounts (e.g., Edin and Nelson 2013) that have emphasized the potential negative consequences of high orders and related enforcement for individual families; and several prominent child support demonstrations that have attempted alternative approaches to collecting child support with limited or no improvement in payment or compliance outcomes (Cancian et al. 2019c; Miller and Knox 2001).

Partially in response to arguments in favor of setting child support orders in a manner better aligned with noncustodial parents' abilities to pay and increasing their odds of retaining enough money to achieve self-sufficiency, the federal government provided states with additional direction regarding treatment of low-income noncustodial parents in December 2016. The Office of Child Support Enforcement's issuance of the Flexibility, Efficiency, and Modernization in Child Support Programs Final Rule directed states to set support orders based on a noncustodial parent's ability to pay and considering his or her basic subsistence needs, while leaving it to the discretion of each state to decide whether to also take into consideration the earnings, income, and basic subsistence needs of the custodial parent (42 C.F.R. § 302.56(c)(1)(i)). The developers expected that the rule would yield orders that low-income obligors were more likely to be able to pay and result in an increase in the consistency of child support payments made to custodial parent families.

In this paper, we examine policy expectations about low-income noncustodial parents' financial contributions to their children across the 50 states. We draw on states' child support guideline reviews conducted between January 2017 and March 2020 to identify policy changes salient to low-income obligors, and we use online child support calculators to calculate order amounts for several types of low-income cases. We find that states fall on a spectrum of how they conceive of parental financial responsibility versus parental self-sufficiency in their child support policy and particularly when setting child support orders for low-income noncustodial parents. Consistent with more contemporary perspectives, some states view the noncustodial parent's responsibility for their child's financial needs as secondary to the noncustodial parent's ability to meet their own basic needs. Consistent with more traditional perspectives, other states view the child's needs as coming first. For states in the former category, the most common strategy to address the limited financial resources of the non-custodial parent is to use a self-support reserve (SSR), which allows the parent to retain income up to a certain amount before an obligation is set. For states in the latter category, the most common strategy is to make no adjustment to their standard child support guidelines and leave any potential adjustment to the discretion of the courts. However, many states fall somewhere in between.

Policy Issue: Non-payment of Child Support

Non-payment of child support is a significant problem. The total amount of child support arrearages was more than $118 billion in 2018 (Office of Child Support Enforcement 2019). There are many reasons why noncustodial parents pay (or do not pay) the formal child support that they owe. Bartfeld and Meyer (2003) present three conceptual categories affecting child support compliance: ability to pay, incentives to comply (or willingness to pay), and characteristics of the enforcement system.

For obligors with limited economic resources—who are the focus of the current study—ability to pay plays a significant role in paying what is owed. The amount a parent earns is associated with the amount of formal support the parent pays (Bartfeld and Meyer 2003; Chen and Meyer 2017; Goldberg 2015; Huang et al. 2005; Mincy and Sorensen 1998; Nepomnyaschy and Garfinkel 2010). So, too, is how much a parent owes relative to their earnings, often referred to as the economic burden of the child support order (Cancian and Meyer 2004; Hodges et al. 2020; Huang et al. 2005; Meyer et al. 2008). Having child support obligations for multiple families also affects many noncustodial parents' abilities to pay support, as it leads to higher amounts owed and more burdensome orders (Cancian and Meyer 2004; Manning and Smock 2000; Sinkewicz and Garfinkel 2009).

Willingness to pay child support is also salient for obligors with limited economic resources, particularly those with informal earnings. Most (72%) noncustodial parents pay child support through automatic wage withholding, a process beyond their control (Tollestrup 2019). However, for "discretionary obligors," or noncustodial parents who pay outside of automated systems, willingness to pay can affect compliance (Bartfeld and Meyer 2003). Factors associated with willingness to pay include quality of co-parenting and parent-child relationships and noncustodial parent access to and contact with children (Goldberg 2015; Nepomnyaschy and Garfinkel 2010). While positive relationships with custodial parents and children can increase a noncustodial parent's willingness to pay, negative experiences with the child support system can decrease willingness to pay (Edin and Nelson 2013; Vogel 2020a; Vogel 2020b; Waller and Plotnick 2001). These negative experiences can also push the paying parent to work outside of the formal system to avoid having support collected through automatic wage withholding (Cancian et al. 2013; Heinrich et al. 2011; Miller and Mincy 2012).

Finally, child support agencies use various tools to enforce payment of child support. These include data systems such as the Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS) and the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH) that help agencies locate noncustodial parents and access information about their employment, income withholding (from wages, unemployment insurance benefits, and tax refunds), and administrative consequences for nonpayment (such as driver's license suspension). Generally, research indicates that a stronger enforcement system leads to increased payments—a potentially important motivator, in particular, for discretionary obligors who make a choice about whether to pay (Bartfeld and Meyer 2003; Freeman and Waldfogel 2001; Garfinkel et al. 1998). Recent evidence also suggests that the enforcement of formal child support obligations plays an important role in the equity of noncustodial parents' contributions to children in multiple families (Berger et al. 2019) and to the stability of contributions over time as a child ages (Nepomnyaschy and Garfinkel 2010; Sariscsany et al. 2019).

Child Support Program Background

Child Support Guidelines

Child support guidelines provide a consistent basis for calculating child support obligations based on parents' financial resources and the needs of children. The federal government and states each play an important role in shaping child support guidelines. Federal legislation requires that states develop and use guidelines to calculate child support obligations for noncustodial parents; develop and implement criteria under which a child support obligation can deviate from the guidelines; and review their guidelines every 4 years to consider whether or not they need to be updated to take into account the costs of raising children (Child Support Enforcement Amendments of 1984; Family Support Act of 1988; Venohr 2013).[1] States are then responsible for the development, implementation, and periodic assessment of guidelines. As a result, states have substantial flexibility to determine how guidelines are operationalized and applied and there is a considerable amount of cross-state variation in child support guidelines, criteria for guidelines deviations, and guidelines review processes.

For example, states have the flexibility to select a model to serve as the basis of calculating the state guidelines. The income shares model, used by 40 states and the District of Columbia,[2] takes into account the noncustodial and custodial parents' incomes and the number of children they have had together. The incomes of the noncustodial parent and the custodial parent are combined to calculate the total expected contribution to the child. Each parent's share of the expected contribution is based on his or her share of total income, and the noncustodial parent's share is the child support order amount (Venohr 2016). The percentage of obligor income model, used by seven states, does not explicitly consider the custodial parent's income, and is instead set as a percentage of the noncustodial parent's income, adjusted for the number of children the noncustodial parent has. Some states apply an invariant percentage amount across income levels on the basis that parents spend roughly the same proportion of their income on child rearing across the income distribution (Cancian and Costanzo 2019); other states vary the percentage at different income levels. The Melson formula, used by three states, uses an income-shares formula to account for the basic needs of the child, then a percent of obligor income model to calculate additional support for the child beyond the child's basic needs and after accounting for the noncustodial parent's basic needs (Venohr 2013, 2016).

Even when states use the same mathematical model, order amounts for parents with the same levels of income can vary for several reasons. First, states can draw on different research studies to inform their calculations of the costs of raising a child (Venohr 2013). Second, states can differ in the income basis on which orders are calculated, with some using gross income and others using net income. Third, states can vary in their treatment of noncustodial parents with very low and very high incomes.

[1] Requiring the use of guidelines and establishing criteria for deviating from them limits judicial discretion in the establishment of order amounts, in the interest of promoting fairness and consistency across cases (Brito 2012; Pirog et al. 1998) and in the interest of making the process of setting order amounts simpler and making the amounts themselves more predictable (Brito 2012).

[2] The District of Columbia uses a hybrid model combining the percentage-of-income model with a mathematical reduction based on the custodial parent's income (McCann 2019).

Fourth, they can take different approaches to adjustments made in calculating income and allowable deductions (Venohr 2013, 2016). For example, some states take local economic conditions such as housing expenses and relative income for the state into account when setting guidelines, while other states do not. Some states use actual expenditure amounts, such as childcare expenses, for calculating deductions, while others do not. Additionally, some states adjust order amounts for parents with shared parenting arrangements, and the time thresholds and adjustment amounts vary across states. Finally, states typically allow judges to deviate from the amounts established in guidelines within a set of parameters, considering a child's needs and parents' abilities to provide the needed support (Brito 2012).

Recent Federal Legislation

In 2016, the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement issued the Flexibility, Efficiency and Modernization in Child Support Enforcement Programs Final Rule. The final rule contains a number of provisions OCSE described as intended to help improve program operations, increase payments and remove barriers to payments, and improve customer service (Office of Child Support Enforcement 2017a).[3] Central to this research, the final rule includes a number of provisions related specifically to low-income obligors, in recognition that "setting an accurate child support order based on the noncustodial parent's ability to pay improves the chances that the parent will comply with the support order and continue to pay over time" (Flexibility, efficiency, and modernization of child support enforcement programs, 2016 p. 93516).

In relation to low-income obligors, the final rule directs states to ensure that the revised child support guidelines calculate orders based on "the noncustodial parent's earnings, income, and other evidence of ability to pay" (42 C.F.R. § 302.56(c)(1)), that "takes into consideration all earnings and income of the noncustodial parent (and at the State's discretion, the custodial parent)" (42 C.F.R. § 302.56(c)(1)(i)); and facilitate transparency and consistency of the guidelines by basing them on "specific descriptive and numeric criteria [resulting] in the computation of the child support obligation" (42 C.F.R. § 302.56(c)(4)). It also requires states to specifically address the basic subsistence needs of low-income noncustodial parents, by requiring that the revised guidelines include "a low-income adjustment, such as a self-support reserve" for those with limited ability to pay (42 C.F.R. § 302.56(c)(1)(ii)), which is the main focus of the current study, and by requiring that states limit imputation practices that inappropriately inflate a noncustodial parent's ability to pay (42 C.F.R. § 302.56(c)(1)(iii)).

