

Facts about Child Support

The Child Support Program

The Child Support program helps families become independent and remain self-sufficient by establishing paternity (legal fatherhood) and by obtaining and enforcing court orders for child support and medical support.

“The Child Support program serves 17 million children overall, and half of all poor children. The program lifts a million people out of poverty every year and helps families avoid the need for public assistance. Child support provides about 30 percent of income for the poor families who receive it.” *[Carmen Nazario, Assistant Secretary for the federal Administration for Children and Families, testifying before the Committee on Ways and Means, March 2010.]*

The Child Support program is a cooperative local, state, and federal effort designed to ensure that **both parents support their children**. The Child Support program also has cooperative agreements with many foreign countries. Title IV-D of the Social Security Act, enacted in 1975, requires every state to provide child support services.

The Federal Role

The federal Office of Child Support Enforcement administers the federal Child Support program and provides a variety of services and assistance to the states. The federal government reimburses some administrative costs of state and local governments and helps locate parents.

Wisconsin’s Role

The Bureau of Child Support, in the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, manages the statewide Child Support program. The Bureau works with other states, other nations, the federal office, as well as tribal and county child support agencies. Local child support agencies provide most child support services. These local agencies help parents establish paternity (legal fatherhood), locate parents, and help establish and enforce child support and medical support orders. In 2013, the Wisconsin Child Support program provided full case management services to 361,180 families and provided financial management services to an additional 131,832 families.

Locate

In many child support cases, the first step is finding a missing parent or a parent’s income or assets. KIDS, Wisconsin’s child support computer system, automatically checks other computer databases for information about parents who owe child support. For instance, KIDS will find out if a nonpaying parent is receiving unemployment insurance or workers’ compensation. The Federal Parent Locator Service, operated by the federal office, may also be used. This federal service uses information collected from federal agencies and other states and information reported by employers.

Paternity (Legal Fatherhood)

Before a court can order child support for unmarried parents, paternity (legal fatherhood) must be established. Parents who are 18 or older can establish paternity by filing a *Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgment* form. Adult and teen parents can request paternity establishment services, including genetic testing, from their local child support agency. When a mutual agreement cannot be reached, a court can issue a legal decision on paternity based on genetic test results. Parents who marry after their child is born may file an *Acknowledgment of Marital Child* form. Genetic testing should be done if there are doubts about paternity. In 2013, the Wisconsin Child Support program established paternity for 25,609 children.

Establishing and Enforcing Support Orders

Local child support agencies help establish court orders for financial and medical support. In 2013, the Wisconsin Child Support program helped establish support orders for 40,057 families.

Local child support agencies enforce the court order to pay child support using a variety of tools. States and foreign countries work together cooperatively to assist each other through interstate and international actions. In Wisconsin, most support orders include income withholding. The child support agency sends a notice to the paying parent's employer to withhold a certain amount of the parent's income for child support.

When parents do not pay their court-ordered support, other actions might be taken. The overdue child support might be reported to credit bureaus and may be taken from tax refunds and lottery winnings. Liens might be placed against the parents' titled property. Delinquent payers might lose their recreational, occupational, and drivers' licenses. The court might order the parent to search for work. Failure to obey a court order might result in a hearing for contempt of court. In extreme cases, the district attorney might bring criminal nonsupport charges.

Eligibility for Services

All families with a court order for support (child support, alimony/maintenance, and family support), receive financial management services. Families needing help with child support may apply to their local child support agencies for case management services (commonly called child support services). There is no application fee. Families receiving public assistance automatically receive case management services.

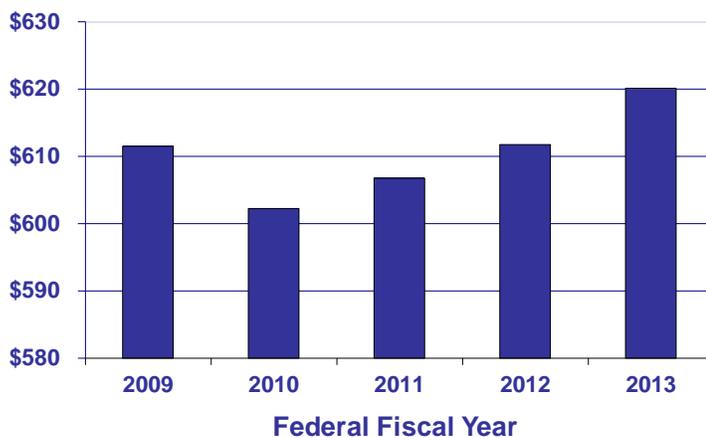
Taxpayer Savings

In 2013, Wisconsin collected \$6.54 in child support for every \$1.00 spent for program costs. That was well over \$1.00 more than the national average. Child support collected for families who no longer receive public assistance helps to keep those families independent and reduces public assistance costs.

Amounts Collected

Wisconsin is a national leader in the collection of child support. In 2013, Wisconsin ranked fourth nationally in the percentage of court-ordered current support that was collected. Wisconsin ranked eleventh in collections per full-time child support employee, collecting \$621,383 per worker. The national average was \$518,257. The graph below shows the recent collection amounts for families in the Wisconsin Child Support program.

Wisconsin Child Support Collections (millions)



For More Information

Contact your local child support agency (listed in your phone book under "county government" or tribal name and online at dcf.wisconsin.gov).

Child support information is available online at dcf.wisconsin.gov. Most public libraries offer free Internet access.

The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access this information in an alternate format, or need it translated to another language, please call (608) 266-9909 or (800) 947-3529 TTY (Toll Free).