

# Building the Next Generation of Child Support Policy Research

## Research Agenda

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# Introduction & Purpose

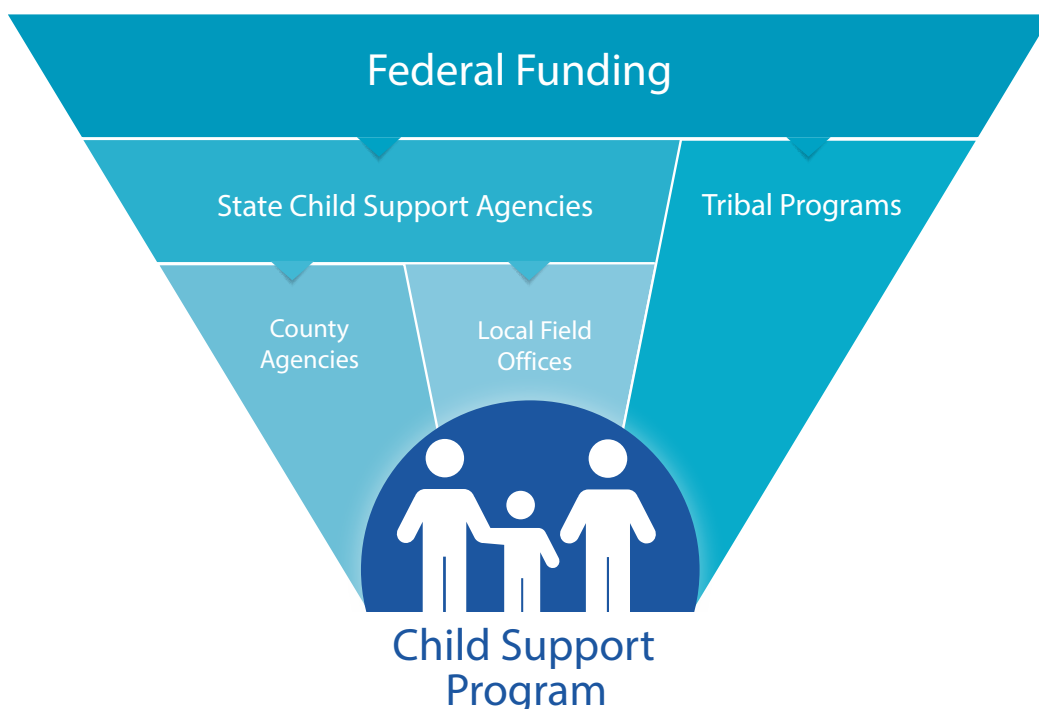
**The child support program plays a vital role in facilitating financial and medical support for millions of children across the country. In 2016, the program served 21 million children and distributed over \$28 billion in child support.<sup>1</sup>**

With a culture of continuous improvement, the child support program can use research and analysis to enhance and refine its operation. As a partnership between federal, state, local, and tribal governments, there are opportunities for experimentation at various levels of program coordination and service delivery. Moreover, the substantial data collected by and available to child support agencies provide an opportunity for analyses that improve program operations and inform policy development.

This research agenda is for the broader child support community — federal, state, and local policymakers, program operators, academic researchers and scholars, and program evaluators — to further this spirit of continuous improvement. It identifies potential areas for research and analysis to inform the most pressing policy issues facing the field.

To spark this conversation, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and MEF Associates convened child support practitioners, researchers, and policymakers for the Roundtable for Building the Next Generation of Child Support Policy Research in October 2017. The meeting involved a series of presentations from expert panelists that served as the basis for individual feedback and group discussion. Attendees submitted individual responses about research gaps, engaged in small group discussions with peers, and participated in large group discussions.

## The Child Support Program is a Partnership Between Federal, State, Tribal, and Local Agencies



## Organization of this Research Agenda

The conversations and information collected at the roundtable serve as the foundation for this research agenda. This agenda highlights eight key issues facing the child support community:

- **The Declining Child Support Caseload**
- **Participation in the Child Support Program Among Families Receiving Public Benefits Other than TANF**
- **Establishing Child Support Orders that Reflect both the Costs of Raising Children and Parents' Ability to Pay**
- **Establishing Initial Orders for Cases where Parents have Unstable Income or where Limited Income Information is Available**
- **The Role of the Child Support Program in Facilitating Co-Parenting Arrangements or Relationships**
- **How to Adjust Child Support Orders in Response to Changing Family Circumstances**
- **How to Best Use Enforcement Mechanisms to Increase Compliance**
- **Supporting Employment for Non-Custodial Parents**

For each issue, the agenda presents ideas and opportunities for future research to be taken up by public, private, and civil society partners. The box below provides a framework for the types of potential research opportunities that could support the issues discussed in this research agenda. They highlight the multiple types of research that can contribute to improvements to child support policy and practice.