The final rule also requires that each state review and revise their child support guidelines to meet the requirements of the rule within a year of completing its next quadrennial review (though states whose review was scheduled for within a year of the final rule's issuance were allowed to postpone this requirement until after their next scheduled quadrennial review), and every 4 years thereafter. Broadly, states are required to consider, in the course of these reviews: data on the cost of raising children;

[3] The final rule also addresses the 2011 Supreme Court decision Turner v. Rodgers by implementing due-process requirements for contempt actions related to determination of an obligor's ability to pay. It also bars states from treating incarceration as a form of voluntary unemployment, precluding incarcerated obligors from obtaining an order modification on the grounds of a substantial change in circumstances (OCSE 2017b).

labor market data by occupation and skill level within the state; and factors that affect compliance rates with child support orders and employment rates among noncustodial parents.[4]

Guidelines Adjustments for Low-Income Payors

Nearly all (45) states provide a guidelines adjustment when a noncustodial parent's income is low. Some states use an alternate schedule for low-income obligors, in which a lower percentage of income is required of the noncustodial parent (Brito 2012; Cancian et al. 2011). Other states employ an SSR, which compares a noncustodial parent's income to an amount presumed necessary to meet his or her own basic needs and calculates child support order amounts based on the amount of income remaining (Brito 2012; Venohr 2013, 2016). SSRs are often, though not always, explicitly denoted in child support guidelines among the states that use them (Venohr 2013, 2016).

Additionally, some states have minimum order requirements for noncustodial parents with very low incomes. Minimum order requirements are predicated on the principle that all parents have an obligation to provide for their children financially, regardless of income (Brito 2012). Some states set no minimum and allow for judicial discretion in the determination of the order amount for low-income obligors; others set a presumptive minimum for low-income obligors that can be rebutted with judicial discretion (Brito 2012; McCann 2019). Other states, however, impose a mandatory minimum that cannot be adjusted, regardless of the noncustodial parent's income (Brito 2012; Venohr 2013, 2016). Most commonly, states use a $50 order minimum, though some states employ a higher minimum and others use a lower minimum (Venohr 2013, 2016).

Child support guidelines can help define and predict order amounts for low-income obligors. However, some child support practices may result in orders that do not align with the parent' actual economic circumstances. For example, all state guidelines allow for income imputation, or the use of assumptions about how much a noncustodial parent can earn in lieu of using actual earnings to set child support order amounts (McCann 2019). Recent research has found substantially lower payment amounts and rates of compliance (total amount paid as a proportion of the amount due) for noncustodial parents with imputed income orders compared with those without (Cancian et al. 2019a; Demyan and Passarella 2018). Further, default judgments, or orders issued when an obligor does not appear in court, may be calculated absent information from the obligor about his or her income. Previous research has indicated that default orders can result in order amounts higher than low-income obligors are able to pay (Cancian et al. 2019a; Sorensen and Oliver 2002; Sorensen 2004).

[4] The rule also required that states examine the "impact of guidelines policies and amounts on custodial and noncustodial parents who have family incomes below 200% of the Federal poverty level" (42 C.F.R. § 302.56(h)(1)); conduct analyses of case data on "the application of and deviations from the child support guidelines, as well as the rates of default and imputed child support orders and orders determined using the low-income adjustment required" (42 C.F.R. § 302.56(h)(2)); compare payments by case characteristics affecting low-income obligors in particular, including whether or not the case was entered into by default, set using imputation, or determined using a low-income adjustment; and provide a "meaningful opportunity for public input, including input from low-income custodial and noncustodial parents and their representatives," as well as the child support agency (42 C.F.R. § 302.56(h)(3)).

Materials and Methods

Content Analysis of Recent Changes to Low-Income Guidelines

To contribute to current understanding of how child support agencies and lawmakers are attempting to address the financial needs of low-income noncustodial parents through policy and statute following the 2016 ruling, we begin by presenting findings from a content analysis of 21 state child support guidelines reviews focused on policy changes (considered or implemented) salient to low-income obligors. For this paper, we focus specifically on two policy changes related to provisions in the final rule and the numerical computation of child support orders: the basic subsistence needs of the paying parent and minimum order requirements.[5]

We performed an online search to identify states that released documentation on their guidelines review processes following enactment of the final rule (i.e., between January 2017 and March 2020).[6] The documentation of states' review processes varied in format and detail and included sources such as reviews undertaken by external consultants; recommendations from the state's guidelines review committee; revised statute, policy, or judicial orders (sometimes with changes highlighted and rationales for changes provided); and meeting notes summarizing key issues considered by the guidelines review committee. We coded the available documentation using a conventional content analysis approach (Hsieh and Shannon 2005).

Basic Subsistence Needs of Low-Income Obligors

Following the 2016 ruling, the most central changes to the low-income guidelines considered by states were mechanisms for taking into consideration the basic subsistence needs of noncustodial parents such as low-income adjustments or SSRs. These changes were directly related to the final rule, which directed states to take the basic subsistence needs of noncustodial parents with low incomes into account when setting orders through a low-income adjustment of each state's choosing. Fourteen states considered or implemented changes to their approaches towards adjusting the obligations of low-income noncustodial parents; three had approaches in place that their reviews indicated already met the federal requirement. Of the 14 states, 12 considered some sort of change related to an SSR. Six states considered or implemented new or modified SSRs, by increasing them or tying them to updated federal poverty guidelines. One considered eliminating the reserve in favor of a low-income adjustment and one considered newly adding a low-income adjustment. Three considered or implemented

[5] The states included are Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Utah. Links to the guidelines documentation for these states are provided in Appendix A. We also examined the extent to which states considered or implemented changes related to the final rule outside of the scope of this paper, including imputation practices, public health insurance, and incarcerated obligors.

[6] The final rule included a provision that states could postpone considerations related to the final rule until their subsequent quadrennial review if their next scheduled quadrennial review fell within 1 year of the final rule's effective date. For the states whose reviews fell in 2017, we included the states that considered at least some changes pursuant to the final rule (even if the state postponed some decisions until its subsequent quadrennial review), and excluded states that did not.

changes to make the SSR more explicit and transparent; in these states, a reserve amount was implied by not showing the order amount for incomes below a particular threshold in the guidelines tables. Five states considered or implemented changes to address obligors with incomes just above the SSR. These states sought to reduce or eliminate a "cliff effect," where noncustodial parents just above the SSR saw a dramatic increase in their order amounts, by phasing in incrementally higher orders as the noncustodial parent's income increased above the SSR amount.

Minimum Order Requirements

Another change to the low-income guidelines considered by states was making changes to minimum order requirements. States were not required to make changes to minimum order requirements following the final ruling, but minimum order amounts affect orders for low-income noncustodial parents since they primarily apply to obligors with the lowest incomes. Of the seven states that considered or enacted changes to minimum order requirements, four considered or enacted changes reducing or eliminating minimums for low-earning obligors, two considered or enacted changes increasing minimums, and one considered or enacted changes changing the basis of the minimum from a fixed rate to a percentage.

Cross-State Comparison of Order Amounts for Low-Income Payors

Next, we compare expectations about child support contributions from low-income noncustodial parents across states based on our calculations of child support orders for several types of low-income cases. With this approach, often used in international comparative policy research, several scenarios with hypothetical family types are presented, varying on the income level of each parent and the number of children. This allows for straightforward comparisons across states while also allowing us to consider whether states differ based on the characteristics selected. It also allows us to identify patterns in how states prioritize the ability of noncustodial parents to meet their own basic needs versus the goal of maximizing expected contributions for children living outside of the home.

Study Population, Data, and Scenarios

Our study population was all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. We drew our income data for the noncustodial parent (father) and the custodial parent (mother) on our hypothetical cases from two public sources. We used estimates of median weekly earnings by state and sex from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019) and information about state minimum wage rates from the US Department of Labor (Department of Labor 2019).

We calculated the monthly order amount that would result from each state's child support guidelines for four different scenarios where we changed the income of the noncustodial parent while holding the income of the custodial parent constant (shown in Table 1). For most states, we were able to calculate order amounts using publicly available child support calculators from child support agency websites. For ten states that did not have their own online calculators, we used a generic online child support

Table 1 Scenarios used in order calculations

Scenarios	Father's gross income (monthly)	Mother's gross income (monthly)	Number of children
1. Median earnings	The state median weekly earnings for full-time male workers × 4.33 weeks	Half the state median weekly earnings for full-time female workers × 4.33 weeks	1 Child 2 Children
2. Half median earnings	Half the state median weekly earnings for full-time male workers × 4.33 weeks	Half the state median weekly earnings for full-time female workers × 4.33 weeks	1 Child 2 Children
3. Full-time minimum wage	Full time (40 h per week) at state minimum wage × 4.33 weeks	Half the state median weekly earnings for full-time female workers × 4.33 weeks	1 Child 2 Children
4. Part-time minimum wage	Part time (20 h per week) at state minimum wage × 4.33 weeks	Half the state median weekly earnings for full-time female workers × 4.33 weeks	1 Child 2 Children

Note: In all model families, the mother has primary placement, with the child staying with the father every other weekend (staying overnight for 2 out of every 14 nights), and neither parent has had children with others

calculator from the website SupportPay.com (https://supportpay.com/).[7] For each scenario, we calculated order amounts for parents with one and two children. To simplify the analysis, for all scenarios, we designated the mother as the custodial parent and as having primary placement, with the child (ren) staying with the noncustodial father every other weekend (2 overnights/14 nights or 52 nights per year). We assumed that neither parent had children with other partners. We assumed that the mother worked for 4.33 weeks, and each week, she earned the median weekly earnings of female workers in that state in 2018.

In the first scenario, we assumed that the father on the case worked for 4.33 weeks, and each week, he earned the median weekly earnings of male workers in that state in 2018. This is the only scenario in which the father is not low income. This allows us to have a sense of how much the typical amount of support that is expected from fathers in a given state. The median earning scenario also allows us to evaluate how much low-income deviations result in changes to amounts owed within and across states. In the median earning scenario, the father's income for the median state was $4178 per month, or about $24 per hour.

In the second scenario, we assumed that the father on the case worked for 4.33 weeks and each week he earned half of the median weekly earnings of male workers in that state in 2018. This income level approximates the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) definition of low pay, which refers to individuals

[7] All orders were calculated independently by two different researchers. We used SupportPay.com to calculate orders for Connecticut, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Missouri, Nevada, and West Virginia. Mississippi did not provide an online calculator. Because Mississippi uses a percentage-of-income approach to determine child support orders, we applied the percentages of income for one- and two-child cases to the father's income for each scenario to calculate order amounts for Mississippi.

earning less than two-thirds of median earnings (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2019).[8] This income level also allows us to examine order amounts for fathers that are low-income but unlikely to qualify for a low-income adjustment, since adjustments are typically targeted toward those with incomes closer to 100% of the federal poverty level. In the half median earning scenario, the father's income for the median state was $2089 per month, or about $12 per hour.