This research agenda is not a comprehensive summary of all issues discussed at the meeting, nor a description of every potential area for research. The goal is to identify opportunities for the child support community to build the evidence base and inform continued improvements to the child support program over the next 10 years.

## Types of Research Opportunities

Throughout this document, we classify research ideas and opportunities into several categories, using the following definitions:



**Descriptive research** explores the characteristics of a population or system. Using this type of research, we can learn what is currently happening, which subsets of the population are affected, and what differences exist across states and localities. Data sources might include administrative data from child support programs and survey data.



**Impact evaluation research** is the systematic collection and assessment of information to determine and better understand the effectiveness of an intervention or program. These range from rapid-cycle experimentation to longer-term, rigorous randomized controlled trials. Data sources may include administrative data, survey data, and qualitative data collected through conversations with staff and participants.



**Policy and operations research** focuses on determining the potential implications of a given policy or comparison of multiple policy options. It also considers the role data systems play within the broader policy context. Data sources may include policy documentation and state/local guidelines, and qualitative data collected through conversations with staff and experts in the field.

# ISSUE: The Declining Child Support Caseload

**The child support program is serving fewer families than it once did.** The child support caseload has declined in the last two decades. The decline in current assistance cases is most pronounced, driven by the broader reduction in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) caseload following welfare reform. Between 2000 and 2015, the national TANF caseload decreased by over 40 percent, as many states instituted stricter eligibility requirements and shorter time limits for benefit receipt.<sup>2</sup>

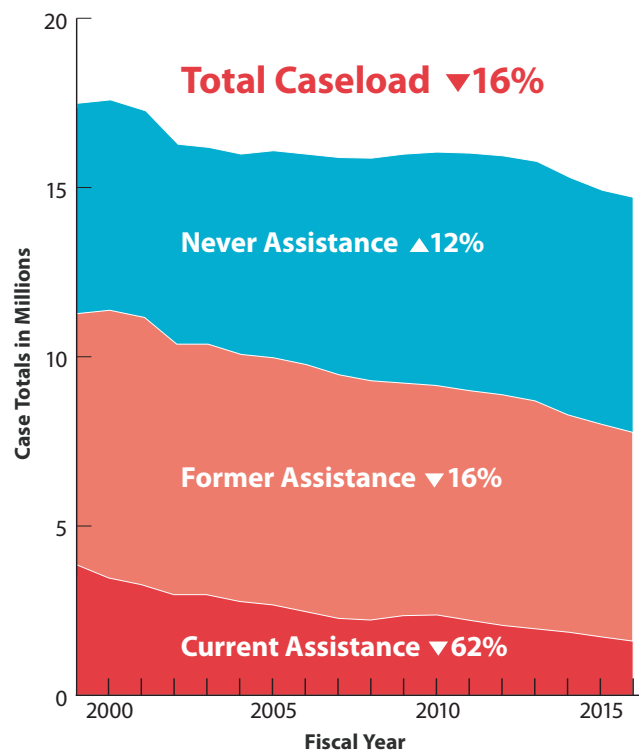
**Fewer custodial parents have child support orders.** The percent of custodial parents with a child support agreement has decreased from about 60 percent in 2003 to approximately 50 percent in 2015.<sup>3</sup> This indicates that there is a large pool of families that could potentially benefit from engaging with the child support program. Though we know that child support caseloads are declining, more information on the characteristics of the remaining caseload and those who are eligible but do not participate in the child support program would allow for programs to better serve their customers.

## National Child Support Caseload Changes from 1999 to 2016

**Never Assistance:** cases that never received cash assistance from TANF or IV-E foster care maintenance payments.

**Former Assistance:** cases that formerly received cash assistance from TANF or IV-E foster care maintenance payments.

**Current Assistance:** cases receiving cash assistance from the TANF program or IV-E foster care maintenance payments.



Source: OCSE Form 157, Line 1 + Line 3

## Ideas and Opportunities for Research



### **Research objectives:**

1. **What are the characteristics of families where there is at least one non-custodial parent (i.e., those who are eligible to access child support services)?**
  - a. What are the characteristics of the families in the child support caseload?
  - b. What are the characteristics of the families not being served? What differences in characteristics exist across states, and why?