In the third scenario, we assumed that the father on the case worked for 4.33 weeks, and each week, he worked full-time (40 h) at the state's minimum hourly wage rate in 2018. Historically, full-time minimum wage has been the income amount that states use to set orders when the noncustodial parent's income is unknown (Fleming 2017). For this scenario, we expect some variation across states in whether the father qualifies for a low-income adjustment. While most low-income adjustments are targeted to fathers at or below the federal poverty level, some states make adjustments for fathers with incomes up to 150% of the federal poverty level. In the full-time minimum wage scenario, the father's gross income for the median state was $1429 per month, or about $8 per hour and about 137% of the federal poverty level for a single person household in 2019.

In the fourth and final scenario, we assumed that the father on the case worked for 4.33 weeks, and each week, he worked part-time (20 h per week) at the state's 2018 minimum wage rate. We use this income level to approximate the earnings of economically disadvantaged fathers in the IV-D caseload who are least likely to make any child support payments in a given year. In the part-time minimum wage scenario, the father's gross income for the median state was $714, or about 69% of the federal poverty level for a single person household in 2019, and about $8568 annually. This income level is consistent with Sorensen and Zibman (2001)'s estimation of the average annual income for low-income fathers who do not pay any child support (approximately $8980 in 2018 dollars).

Analytic Approach

To examine the extent to which state's approaches to setting orders result in different expectations depending on the level of income of a low-income payer, we calculate the minimum, median, and maximum order amounts for the 50 states and compare across scenarios. Because median earnings vary by state, and order amounts typically correspond with income (i.e., are higher at higher income amounts and lower at lower income amounts), we report the minimum, median, and maximum burden levels (the amount owed as a percentage of the noncustodial parent's income) in addition to order amounts.

States may choose from several policy options for low-income obligors and even combine these different options. In order to examine how these policy choices impact expectations about contributions from low-income payers (holding constant factors other than the noncustodial parent's income), we group states into three categories: whether they have an SSR, whether they have a different type of low-income deviation, or whether they have no low-income deviation (see Appendix 3 Table 4). We also consider whether states have a minimum order requirement in conjunction with a low-

[8] Although the focus of this paper is a cross-state comparison, using half the median weekly earnings as one example of low income makes the order amounts in our study comparable to order amounts for parents considered low income in other countries.

income deviation (also shown in Appendix 3 Table 4). We report min, max, and median order amounts by policy category and scenario.

Results

In scenario 1, the median earning scenario, order amounts range from $390 to $1057 across states, with a median amount of $669 (see Fig. 1). Burden levels range from 11 to 21%, with a median level of 16 (see Fig. 2). States on the higher end of the order distribution include Massachusetts, Washington D.C., New Hampshire, and Delaware, while states on the lower end of the order distribution include Kentucky, New Mexico, Arkansas, Mississippi (see Fig. 3a).

In scenario 2, the half median weekly earning scenarios, order amounts range from $244 to $550 across states, with a median amount of $369 (see Fig. 1). Burden levels range from 14 to 22%, with a median level of 17%. States on the higher end of the distribution include Massachusetts, Washington, D.C., New Hampshire, and New Jersey, while states on the lower end of the order distribution include Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, and Mississippi (see Fig. 3b). Importantly, fathers with this level of income (i.e., whose incomes are considered "low pay" under OECD definitions but are well above the federal poverty line) do not qualify for low-income adjustments in most states. One exception is Delaware, which uses the Melson Formula.

In scenario 3, the full-time minimum wage scenario, order amounts range from $0 to $416 across states, with a median amount of $245 (see Fig. 1). Burden levels range from 0 to 22%, with a median level of 17% (see Fig. 2). States on the higher end of the order distribution include Massachusetts, Washington, D.C., Arizona, and South Dakota, while states on the lower end of the order distribution include Ohio, North Carolina, New Hampshire, and Wyoming (see Fig. 3c). Historically, full-time minimum wage has been the income amount that states use to set default or imputed orders (Fleming 2017).

Fig. 1 Monthly order amounts by scenario. Notes: Authors' own calculations based on order amounts when there is one child on the case. In all scenarios, the custodial mother's income is 4.33 times the state median weekly earnings for female workers in 2018. In scenario 1, the noncustodial father's income is 4.33 times the state median weekly earnings for male workers in 2018. In scenario 2, the noncustodial father's income is 4.33 times half of the state median weekly earnings for male workers in 2018. In scenario 3, the noncustodial father's income is 4.33 times 40 h per week at the state minimum wage in 2018. In scenario 4, the noncustodial father's income is 4.33 times 20 h per week at the state minimum wage in 2018

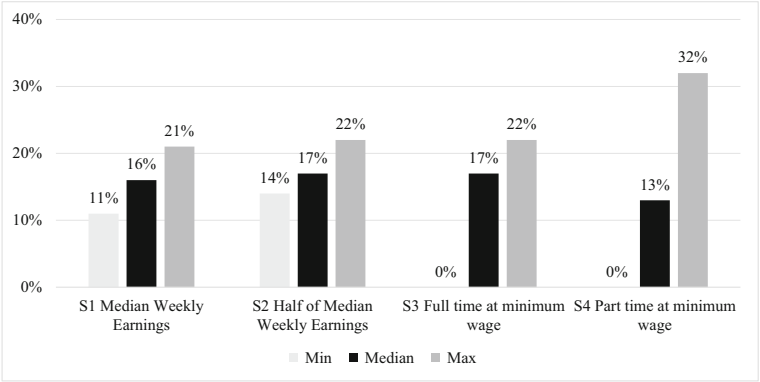


Fig. 2 Burden levels by scenario. Notes: Authors' own calculations based on burden levels when there is one child on the case. In all scenarios, the custodial mother's income is 4.33 times the state median weekly earnings for female workers in 2018. In scenario 1, the noncustodial father's income is 4.33 times the state median weekly earnings for male workers in 2018. In scenario 2, the noncustodial father's income is 4.33 times half of the state median weekly earnings for male workers in 2018. In scenario 3, the noncustodial father's income is 4.33 times 40 h per week at the state minimum wage in 2018. In scenario 4, the noncustodial father's income is 4.33 times 20 h per week at the state minimum wage in 2018

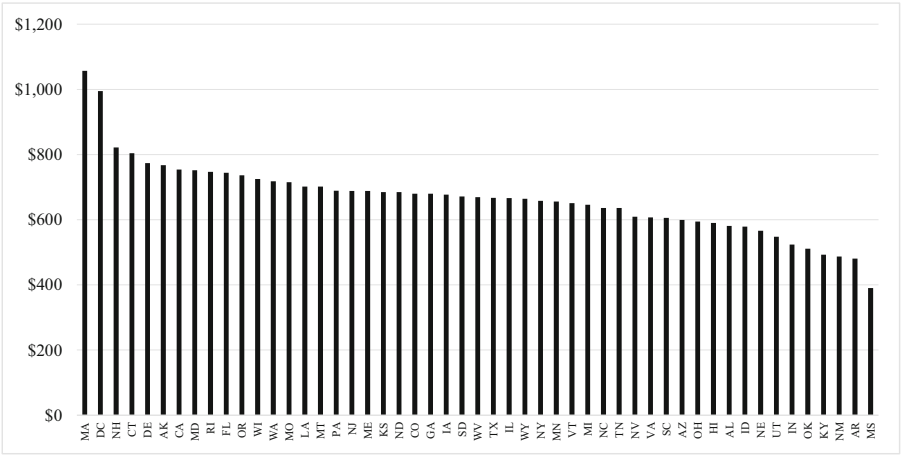
Finally, in scenario 4, order amounts range from $0 to $212 across states, with a median amount of $91 (see Fig. 1). Burden levels range from 0 to 32%, with a median level of 13% (see Fig. 2). States on the higher end of the order distribution include Massachusetts, Kentucky, Rhode Island, and Minnesota, while states on the lower end of the order distribution include Arizona, North Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming (see Fig. 3d).

Several patterns appear when we consider order amounts across scenarios (Fig. 1). First, as expected, order amounts are about twice as high for the median earning scenario relative to the half median earning scenario. However, this is not the case for fathers at the lower end of the income distribution. The minimum order amount is $0 for both the full-time minimum wage scenario and the part-time minimum wage scenario, whereas the median order amount for the full-time minimum wage scenario is almost 3 times greater than the part-time minimum wage scenario.

Our comparison across scenarios also reveals that in some states, the lowest earning fathers owe a disproportionate amount of their incomes relative to higher earning fathers (see Fig. 2). For example, the distribution of burden levels (i.e., order amounts as a percentage of the father's income) indicates lower burden levels for fathers with incomes equivalent to the median weekly earnings relative to fathers with incomes equivalent to half the median weekly earnings. A closer look shows that burden levels for the median weekly earning scenario were lower than burden levels for the half median weekly earning scenario in 35 states (author's calculations based on burden levels reported in Table 2). One possibility for the lower burden levels of the higher earning fathers is that the income shares formula used by most states is based on the noncustodial parents' share of combined income. When the custodial parent is relatively low income, this may result in higher-earning fathers owing a lower percentage of their income, even if the fathers owe a larger share of combined income.

Similarly, the range in burden levels is greater across states for father's earning part-time minimum wage compared with father's earning full-time minimum wage, with

a) Scenario 1: Median Weekly Earnings



b) Scenario 2: Half Median Weekly Earnings

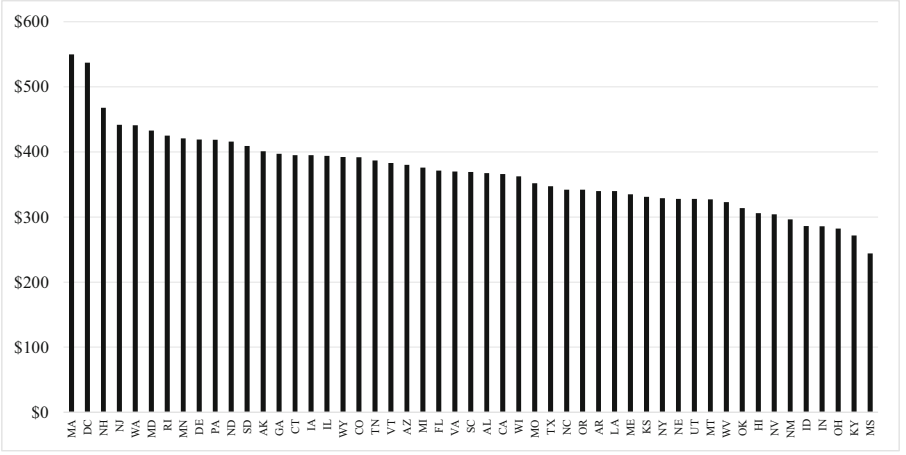
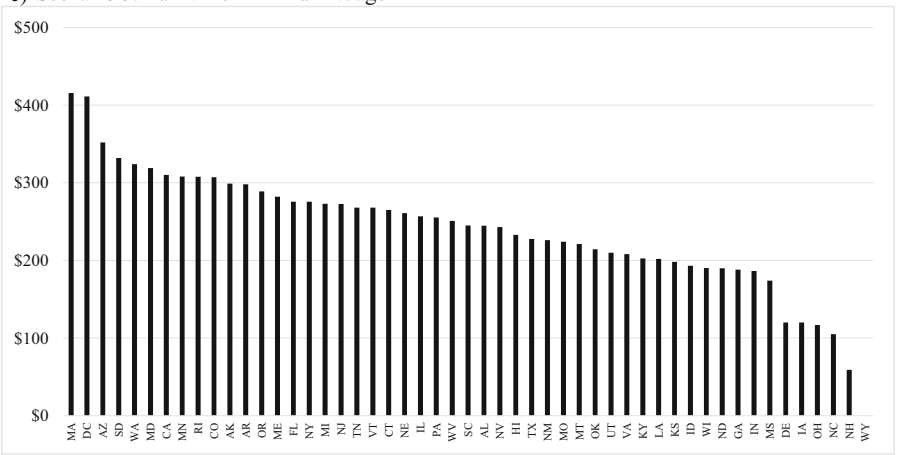


Fig. 3 Monthly order amounts from highest to lowest. **a** Scenario 1: median weekly earnings. **b** Scenario 2: half median weekly earnings. **c** Scenario 3: full-time minimum wage. **d** Scenario 4: part-time minimum wage. Notes: Authors' own calculations of order amounts when there is one child on the case

maximum amount of 32% for the lowest earning fathers compared with 22% for father's earning full-time minimum wage. Again, a closer look shows that burden levels for the full-time minimum wage scenario were lower than burden levels for the part-time minimum wage scenario for 13 states. Several different factors could be at play here for lower burden levels for higher-earning fathers. First, it is possible that minimum order amounts result in similar order amounts for fathers earning part-time minimum wage and fathers earning full-time minimum wage. A similar order would result in fathers earning part-time minimum wage having higher burden levels than fathers earning full-time minimum wage. It is also possible that income imputation or assignment of income at full-time minimum wage to father's earning part-time minimum wage explains some of this discrepancy. For example, the burden level is twice as high for the part-time minimum wage scenario than the full-time minimum wage scenario in Kentucky. The online calculator for Kentucky automatically replaces

c) Scenario 3: Full-time Minimum Wage



d) Scenario 4: Part-time Minimum Wage

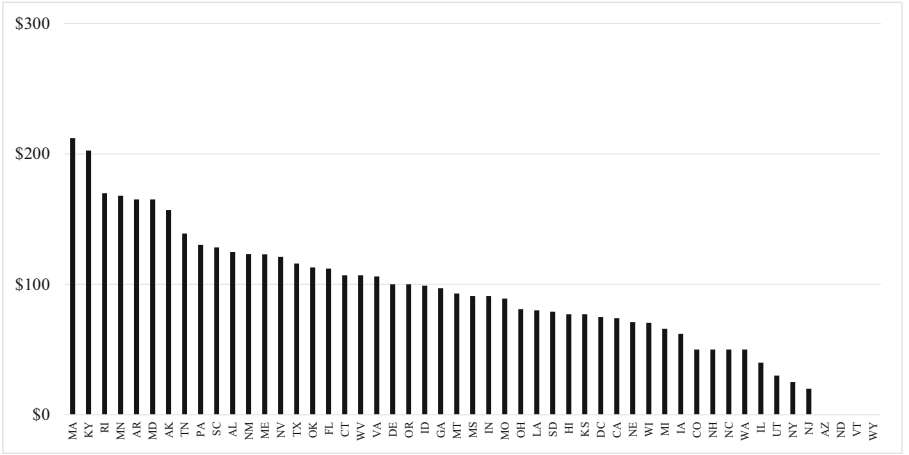


Fig. 3 (continued)

income below full-time minimum wage with income equivalent to full-time time wage before calculating the support order (Kentucky Child Support Program 2020).

Next, we group states into three categories based on type of low-income deviation and other considerations for low-income payors: whether they have an SSR, whether they have a different type of low-income deviation, or whether they have no explicit low-income deviation. We show the median amount owed for each group (see Fig. 4). One noteworthy observation is that when the father is not low income (scenario 1) and the father has low pay according to OECD standards (scenario 2), the median order amount is lower in states with no explicit deviation relative to overall and to states with other types of deviations. In general, however, there is not much variation across scenarios 1 and 2 by type of low-income deviation.

There is considerably more variation in the median order amount by type of low-income deviation when the father's income is full-time minimum wage and when the

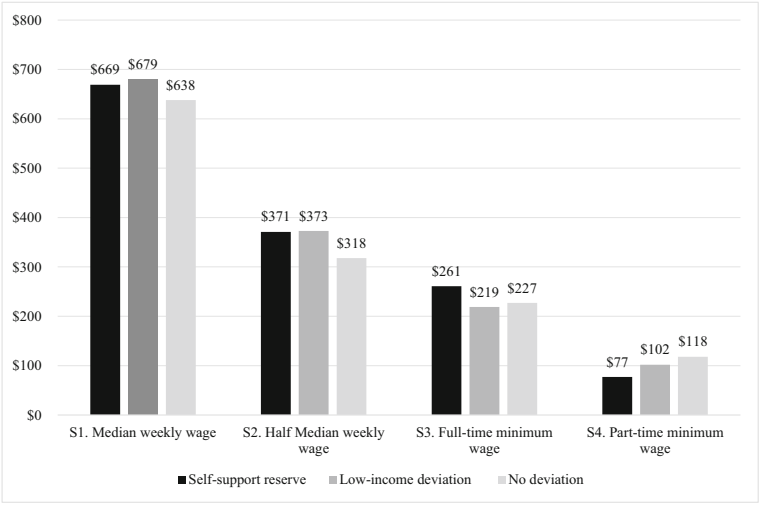


Fig. 4 Median order amounts by low-income adjustment for low-income scenarios. Notes: Authors' own calculations based on order amounts where there is one child on the case. Categorization into type of low-income deviation based on authors' review of state guidelines. States' online child support calculators varied as to whether or not they incorporated a low-income deviation. Order amounts for some states may not reflect the low-income deviation

father's income is part-time minimum wage (scenarios 3 and 4). When the father's income is full-time minimum wage, the median order amount is higher for states with SSRs compared with states using other types of low-income deviations. This reverses when the father's income is part-time minimum wage, with a higher median order amounts for states using other types of low-income deviations compared with states with SSRs. This could be the case for several reasons. First, there is considerable variation across states in the income threshold at which the SSR is applied. In half of the states, full-time minimum wage is above 120% of the federal poverty level in 75% of the states, part-time minimum in all states but the District of Columbia is below 100% of the federal poverty level and below 70% of the federal poverty level in half of the states.[9] Many states SSR thresholds are set at 100% of the federal poverty level, so fathers earning full-time minimum wage would typically fall above states' SSR thresholds while fathers earning part-time minimum wage would typically below states' SSR thresholds. Another possibility is that some states have SSRs that are not explicitly captured by the state's online calculator. For example, Arkansas adopted an SSR in the spring of 2020 (Supreme Court of Arkansas 2020), and this policy change is not taken into account in our order calculations that occurred in January 2020.

Finally, we consider how low-income deviations interact with minimum order requirements for the two scenarios with the lowest-income fathers (scenarios 3 and 4) in Fig. 5a and b. For states that have an SSR and states that have a low-income deviation, when the father's income is full-time minimum wage (Fig. 5a), minimum and maximum order amounts are higher in states with that also have a minimum order requirement. At the bottom end of the distribution, monthly order amounts are lower for states with an SSR

[9] Authors' own calculations using the 2018 federal poverty level for a single person household which was $12,140 per year or $1012 per month (ASPE 2018).

relative to states with other types of low-income deviations (both with and without minimum order requirements). However, median and maximum monthly order amounts are lowest for states with a low-income deviation and no minimum order requirement.