### **Example: Descriptive research**

**Description of characteristics of families in the child support caseload and of families who are not engaging with the child support program:**

- What are the household characteristics of families in the child support caseload, including the presence and employment status of non-custodial parents?
- What are the characteristics of families outside the child support program and the reasons they are not receiving services?
- What differences exist in caseloads across states and localities?



### **Example: Impact evaluation research**

**Testing different outreach methods to encourage families outside the child support program to engage with the program:**

- Building on recent behavioral economics research<sup>4</sup>, what new outreach methods and communication strategies are most effective?
- What ways can child support programs use other public programs' data and processes to identify families and engage them in child support services?

# ISSUE: Participation in the Child Support Program Among Families Receiving Public Benefits Other than TANF

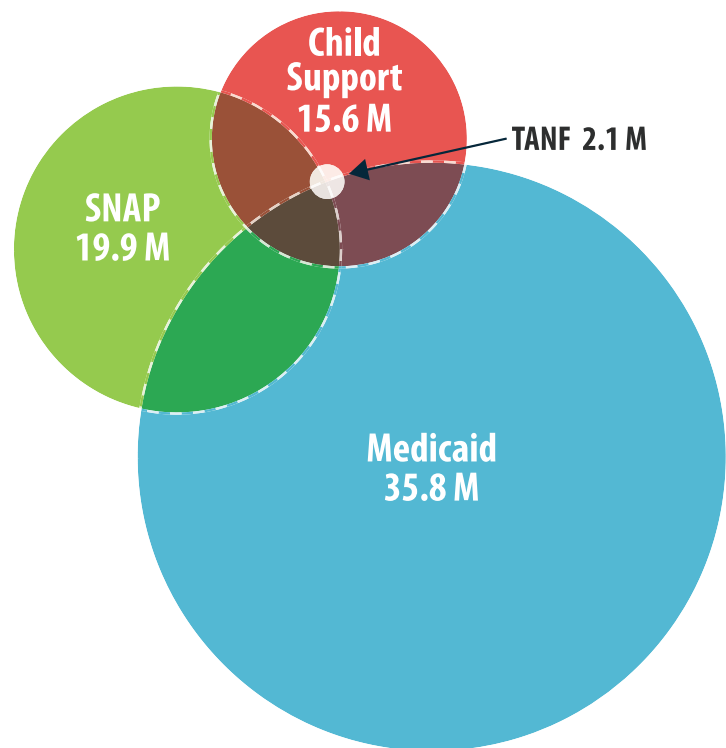
**With declining TANF caseloads, fewer low-income families are required to open cases with child support agencies.** Families receiving TANF are required to participate in the child support program, which includes assigning the rights to their child support to the state while they are receiving benefits. However, smaller TANF caseloads mean that many low-income families are no longer receiving TANF but still receive a range of government benefits such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, and subsidized child care.<sup>5</sup> For these families, child support may represent an alternative income stream that can augment or replace these benefits. This has the potential to reduce government costs and increase family income.

**Fewer linkages exist between the child support program and public benefits programs other than TANF.** States have the option to require participation with child support as a condition of receiving SNAP, child care subsidies, and housing assistance, but there is great variation in cooperation policies across the country. Families often have a choice about whether to ask the child support agency to establish a formal support order. More formal referral processes or mandated cooperation between the child support program and other means-tested benefits could result in more families receiving child support services that could benefit from them. However, there is little to no research on the implementation and impact of these policies.<sup>6</sup>

## Children in the Child Support Program Compared to Other Public Benefits Programs

Families receiving SNAP could increase their family income and reduce government costs by participating in the child support program, though this could raise operating costs of the child support program itself.

Source: OCSE Annual Report, [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/programs/css/fy\\_2016\\_annual\\_report.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/programs/css/fy_2016_annual_report.pdf)



# Participation in the Child Support Program Among Families Receiving Public Benefits Other than TANF

## Ideas and Opportunities for Research



### Research objectives:

1. What public programs are child support-eligible families and non-custodial parents accessing, and how many have a formal child support order?
2. What would the effects of increased cooperation requirements be on key program outcomes and what would be the costs associated with such requirements?



### Example: Impact evaluation research

Test of the effects of child support cooperation requirements on key program outcomes such as order establishment and collections:

- Do cooperation requirements increase the number of child support orders established and the amount of money collected on the behalf of low-income families?
- What are the costs to the government and families associated with the implementation of increased cooperation requirements?



### Example: Policy and operations research

Policy analysis on ways to facilitate collaboration and engagement between the child support program and means-tested benefits programs that serve the same families, and the benefits and costs of such policies. Potential areas of focus include:

- Program requirements: Do the requirements of other public benefits programs incentivize participation in the child support program?
- Funding: How do existing policies fund collaboration and engagement across programs? What are the benefits and costs of administering these policies?
- Data: Do existing policies encourage cross-program data sharing? How do data policies affect the way the child support program and other public benefits programs manage cases and serve families?

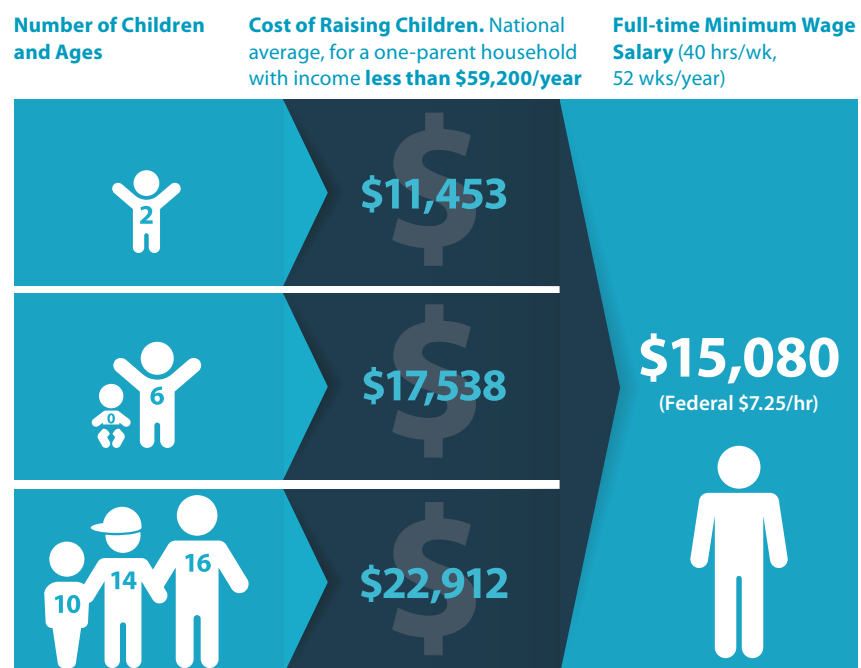
# ISSUE: Establishing Child Support Orders that Reflect both the Costs of Raising Children and Parents' Ability to Pay

**Establishing orders is one of the primary functions of the child support program.** Order establishment processes vary by state, with a mix of procedures used to calculate and determine support obligations based on state guidelines.<sup>7</sup> These guidelines consider factors such as one or both parents' income, number of children, custody arrangement, other child support orders, and medical expenses. The primary goal of the order establishment process is to calculate an order amount that balances the needs of the custodial parent, who is incurring most of the costs of raising a child, while ensuring that the paying parent has enough residual income to cover his or her own basic expenses. States' approaches to order calculations vary, and the way states apply guidelines can affect order amounts.<sup>8</sup> The implementation of the Flexibility, Efficiency, and Modernization rule also has implications for the order establishment process, as it requires a state's child support guidelines to consider the non-custodial parent's actual income, and not presumed ability to pay.<sup>9</sup>

**Child support is an important source of income for custodial parents, but most do not receive full payment of their child support order.**<sup>10</sup> Child support orders define parents' financial responsibilities toward their children. There is a clear incentive for child support programs to establish orders that provide the necessary funds to cover the costs of raising children while also accurately reflecting parents' financial circumstances. Orders that are too low may cause added financial stress for low-income custodial parents. Orders that are too high may result in the paying parent having insufficient funds to pay for his or her own basic expenses or accumulating debt due to non-payment. Zero-dollar orders have also become more common in the past two decades; as of 2016, they represented 10 percent of all orders.<sup>11</sup> While limited, there is some evidence that setting orders that accurately reflect parents' ability to pay increases compliance with child support orders.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, states receive federal incentive funding based on their ability to collect current support due. Orders that reflect parents' financial circumstances and ability to pay can also help states increase performance on the federal incentive measures.