Patterns are generally similar when the father's income is part-time minimum wage (Fig. 5b). For states that have an SSR or a low-income deviation, maximum order amounts are higher in states with minimum order requirements. At the bottom end of the distribution, monthly order amounts are lower for states with an SSR relative to states with other types of low-income deviations, although the differences are smaller compared with when the father's income is full-time minimum wage (scenario 3). Fathers' incomes in scenario 4 are more likely to fall below the SSR threshold than

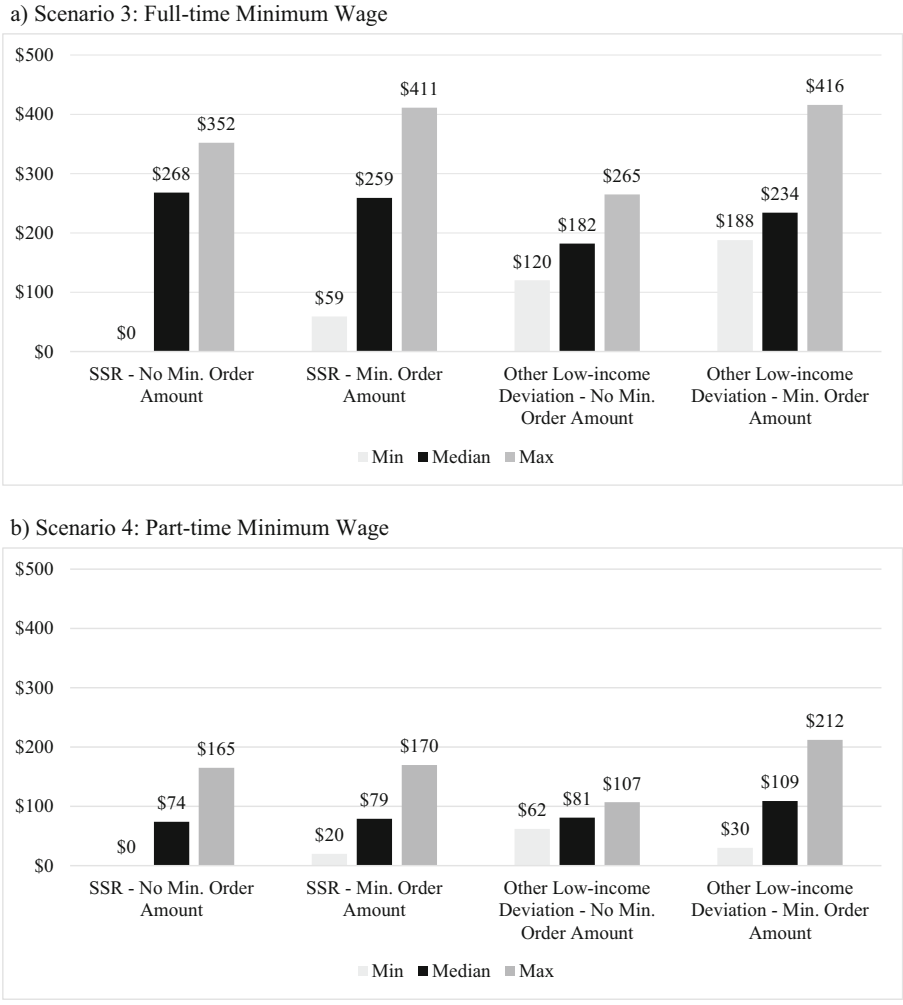


Fig. 5 Monthly order amounts by low-income adjustment and minimum order amount. **a** Scenario 3: full-time minimum wage. **b** Scenario 4: part-time minimum wage. Notes: Authors' own calculations based on order amounts where there is one child on the case. Categorization into type of low-income deviation based on authors' review of state guidelines. States' online child support calculators varied as to whether or not they incorporated a low-income deviation. Order amounts for some states may not reflect the low-income deviation

fathers' incomes in scenario 3, and minimum amounts are lowest for states with an SSR and no minimum order requirement.

Discussion

Recognizing that many states' child support guidelines may lead to unreasonable expectations about contributions from fathers with limited economic resources, the federal government provided states with additional direction regarding right-sizing orders for low-income noncustodial parents through the issuance of the Flexibility, Efficiency, and Modernization in Child Support Programs Final Rule in December of 2016 (Office of Child Support Enforcement 2016). As states were expected to revise their child support guidelines following the issuance of this rule, we undertook this study to provide detailed information on policy expectations about low-income noncustodial parents' financial contributions to their children across the 50 states.

We began by collecting information from 21 state child support guidelines reviews that were conducted between January 2017 and January 2020. From these reviews, we were able to identify policy changes states that states were considering related to the 2016 ruling, and we focused particularly on items salient to low-income obligors including the basic subsistence needs of the paying parent (such as low-income adjustments or SSRs) and minimum order amounts. We then used online child support calculators to calculate order amounts for several types of low-income cases for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. From these order amounts, we identified substantial variation in what is considered an appropriate child support obligation for a low-income noncustodial parent, both across the 50 states and across levels of low income (full-time minimum wage, part-time minimum wage, etc.). Taken as a whole, the findings from our study add to current understanding of how child support agencies and lawmakers attempt to address the financial needs of low-income children and families through policy and statute. They also illuminate how the different policy tools used by states (such as low-income deviations and minimum orders) influence the allocation of resources across low-income households when children live apart from one of their parents.

Basic Subsistence Needs of Low-Income Obligors

The 2016 final rule directed states to take the basic subsistence needs of noncustodial parents with low incomes into account when setting orders. Most often in their guidelines reviews, states considered implementing or updating an SSR in order to address this aspect of the ruling. In our cross-state comparison, SSRs generally resulted in lower order amounts and burden levels for fathers with incomes below the federal poverty line compared with states without SSRs.

Having an SSR can be seen as consistent with the 2016 ruling, and also as prioritizing the paying parent having income to meet their own needs. Take, for example, New Hampshire, where the SSR is set at net income of 115% of the federal poverty level (or $1197 per month in 2019). With an SSR, the expected contribution of a noncustodial father earning full-time minimum wage would be $59 per month when there are two children on the case (see Appendix 2 Table 2). Without the SSR, the expected contribution would be $361 per month (calculations not shown). An order of this size would reduce the

noncustodial parent's monthly gross income to about 86% of the federal poverty level for a household size of one.

At the same time, SSRs result in order amounts that are well below the amount of income needed to support a child—both in terms of recent estimates of percentage of income spent on children (Robb 2019) and by more general accounts, such as the federal poverty guidelines (Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation 2018). Robb (2019) used USDA data to estimate the percentage of income spent on children for households with up to five children in 2015. He estimated 17% of income for a single-child household, which is more than the percentage of income expected of fathers earning full-time minimum wage in 24 states (see Appendix 2 Table 2).

The 2019 poverty guidelines indicate that $360 per month of income is needed to support an additional household member (Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation 2018). In our analysis, for fathers supporting one child and earning full-time minimum wage, only Massachusetts and Washington, D.C., exceeded this amount. Arizona, a state with a lower SSR threshold, and South Dakota, a state with no explicit low-income deviation, come close (see Fig. 4c). On the other hand, New Hampshire and Wyoming, states with higher SSR thresholds, produced orders well below this amount (see Fig. 4c).[10]

Having some other type of low-income deviation, such as a sliding scale that reduces the percentage owed for lower-income fathers, or having no explicit low-income deviation, can be seen as prioritizing the financial needs of the child (and the custodial parent). Wisconsin, for example, uses a separate percentage of income guidelines table for low-income payers, which results in a more gradual decline in order amounts and burden levels across the different scenarios. The income of the father in scenario 4 is half the income of the father in scenario 3, but the percentage of income owed by the father in scenario 4 is only three percentage point less than the percentage of income owed by the father in scenario 3 (see Table 2).

Minimum Order Requirements

Minimum order amounts represent another example of fixed amounts that may result in too-high orders for some noncustodial parents (Cancian et al. 2011) and therefore potentially exacerbate their already difficult financial circumstances (Brito 2012). Although states were not explicitly required to consider minimum orders in the final rule, in our examination of states' quadrennial reviews, we found that several states considered changes to minimum orders, with some states considering increases to minimum order amounts and others considering decreases.

Our cross-state analysis showed that minimum orders could be regressive (i.e., they could result in lower-earning fathers owing a higher proportion of their incomes for support than slightly higher-earning fathers). Of the states we examined, 37 had minimum order amounts (see Appendix 2 Table 3), and in 12 of these seven states,

[10] In a recent report, Cancian et al. (2019b) examine the potential impacts of adopting an SSR in Wisconsin and draw a similar conclusion that SSRs increase the financial resources of the noncustodial parent but reduce the financial resources available to custodial parents and children. Examining order amounts for noncustodial parents with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level and assuming full payment of child support orders, they find that an SSR threshold set at 100% of the federal poverty level would increase noncustodial parent income by $220 and decrease custodial parent and child income by $190.

burden levels were the same or higher for fathers earning part-time minimum wage compared with fathers earning full-time minimum wage. Take, for example, New Hampshire, where monthly income of full-time minimum wage was just above the SSR of $115. Fathers earning full-time minimum wage (scenario 3) and those earning part-time minimum wage (scenario 3) were both expected to pay about $50 per month (see Appendix 2 Table 2).

Limitations

There are several limitations to our analysis worth noting. First, our review of guidelines may not include all states that have recently considered and/or implemented changes to their guidelines in response to the 2016 rule. Our analysis focuses on 21 recent reviews, as well as supporting documentation regarding current guidelines and legislation, that we were able to obtain online. Additionally, states with quadrennial reviews in 2017 were allowed to postpone compliance with the final ruling until their next review cycle (i.e., 2021), limiting the number of states to date that have completed quadrennial reviews that consider the 2016 ruling. Finally, states continue to implement changes to their state guidelines and related policies on an ongoing basis. It is possible that some state policies changed after we drafted this analysis.

There are several limitations to our cross-state comparison of low-income order amounts as well. First and foremost, we only included four possible scenarios and the only characteristic that varied across the scenarios was the income of the father on the case. We did not consider several aspects of child support policy that are likely to directly or indirectly affect order amounts for low-income noncustodial parents. This includes states' considerations for obligations to resident children, considerations for obligations to other nonresident children, considerations for contributions of medical support and childcare, and considerations for shared-parenting time. These considerations were often discussed in states guidelines reviews but were beyond the scope of the present analysis.

The analysis was also limited to aspects of states' guidelines and guidelines deviations incorporated into online calculators and/or available from guidelines reviews or other guidelines-related information on states' websites. Order amounts may be lower than what we reported for some scenarios if a state has an SSR or another type of low-income adjustment not accounted for in the online calculator. Order amounts might also be higher than what we reported if a state designates a minimum support order amount not reflected in an online calculator or if assigning parents incomes at full-time minimum wage when actual incomes are below full-time minimum wage is a common practice in a state.

Summary

The *Flexibility, efficiency, and modernization of child support enforcement programs* (2016) final rule directed states to set support orders based on a noncustodial parent's ability to pay and considering his or her basic subsistence needs, while leaving states with considerable discretion in how to implement this directive and with little guidance on how to balance the needs of low-income non-custodial parents against the needs of custodial parents and their children when income is not enough to meet the needs of two households. Our review of states' guidelines reviews and order amounts for low-income payors show a mixture of views on this balance. For example, some states

considered increasing SSR thresholds, while other states considered adopting a low-income schedule in place of an SSR; some states considered increasing minimum order requirements while other states considered eliminating them.