## Parent Earnings in the Context of the Cost to Raise Children

Source: USDA's Cost of Raising a Child Calculator, [https://www.cnpp.usda.gov/tools/CRC\\_Calculator/](https://www.cnpp.usda.gov/tools/CRC_Calculator/)





# Establishing Child Support Orders that Reflect both the Costs of Raising Children and Parents' Ability to Pay

## Ideas and Opportunities for Research



### Research objectives:

1. What approaches to establishing orders help balance the costs of raising children with the financial circumstances of the child's parents?
2. How does the order amount, relative to parents' financial circumstances, influence payment behavior?



### Example: Descriptive research

Understanding variation in order amounts across states and relationships with caseload characteristics, using administrative data:

- What variation in order amounts exists (e.g., average order amount, number of zero-dollar orders) across state child support programs? What are the associations between order amounts and caseload characteristics?
- By comparing cases with similar case characteristics but different order amounts, what is the extent to which payment behavior is associated with the order amount?

Understanding order establishment practices in the field, using administrative child support data and qualitative data, such as a staff survey, in select states:

- What effect does the Flexibility, Efficiency, and Modernization rule have on order establishment rates and payment compliance?



### Example: Impact evaluation research

Understanding the relationship between order amount and non-custodial parent payment rates:

- For low-income parents, what are the options for setting lower monthly orders that may more accurately reflect ability to pay? What are the effects of these lower orders on overall payments and rates of compliance?



### Example: Policy and operations research

Review of state policies regarding use of zero-dollar order amounts:

- How do state guidelines influence the prevalence of zero-dollar orders in different localities?
- What justifications for deviations from guidelines allow zero-dollar orders?
- What are the implications of inconsistent payments for families?
- How are states responding to the new guidelines requirements in the Flexibility, Efficiency, and Modernization rule?

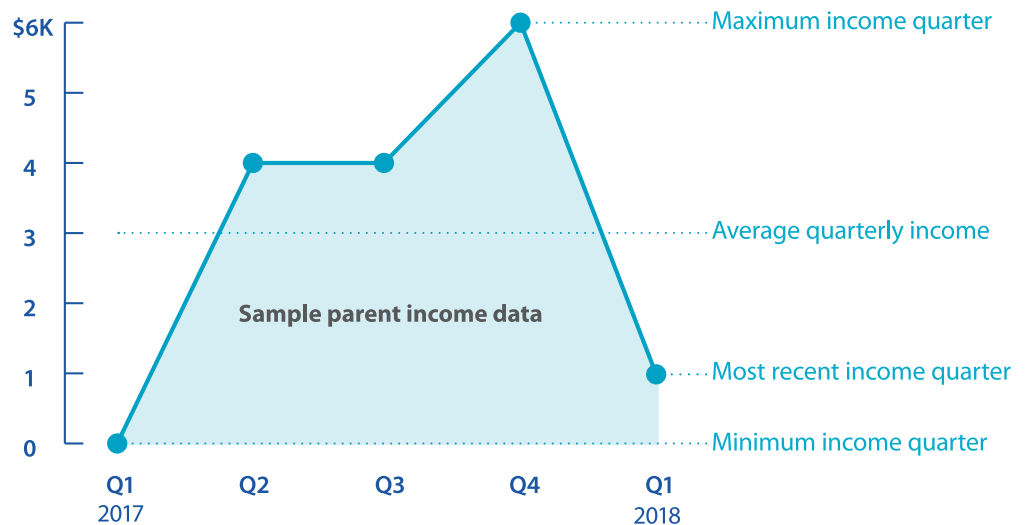
# ISSUE: Establishing Initial Orders for Cases where Parents have Unstable Income or where Limited Income Information is Available

**Order establishment processes typically assume that parents have relatively stable income that serves as the basis for calculating a monthly support obligation.** However, low-income populations often have unstable incomes and employment arrangements.<sup>13</sup> This instability or lack of earnings negatively affects parents' ability to meet monthly child support obligations. Even when there is some evidence of prior earnings in quarterly wage data, staff must decide how to interpret inconsistent wages. For example, they can either take the average of earnings from multiple quarters, the highest amount from a given quarter, or some other adjustment based on information obtained through a conversation with one or both parents. In each case, the decision staff make has implications for the order amount. Moreover, child support programs often have limited information, resulting in orders being based on income imputation.<sup>14</sup> Yet for most non-custodial parents undergoing imputation, orders often end up being either too high or too low.<sup>15</sup>

**The fluctuations in non-custodial parent income and changes in employment status make it difficult for child support agencies to ensure that orders accurately reflect parents' financial situations and that custodial parents receive the support they need to pay the ongoing costs of raising a child.** The inability to easily assess a parent's financial profile puts child support programs in a difficult situation. Federal code requires states to establish child support orders within 90 days of paternity establishment.<sup>16</sup> For cases in which there is little information on parents' financial circumstances (or the parents are less responsive to requests for this information), states are left with the choice of either delaying order establishment in the hopes of receiving better information or establishing an order with less complete information. How states handle these situations has implications for both the speed with which orders are established as well as the degree to which the orders accurately reflect parents' financial circumstances.

## Choosing the basis for an initial order when a non-custodial parent has unstable income.

At order establishment, parents provide information on recent income. When their income information is incomplete or earnings are inconsistent, there are various ways to calculate income to set an order amount.



# Establishing Initial Orders for Cases where Parents have Unstable Income or where Limited Income Information is Available

## Ideas and Opportunities for Research



### Research objectives:

1. How can child support programs increase the accuracy of orders for low-income parents while not dramatically increasing time or costs associated with the order establishment process?



### Example: Descriptive research

Understanding variation in state approaches to setting orders and exploring opportunities for utilizing existing wage data to improve order accuracy:

- How do states approach setting orders when there is little or no information on non-custodial parent income?
- How can historical earnings and demographic data be used to predict future earnings and inform order setting for those parents with sporadic or incomplete earnings histories?



### Example: Impact evaluation research

Test efforts to increase parent engagement in the order setting process to improve accuracy of income information:

- How can child support agencies increase interaction with parents during the order setting process to encourage more parent-provided information to inform order amounts?
- What types of increased outreach to custodial and non-custodial parents might increase available information that can inform order amounts?



### Example: Policy and operations research

Description of data available to state child support agencies to accurately document parents' financial circumstances and opportunities to leverage additional administrative data:

- What non-child support data can child support agencies access to understand parents' financial circumstances at the point of order establishment (e.g., wage data, IRS data, data on public benefits receipt)?
- What different approaches exist to capture non-wage earnings data (e.g., independent contractor earnings)?

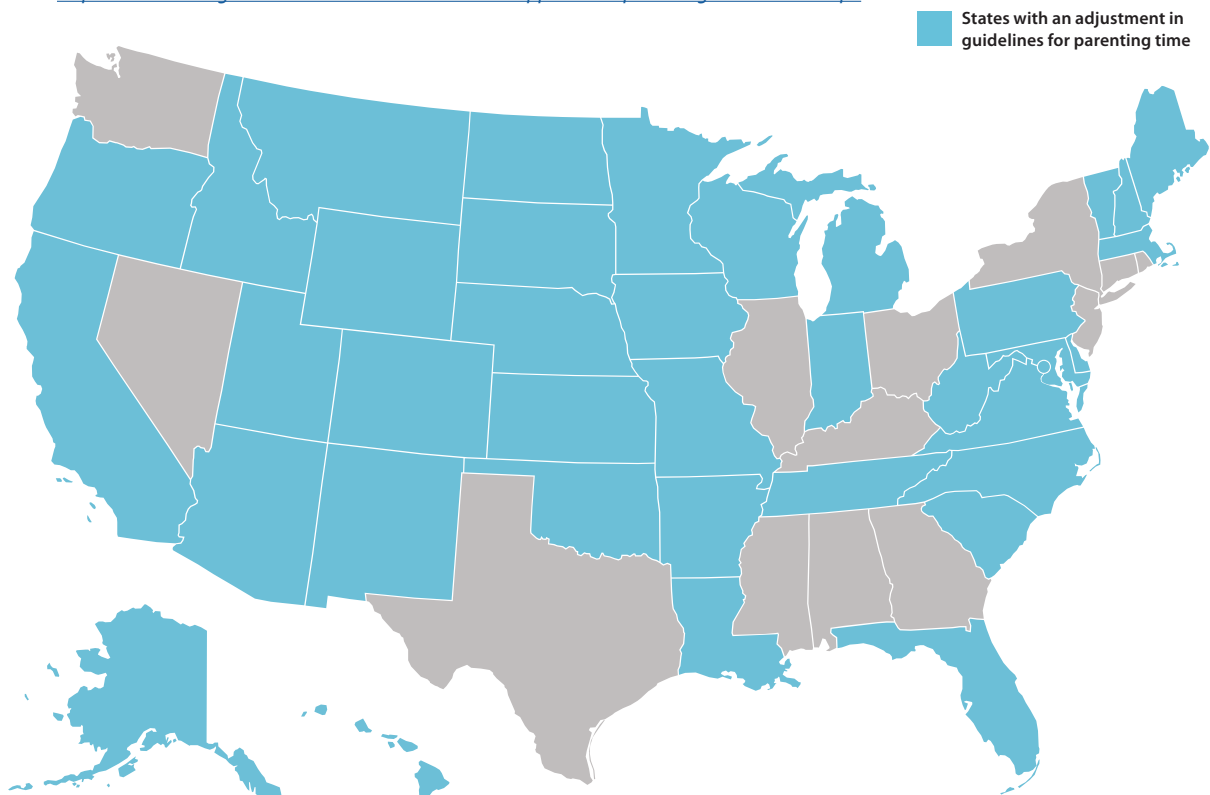
# ISSUE: The Role of the Child Support Program in Facilitating Co-Parenting Arrangements or Relationships