In states with more generous SSR thresholds, and particularly those without a minimum order requirement, the balance shifts towards the needs of the noncustodial parent rather than the needs of the child. In states that allow judicial guidelines deviations for low-income parents but without deviations explicated in their guidelines, such as Georgia, the balance shifts towards the needs of the child rather than the needs of the noncustodial parent. Other states fall in the middle. In Wisconsin, for example, the graduated percentage-of-income scale places a larger burden on low-income noncustodial parents than an SSR approach, but also has the potential for a substantial financial contribution to the child (if the order is paid in full).

Striking the right balance between the needs of the paying parent and the needs of the child has become even more salient with the recent economic downturn, which has highlighted systematic inequalities that particularly affect families served by the child support program, including single mothers and families living in poverty. Given unprecedented rates of unemployment among less-educated and precariously employed workers, and the absence of guaranteed child support payments for children (Cancian and Meyer 2018), it is more important than ever that child support orders work for paying parents but also meet the needs of children. Our findings suggest that if a state is trying to maximize noncustodial parent income, then generous SSRs and no minimum order amount can help meet this goal. If a state is trying to maximize the financial contribution to the child, a more graduated adjustment in order amounts for low-income noncustodial parents may be preferable.

Acknowledgments The authors wish to thank Peter Christenson for his data collection efforts and careful attention to detail and Daniel Meyer and Emma Casper for their feedback and guidance in the development of this research.

Funding The research reported in this paper was supported by the Child Support Research Agreement between the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families and the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Data Availability All data used in this paper draw from publicly available data. Content analysis of child support documentation draws from the publicly available sources listed in Appendix 1. We drew our income data on our hypothetical cases from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and we drew information about state minimum wage rates from the U.S. Department of Labor (2019).

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflicts of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Disclaimer The research reported in this article was supported by the Child Support Policy Research Agreement between the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families and the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The findings and conclusions in this publication are those of the authors and should not be construed to represent any official USDA or US government determination or policy or views of the sponsoring institutions.

Appendix A Order amounts and burden levels by income scenario and number of children for all states

Table 2 Order amounts and burden levels by income scenario and number of children for all states, one child

	Scenario 1			Scenario 2			Scenario 3			Scenario 4		
One child												
State	NCP income	Order amount	Burden level	NCP income	Order amount	Burden level	NCP income	Order amount	Burden level	NCP income	Order amount	Burden level
Alabama	$3992	$581	15%	$1996	$368	18%	$1256	$245	19%	$628	$125	20%
Alaska	$4681	$767	16%	$2340	$401	17%	$1704	$299	18%	$852	$157	18%
Arizona	$3940	$599	15%	$1970	$380	19%	$1819	$352	19%	$909	$0	0%
Arkansas	$3503	$481	14%	$1751	$340	19%	$1472	$298	20%	$736	$165	22%
California	$4295	$754	18%	$2148	$366	17%	$1905	$310	16%	$953	$74	8%
Colorado	$4629	$680	15%	$2314	$392	17%	$1767	$307	$307	$307	$50	6%
Connecticut[a]	$4936	$804	16%	$2468	$395	16%	$1749	$265	15%	$875	$107	12%
Delaware	$4252	$774	18%	$2126	$419	20%	$1429	$120	8%	$714	$100	14%
District of Columbia	$6257	$995	16%	$3128	$537	17%	$2286	$2286	18%	$1143	$75	7%
Florida	$3754	$744	20%	$1877	$371	20%	$1429	$276	19%	$714	$112	16%
Georgia	$3979	$680	17%	$1990	$397	20%	$1256	$188	15%	$628	$97	15%
Hawaii	$4178	$590	14%	$2089	$306	15%	$1749	$233	13%	$875	$77	9%
Idaho	$3823	$579	15%	$1912	$286	15%	$1256	$193	15%	$628	$99	16%
Illinois	$4629	$666	14%	$2314	$394	17%	$1429	$257	18%	$714	$40	6%
Indiana	$3940	$524	13%	$1970	$286	15%	$1256	$186	15%	$628	$91	14%
Iowa	$4230	$677	16%	$2115	$395	19%	$1256	$120	10%	$628	$62	10%
Kansas[a]	$3932	$685	17%	$1966	$331	17%	$1256	$198	16%	$628	$77	12%
Kentucky	$3668	$493	13%	$1834	$272	15%	$1256	$203	16%	$628	$202	32%

Table 2 (continued)

	Scenario 1			Scenario 2			Scenario 3			Scenario 4		
Louisiana[a]	$3975	$702	18%	$1987	$340	17%	$1256	$202	16%	$628	$80	13%
Maine[a]	$4044	$688	17%	$2022	$335	17%	$1732	$282	16%	$866	$123	14%
Maryland	$4967	$752	15%	$2483	$433	17%	$1749	$319	18%	$875	$165	19%
Massachusetts	$5066	$1057	21%	$2533	$550	22%	$1905	$416	22%	$953	$212	22%
Michigan	$4274	$646	15%	$2137	$376	18%	$1602	$273	17%	$801	$66	8%
Minnesota	$4746	$656	14%	$2373	$421	18%	$1671	$308	18%	$836	$168	20%
Mississippi[a]	$3598	$390	11%	$1799	$244	14%	$1256	$174	14%	$628	$91	14%
Missouri[a]	$4096	$715	17%	$2048	$352	17%	$1360	$224	16%	$680	$89	13%
Montana[a]	$3975	$702	18%	$1987	$327	16%	$1438	$221	15%	$719	$93	13%
Nebraska	$4031	$566	14%	$2016	$328	16%	$1559	$261	17%	$779	$71	9%
Nevada[a]	$3581	$609	17%	$1790	$304	17%	$1429	$243	17%	$714	$121	17%
New Hampshire	$4780	$822	17%	$2390	$468	20%	$1256	$59	5%	$628	$50	8%
New Jersey	$4971	$688	14%	$2485	$442	18%	$1490	$273	18%	$745	$120	3%
New Mexico	$3780	$487	13%	$1890	$297	16%	$1299	$226	17%	$650	$123	19%
New York	$4300	$658	15%	$2150	$329	15%	$1801	$276	15%	$901	$25	3%
North Carolina	$3832	$636	17%	$1916	$342	18%	$1256	$105	8%	$628	$50	8%
North Dakota	$4386	$685	16%	$2193	$416	19%	$1256	$190	15%	$628	$0	0%
Ohio	$4178	$594	14%	$2089	$282	14%	$1438	$117	8%	$719	$81	11%
Oklahoma	$4096	$511	12%	$2048	$314	15%	$1256	$214	17%	$628	$113	18%
Oregon	$4265	$736	17%	$2133	$342	16%	$1767	$289	16%	$883	$100	11%
Pennsylvania	$4321	$689	16%	$2161	$419	19%	$1256	$255	20%	$628	$130	21%
Rhode Island	$4711	$747	16%	$2356	$425	18%	$1749	$308	18%	$875	$170	19%
South Carolina	$3992	$605	15%	$1996	$369	18%	$1256	$245	20%	$628	$128	20%
South Dakota	$3828	$671	18%	$1914	$409	21%	$1498	$332	22%	$749	$79	11%

Table 2 (continued)

	Scenario 1			Scenario 2			Scenario 3			Scenario 4		
Tennessee	$3871	$636	16%	$1936	$387	20%	$1256	$268	21%	$628	$139	22%
Texas	$3975	$667	17%	$1987	$347	17%	$1256	$228	18%	$628	$116	18%
Utah	$4399	$548	12%	$2200	$328	15%	$1256	$210	17%	$628	$30	5%
Vermont	$4131	$651	16%	$2065	$383	19%	$1819	$268	15%	$909	$0	0%
Virginia	$4629	$607	13%	$2314	$370	16%	$1256	$208	17%	$628	$106	17%
Washington	$4936	$718	15%	$2468	$441	18%	$1992	$324	16%	$996	$50	5%
West Virginia[a]	$3806	$669	18%	$1903	$323	17%	$1516	$251	17%	$758	$107	14%
Wisconsin	$4265	$725	17%	$2133	$363	17%	$1256	$190	15%	$628	$70	11%
Wyoming	$4521	$664	15%	$2260	$392	17%	$892	$0	0%	$446	$0	0%
Median	$4178	$669	16%	$2089	$369	17%	$1429	$245	17%	$714	$91	13%

Notes: In all scenarios, the custodial mother's income is 4.33 times the state median weekly earnings for female workers in 2018. In scenario 1, the noncustodial father's income is 4.33 times the state median weekly earnings for male workers in 2018. In scenario 2, the noncustodial father's income is 4.33 times half of the state median weekly earnings for male workers in 2018. In scenario 3, the noncustodial father's income is 4.33 times 40 h per week at the state minimum wage in 2018. In scenario 4, the noncustodial father's income is 4.33 times 20 h per week at the state minimum wage in 2018

[a] SupportPay.com, 2019 used to calculate orders

Table 3 Order amounts and burden levels by income scenario and number of children for all states, two children

	Scenario 1			Scenario 2			Scenario 3			Scenario 4		
Two Children												
State	NCP monthly income	Monthly order amount	Burden level	NCP monthly income	Monthly order amount	Burden level	NCP monthly income	Monthly order amount	Burden level	NCP monthly income	Monthly order amount	Burden level
Alabama	$3992	$833	21%	$1996	$531	27%	$1256	$354	28%	$628	$181	29%
Alaska	$4681	$1035	22%	$2340	$541	23%	$1704	$404	24%	$852	$211	25%
Arizona	$3940	$929	24%	$1970	$514	26%	$1819	$363	20%	$909	$0	0%
Arkansas	$3503	$686	20%	$1751	$493	28%	$1472	$433	29%	$736	$240	33%
California	$4295	$1183	28%	$2148	$565	26%	$1905	$477	25%	$953	$107	11%
Colorado	$4629	$1036	22%	$2314	$601	26%	$1767	$471	27%	$307	$70	8%
Connecticut[a]	$4936	$1286	26%	$2468	$632	26%	$1749	$425	24%	$875	$171	20%
Delaware	$4252	$1131	27%	$2126	$430	20%	$1429	$180	13%	$714	$160	22%
District of Columbia	$6257	$1345	21%	$3128	$733	23%	$2286	$565	25%	$1143	$75	7%
Florida	$3754	$1157	31%	$1877	$576	31%	$1429	$428	30%	$714	$174	24%
Georgia	$3979	$955	24%	$1990	$563	28%	$1256	$268	21%	$628	$138	22%
Hawaii	$4178	$1117	27%	$2089	$565	27%	$1749	$422	24%	$875	$154	18%
Idaho	$3823	$788	21%	$1912	$433	23%	$1256	$293	23%	$628	$149	24%
Illinois	$4629	$1006	22%	$2314	$600	26%	$1429	$392	27%	$714	$80	11%
Indiana	$3940	$788	20%	$1970	$429	22%	$1256	$277	22%	$628	$139	22%
Iowa	$4230	$974	23%	$2115	$497	23%	$1256	$167	13%	$628	$87	14%
Kansas[a]	$3932	$1096	28%	$1966	$529	27%	$1256	$317	25%	$628	$123	20%
Kentucky	$3668	$737	20%	$1834	$398	22%	$1256	$294	23%	$628	$294	47%
Louisiana[a]	$3975	$1124	28%	$1987	$544	27%	$1256	$324	26%	$628	$129	21%
Maine[a]	$4044	$1101	27%	$2022	$536	27%	$1732	$452	26%	$866	$196	23%

Table 3 (continued)

	Scenario 1			Scenario 2			Scenario 3			Scenario 4		
Two Children												
State	NCP monthly income	Monthly order amount	Burden level	NCP monthly income	Monthly order amount	Burden level	NCP monthly income	Monthly order amount	Burden level	NCP monthly income	Monthly order amount	Burden level
Maryland	$4967	$1079	22%	$2483	$625	25%	$1749	$462	26%	$875	$239	27%
Massachusetts	$5066	$1321	26%	$2533	$688	27%	$1905	$520	27%	$953	$264	28%
Michigan	$4274	$979	23%	$2137	$514	24%	$1602	$291	18%	$801	$66	8%
Minnesota	$4746	$1047	22%	$2373	$629	27%	$1671	$395	24%	$836	$0	0%
Mississippi[a]	$3598	$556	15%	$1799	$287	16%	$1256	$205	16%	$628	$107	17%
Missouri[a]	$4096	$1145	28%	$2048	$564	28%	$1360	$358	26%	$680	$142	21%
Montana[a]	$3975	$1004	25%	$1987	$470	24%	$1438	$317	22%	$719	$134	19%
Nebraska	$4031	$812	20%	$2016	$482	24%	$1559	$315	20%	$779	$71	9%
Nevada[a]	$3581	$895	25%	$1790	$448	25%	$1429	$357	25%	$714	$179	25%
New Hampshire	$4780	$1142	24%	$2390	$646	27%	$1256	$59	5%	$628	$50	8%
New Jersey	$4971	$922	19%	$2485	$615	25%	$1490	$329	22%	$745	$20	3%
New Mexico	$3780	$701	19%	$1890	$428	23%	$1299	$327	25%	$650	$178	27%
New York	$4300	$967	22%	$2150	$484	22%	$1801	$405	22%	$901	$25	3%
North Carolina	$3832	$974	25%	$1916	$527	27%	$1256	$106	8%	$628	$50	8%
North Dakota	$4386	$1017	23%	$2193	$533	24%	$1256	$240	19%	$628	$0	0%
Ohio	$4178	$888	21%	$2089	$282	14%	$1438	$154	11%	$719	$82	11%
Oklahoma	$4096	$735	18%	$2048	$454	22%	$1256	$310	25%	$628	$164	26%
Oregon	$4265	$983	23%	$2133	$495	23%	$1767	$418	24%	$883	$100	11%
Pennsylvania	$4321	$986	23%	$2161	$604	28%	$1256	$368	29%	$628	$188	30%
Rhode Island	$4711	$1140	24%	$2356	$653	28%	$1749	$474	27%	$875	$261	30%

Table 3 (continued)

	Scenario 1			Scenario 2			Scenario 3			Scenario 4		
Two Children												
State	NCP monthly income	Monthly order amount	Burden level	NCP monthly income	Monthly order amount	Burden level	NCP monthly income	Monthly order amount	Burden level	NCP monthly income	Monthly order amount	Burden level
South Carolina	$3992	$871	22%	$1996	$533	27%	$1256	$355	28%	$628	$186	30%
South Dakota	$3828	$960	25%	$1914	$592	31%	$1498	$479	32%	$749	$79	11%
Tennessee	$3871	$864	22%	$1936	$536	28%	$1256	$373	30%	$628	$195	31%
Texas	$3975	$834	21%	$1987	$434	22%	$1256	$284	23%	$628	$145	23%
Utah	$4399	$949	22%	$2200	$562	26%	$1256	$341	27%	$628	$30	5%
Vermont	$4131	$966	23%	$2065	$461	22%	$1819	$268	15%	$909	$0	0%
Virginia	$4629	$905	20%	$2314	$560	24%	$1256	$316	25%	$628	$161	26%
Washington	$4936	$1090	22%	$2468	$673	27%	$1992	$324	16%	$996	$100	10%
West Virginia[a]	$3806	$1070	28%	$1903	$517	27%	$1516	$402	27%	$758	$171	23%
Wisconsin	$4265	$1066	25%	$2133	$533	25%	$1256	$280	22%	$628	$104	17%
Wyoming	$4521	$998	22%	$2260	$596	26%	$892	$0	0%	$446	$0	0%
Median	$4178	$983	23%	$2089	$533	26%	$1429	$341	24%	$714	$134	20%

Notes: In all scenarios, the custodial mother's income is 4.33 times the state median weekly earnings for female workers in 2018. In scenario 1, the noncustodial father's income is 4.33 times the state median weekly earnings for male workers in 2018. In scenario 2, the noncustodial father's income is 4.33 times half of the state median weekly earnings for male workers in 2018. In scenario 3, the noncustodial father's income is 4.33 times 40 h per week at the state minimum wage in 2018. In scenario 4, the noncustodial father's income is 4.33 times 20 h per week at the state minimum wage in 2018

[a] SupportPay.com 2019 used to calculate orders

Code Availability For most states, we were able to calculate order amounts using publicly available child support calculators from child support agency websites. For ten states that did not have their own online calculators, we used a generic online child support calculator from the website SupportPay.com (https://supportpay.com/).

Table 4 Characteristics of states' child support guidelines

State	Type of formula	Type of income	Low-income deviation	Self-support reserve	Minimum order requirement
Alabama	Income Shares	AGI	Yes	Yes	No
Alaska	Percentage of Obligor's Income	Gross	Yes	No	Yes
Arizona	Income Shares	Gross	Yes	Yes	No
Arkansas	Percentage of Obligor's Income	Gross	Yes	Yes	No
California	Income Shares	Gross	Yes	Yes	No
Colorado	Income Shares	Gross	Yes	Yes	Yes
Connecticut[a]	Income Shares	Net	Yes	No	No
District of Columbia	Hybrid Model	Gross	Yes	Yes	Yes
Delaware	Melson Formula	Net	Yes	Yes	Yes
Florida	Income Shares	Net	Yes	Yes	No
Georgia	Income Shares	AGI	Yes	No	Yes
Hawaii	Melson Formula	Gross	Yes	Yes	Yes
Idaho	Income Shares	Gross	Yes	Yes	Yes
Illinois	Income Shares	Net	Yes	Yes	Yes
Indiana	Income Shares	Gross	Yes	Yes	No
Iowa	Income Shares	Net	Yes	No	No
Kansas[a]	Income Shares	Net	No	No	No
Kentucky	Income Shares	AGI	No	No	Yes
Louisiana[a]	Income Shares	AGI	Yes	No	Yes
Maine[a]	Income Shares	AGI	Yes	Yes	Yes
Maryland	Income Shares	AGI	Yes	No	Yes
Massachusetts	Income Shares	Gross	Yes	No	Yes
Michigan	Income Shares	Net	Yes	No	Yes
Minnesota	Income Shares	Gross	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mississippi[a]	Percentage of Obligor's Income	AGI	Yes	No	No
Missouri[a]	Income Shares	AGI	Yes	No	No
Montana[a]	Melson Formula	Net	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nebraska	Income Shares	Net	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nevada[a]	Percentage of Obligor's Income	Gross	No	No	Yes
New Hampshire	Income Shares	Net	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Jersey	Income Shares	Net	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Mexico	Income Shares	Gross	No	No	Yes
New York	Income Shares	Gross	Yes	Yes	Yes
North Carolina	Income Shares	Gross	Yes	Yes	Yes
North Dakota	Percentage of Obligor's Income	Net	Yes	Yes	No
Ohio	Income Shares	Net	Yes	Yes	Yes
Oklahoma	Income Shares	Gross	Yes	No	Yes

Table 4 (continued)

State	Type of formula	Type of income	Low-income deviation	Self-support reserve	Minimum order requirement
Oregon	Income Shares	AGI	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pennsylvania	Income Shares	Net	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rhode Island	Income Shares	AGI	Yes	Yes	Yes
South Carolina	Income Shares	Gross	Yes	No	Yes
South Dakota	Income Shares	Net	No	No	Yes
Tennessee	Income Shares	AGI	Yes	No	Yes
Texas	Percentage of Obligor's Income	Net	No	No	Yes
Utah	Income Shares	AGI	Yes	No	Yes
Vermont	Income Shares	Net	Yes	Yes	No
Virginia	Income Shares	Gross	Yes	No	Yes
Washington	Income Shares	Net	Yes	Yes	Yes
West Virginia[a]	Income Shares	AGI	Yes	Yes	Yes
Wisconsin	Percentage of Obligor's Income	Gross	Yes	No	No
Wyoming	Income Shares	Net	Yes	Yes	No

Notes: Authors' own categorizations based on information provided on states' child support websites, online calculators, guidelines reviews, and child support statute. These categorizations are intended to broadly capture the characteristics of a state's child support system, but we note that these characteristics may well vary with specific circumstances of cases

Appendix B Characteristics of states' child support guidelines

References

Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. (2018). *2018 poverty guidelines*. Washington: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation Retrieved June 4, 2019 from https://aspe.hhs.gov/2018-poverty-guidelines.

Bartfeld, J., & Meyer, D. R. (2003). Child support compliance among discretionary and nondiscretionary obligors. *Social Service Review, 77*(3), 347–372.

Berger, L. M., Cancian, M., & Meyer, D. R. (2012). Maternal re-partnering and new-partner fertility: associations with nonresident father investments in children. *Children and Youth Services Review, 34*(2), 426–436.