**Children benefit from spending time and having quality interactions with both of their parents.<sup>17</sup> Parents who are involved in their children’s lives through custody or visitation are more likely to pay child support.<sup>18</sup>** The child support program interacts with both parents. These interactions are influenced by the relationship between the parents, informal care and payment arrangements that may be outside the formal program, and legal agreements on access, visitation, and parenting time. Parents’ willingness to contribute financially can be influenced by their feelings related to access, visitation, and the co-parenting dynamic, and custodial parents’ decisions on gatekeeping may also be tied to the non-custodial parent’s provision of formal or informal financial support.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, these co-parenting relationships may also be influenced by the parents’ perception of, or experience with, the formal child support program.

**While the child support program has a clear role in facilitating the financial support of children and custodial families, the program’s role in other aspects of the co-parenting relationship is less clear.** Thirty-six states consider time spent with the child in the child support guideline calculation that determines the order amount.<sup>20</sup> Six states set parenting time orders at the time of the child support order establishment.<sup>21</sup> In addition, child support programs can play a role in supporting co-parenting relationships through family strengthening and fatherhood programming. A few states have statewide fatherhood initiatives that formalize these partnerships, whereas other jurisdictions give referrals to community-based services.

## States with an Adjustment in Guidelines for Parenting Time

Source: McCann, Meghan. Email correspondence with authors (2018). National Conference of State Legislatures. <http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/child-support-and-parenting-time-orders.aspx>



# The Role of the Child Support Program in Facilitating Co-Parenting Arrangements or Relationships

## Ideas and Opportunities for Research



### Research objectives:

1. What is the role of the child support program in facilitating co-parenting arrangements or relationships?
2. How do formalized parenting time orders affect compliance with the child support program?



### Example: Descriptive research

#### Scan of state policies on setting parenting time orders:

- To what extent and how do states incorporate parenting time orders into the order establishment process?



### Example: Impact evaluation research

#### Test the effectiveness of parenting and co-parenting programming on child support outcomes:

- How do family strengthening programs affect compliance and engagement with the child support program?
- Does the establishment of parenting time for never-married parents in the child support program impact child well-being?



### Example: Policy and operations research

#### Describe options for ways to structure parenting and co-parenting services for families in the child support program:

- What partnership options exist for child support programs seeking to incorporate services for parents to establish formal parenting time arrangements?
- What staff development and business process redesigns are required to implement systems for establishing parenting time orders while ensuring appropriate family violence protections are in place?