Berger, L. M., Cancian, M., Guarin, A., & Meyer, D. R. (2019). Do low-income noncustodial fathers trade families? Economic contributions to children in multiple families. *Social Service Review, 93*(2), 183–217.

Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2019). Median weekly earnings, full-time wage and salary workers. Series. LEU0252881801 -LEU0252881856 and LEU0252882701 - LEU0252882756. In: Weekly and hourly earnings data from the Current Population Survey. Washington: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved from: https://data.bls.gov/cgibin/srgate.

Brito, T. L. (2012). Fathers behind bars: Rethinking child support policy toward low-income noncustodial fathers and their families. *Journal of Gender, Race and Justice, 15*, 617.

Cancian, M., & Costanzo, M. A. (2019). Comparing income-shares and percentage-of-income child support guidelines. *Children and Youth Services Review, 96*, 451–462.

Cancian, M., & Meyer, D. R. (2004). Fathers of children receiving welfare: can they provide more child support? *Social Service Review, 78*(2), 179–206.

Cancian, M., & Meyer, D. R. (2018). Reforming policy for single-parent families to reduce child poverty. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences, 4*(2), 91–112.

Cancian, M., Meyer, D. R., & Han, E. (2011). Child support: responsible fatherhood and the quid pro quo. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 635*, 140–162.

Cancian, M., Heinrich, C. J., & Chung, Y. (2013). Discouraging disadvantaged fathers' employment: an unintended consequence of policies designed to support families. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 32*(4), 758–784.

Cancian, M., Cook, S., & Meyer, D.R. (2019a). *Child support payments, income imputation, and default orders*. Report prepared for Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. Madison: Institute for Research on Poverty.

Cancian, M., Costanzo, M., Guarin, A., Hodges, L., & Meyer, D. R. (2019b). *Potential effects of a self-support reserve in Wisconsin.* Report prepared for the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. Madison: Institute for Research on Poverty.

Cancian, M., Meyer, D. R., & Wood, R. (2019c). *Final impact findings from the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED)*. Madison: Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Chen, Y., & Meyer, D. R. (2017). Does joint legal custody increase child support for nonmarital children? *Children and Youth Services Review, 79*, 547–557.

Child Support Enforcement Amendment of 1984, Pub. L. No. 98–378 (1984).

Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives. (2018). *2018 green book: Background material and data on the programs within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means* (24th ed.). Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Demyan, N. & Passarella, L. (2018). *Actual earnings and payment outcomes among obligors with imputed income*. University of Maryland School of Social Work, Ruth Young Center for Families & Children, 2018. Retrieved from September 9, 2019 from https://familywelfare.umaryland.edu/reports1/guidelines_imputedincome.pdf

Edin, K., & Nelson, T. (2013). *Doing the best I can: fatherhood in the inner city*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Family Support Act of 1988, (1988) Pub. L. No. 100–485, 102 Stat. 2343.

Fleming, J.. (2017). *Imputed income and default practices: the state directors' survey of state practices prior to the 2016 final rule*. Retrieved June 4, 2019 from http://www.ncsea.org/documents/Imputed-Income-and-Default-Practices_CSQ-April-2017.pdf.

Flexibility, efficiency, and modernization of child support enforcement programs, (2016) final rule, 45 C.F.R. § 301–305, 307.

Freeman, R., & Waldfogel, J. (2001). Dunning delinquent dads: the effects of child support enforcement policy on child support receipt by never married women. *The Journal of Human Resources, 36*(2), 207–225.

Garfinkel, I., McLanahan, S., & Hanson, T. (1998). A patchwork portrait of non-resident fathers. In I. Garfinkel, S. McLanahan, D. Meyer, & J. Seltzer (Eds.), *Fathers under fire: the revolution in child support enforcement* (pp. 31–60). New York: Russell Sage.

Goldberg, J. S. (2015). Co-parenting and nonresident fathers' monetary contributions to their children. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 77*(3), 612–627.

Grall, T. (2020). *Custodial mothers and fathers and their child support: 2017, Current population reports, P60–269*. Washington: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic and Statistics Administration.

Ha, Y., Cancian, M., & Meyer, D. R. (2010). Unchanging child support orders in the face of unstable earnings. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 29*(4), 799–820.

Ha, Y., Cancian, M., & Meyer, D. R. (2018). Child support and income inequality. *Poverty & Public Policy, 10*(2), 147–158.

Heinrich, C., Burkhardt, B., & Shager, H. (2011). Reducing child support debt and its consequences: can forgiveness benefit all? *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 30*(4), 755–774.

Hodges, L., Meyer, D.R., Cancian, M. (2020). What happens when the amount of child support due is a burden? Revisiting the relationship between child support Orders and Child Support Payments. Forthcoming in *Social Service Review*.

Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(9), 1277–1288.

Huang, C. C., Mincy, R. B., & Garfinkel, I. (2005). Child support obligations and low-income fathers. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 67*(5), 1213–1225.

Kentucky Child Support Program. (2020). Estimate Shild support. Kentucky Child Support Customer Service Website. Retrieved June 24, 2020 from https://csws.chfs.ky.gov/csws/General/Landing.aspx

Manning, W. D., & Smock, P. J. (2000). 'Swapping' families: serial parenting and economic support for children. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 62*(1), 111–122.

McCann, M. (2019). Child support guidelines models by state. National Council of State Legislatures. Retrieved June 4, 2019 from http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/guideline-models-by-state.aspx.

Meyer, D. R., & Hu, M. C. (1999). A note on the antipoverty effectiveness of child support among mother-only families. *Journal of Human Resources, 34*, 225–234.

Meyer, D. R., Ha, Y., & Hu, M. C. (2008). Do high child support orders discourage child support payments? *Social Service Review, 82*(1), 93–118.

Miller, C., & Knox, V. (2001). *The challenge of helping low-income fathers support their children: final lessons from Parents' Fair Share*. New York: MDRC.

Miller, D., & Mincy, R. (2012). Falling further behind? Child support arrears and fathers' labor force participation. *Social Service Review, 86*(4), 604–635.

Mincy, R. B., & Sorensen, E. J. (1998). Deadbeats and turnips in child support reform. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management: The Journal of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, 17*(1), 44–51.

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2019*).* A roadmap to reducing child poverty. National Academies Press.

Nepomnyaschy, L., & Garfinkel, I. (2010). Child support enforcement and fathers' contributions to their nonmarital children. *Social Service Review, 84*(3), 341–380.

Office of Child Support Enforcement. (2017a). *Final rule summary fact sheet.* Retrieved June 4, 2019 from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/programs/css/fem_final_rule_summary.pdf

Office of Child Support Enforcement. (2017b). *Final rule overview, 2016 Flexibility, Efficiency, and Modernization in Child Support Enforcement Programs.* Retrieved June 4, 2019 from: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/programs/css/overview_child_support_final_r ule.pdf.

Office of Child Support Enforcement. (2019). Preliminary report to Congress, FY 2018. Washington : U.S., Office of Child Support Enforcement, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children & Families. Retrieved May 2, 2020 from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/programs/css/fy_2018_preliminary_data_report.pdf.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2019). *Wage Levels.* Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Retrieved from https://data.oecd.org/earnwage/wage-levels.htm.

Pirog, M. A., Klotz, M. E., & Byers, K. V. (1998). Interstate comparisons of child support orders using state guidelines. *Family Relations, 47*, 289–295.

Robb, C. (2019). *Cost of raising children and expenditures on children. Report prepared for the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families*. Madison: Institute for Research on Poverty.

Sariscsany, L., Garfinkel, I., & Nepomnyaschy, L. (2019). Describing and understanding child support trajectories. *Social Service Review, 93*(2), 143–182.

Sinkewicz, M., & Garfinkel, I. (2009). Unwed fathers' ability to pay child support: new estimates accounting for multiple-partner fertility. *Demography, 46*(2), 247–263.

Sorensen, E. (2004). Understanding how child-support arrears reached $18 billion in California. *American Economic Review, 94*(2), 312–316.

Sorensen, E., & Oliver, H. (2002). *Policy reforms are needed to increase child support from poor fathers*. Washington: Urban Institute.

Sorensen, E., & Zibman, C. (2001). Getting to know poor fathers who do not pay child support. *Social Service Review, 75*(3), 420–434.

SupportPay.com (2019). Child Support Calculator. Retrieved June 4, 2019 from https://supportpay.com/resources/child-support-calculator/

Supreme Court of Arkansas. (2020). *RE: Implementation of the Revised Administrative Order No. 10. Arkansas Judiciary: Opinions, Court Rules and Administrative Orders/Supreme Court.* Retrieved June 12, 2020 from https://opinions.arcourts.gov/ark/supremecourt/en/item/468402/index.do

Tollestrup, J. (2019). Child support enforcement: program basics. Congressional research service, Library of Congress. Washington.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2017). Table C3. Living arrangements of children under 18 years and marital status of parents, by age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin and selected characteristics of the child for all children:

2016. America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2016. Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement. Washington: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce.
U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). Table FM-1. Families by presence of own children under 18: 1950 to present. Current Population Survey, March and Annual Social Economic Supplements, 2019 and earlier. Washington: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce.
U.S. Department of Labor (2019). Changes in basic minimum wages in non-farm employment under state law: selected years 1968 to 2018. Washington: U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division. Retrieved from https://www.dol.gov/whd/state/stateMinWageHis.htm.
Venohr, J. C. (2013). Child support guidelines and guidelines reviews: state differences and common issues. *Family Law Quarterly, 47*(3), 327–352.
Venohr, J. C. (2016). Differences in state child support guidelines amounts: guidelines models, economic basis, and other issues. *Journal of the American Academy of Matrimonial Law, 29*, 377.
Vogel, L. K. (2020a). Barriers to meeting formal child support obligations: noncustodial father perspectives. *Children and Youth Services Review, 110*, 104764. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.104764.
Vogel, L. K. (2020b). Help me help you: identifying and addressing barriers to child support compliance. *Children and Youth Services Review, 110*, 104763. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.104763.
Waller, M. R., & Plotnick, R. (2001). Effective child support policy for low-income families: Evidence from street level research. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management: The Journal of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, 20*(1), 89–110.

Affiliations

Leslie Hodges[1] · **Lisa Klein Vogel**[2]

[1] Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Kansas City, MO, USA

[2] Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI, USA