# ISSUE: How to Adjust Child Support Orders in Response to Changing Family Circumstances

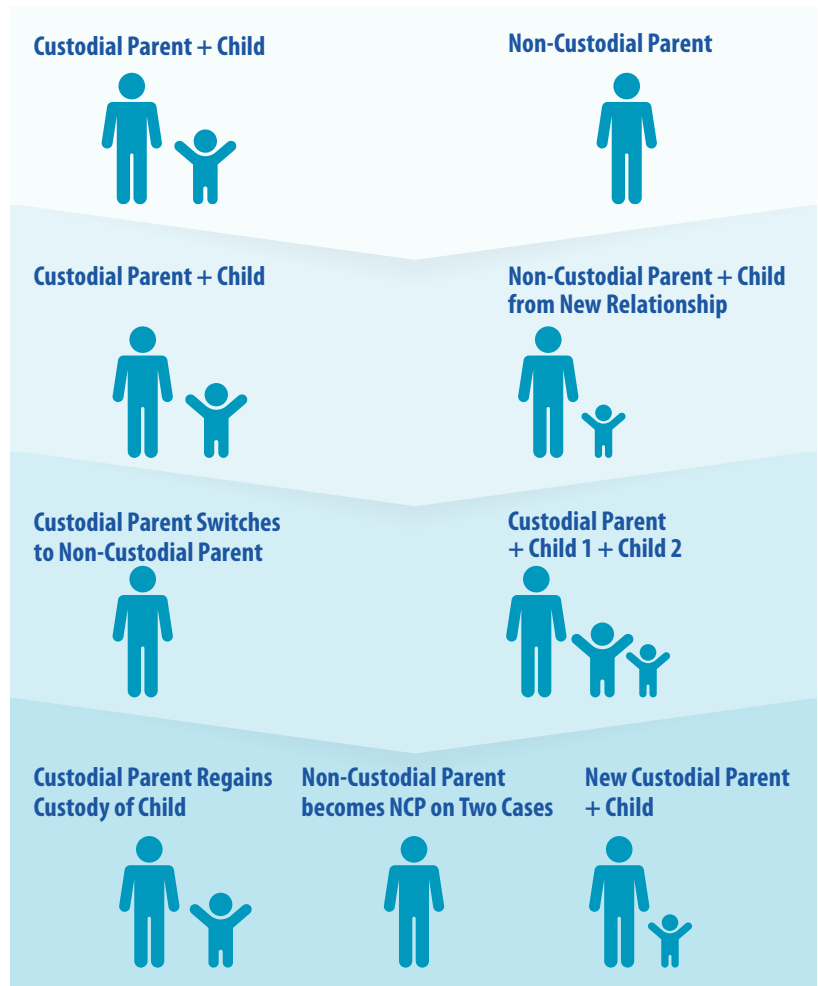
## Child support orders are based on multiple factors related to family finances and custody arrangements.

Whether it is changes in employment status, adjustments in which parent is paying child care costs, or shifts in custody arrangements, families' circumstances change over time. Parents in the child support program are legally entitled to a review of their order every three years that can account for these changes. They can also request modifications to these orders more frequently if there have been more substantial changes.

## Child support agencies have access to a large amount of data, but many times agencies are unable to use these data to their full potential due to aging data systems and limited resources for improvements.

Child support programs often struggle to track changes in family circumstances and adjust their enforcement approaches based on these changes. Many child support data systems are older and there are limitations on resources available for improvements, so state and local agencies must find creative ways to work within system constraints to serve families.

## Family Circumstances and Custody Arrangements can Change Over Time



**Child support agencies face challenges in efforts to work in conjunction with families to modify child support orders to reflect current family circumstances.** The process for order review and modification is often complicated and time consuming and many parents are not even aware of the option. Low-income parents tend to have less stable employment situations which could impact their ability to pay child support consistently. Family relationships can be complicated, and changing custody arrangements can create confusion about the child support responsibilities of parents and the process for adjusting the child support order.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, parents may be unfamiliar with what are often complicated and at times judicial procedures required to modify support orders.

# How to Adjust Child Support Orders in Response to Changing Family Circumstances

**Child support agencies strive to establish orders that reflect family circumstances and to process requests for modifications to these orders when situations change.** Downward modifications due to changes in earnings, job loss, or incarceration can help prevent accumulation of potentially unpayable debt. Upward modifications due to increased earnings can help provide more support to custodial parents and children. However, even when they are potentially eligible, parents often do not apply for modifications to their support orders. Recent tests of attempts to increase requests for modifications among incarcerated parents showed that it was possible to increase the number of parents making the requests. Despite the improvements, the number of parents targeted by these interventions who made requests for modifications remained small.<sup>23</sup>

## Ideas and Opportunities for Research



### Research objectives:

1. What technology and systems interoperability would enhance the child support program's responsiveness to changing family circumstances?
2. Can more timely modifications to child support orders increase payments to families and decrease debt accumulation?



### Example: Descriptive research

Explore the frequency with which child support orders are modified in response to changes in parents' income:

- How frequently do custodial and non-custodial parents request order modifications in response to income changes outside the typical three-year review period?
- What percentage of cases experience changes in parental income within the three-year review period that would result in a change in order amount per the state guidelines?
- What are the barriers for parents in requesting and receiving modifications when appropriate?



### Example: Impact evaluation/policy and operations research

Use administrative data to identify cases potentially appropriate for modification and test different methods for reaching these parents:

- How can states automate the process of identifying cases that could be eligible for a modification?
- Can states increase collections with a more proactive approach to identifying cases in which a modification may be appropriate?



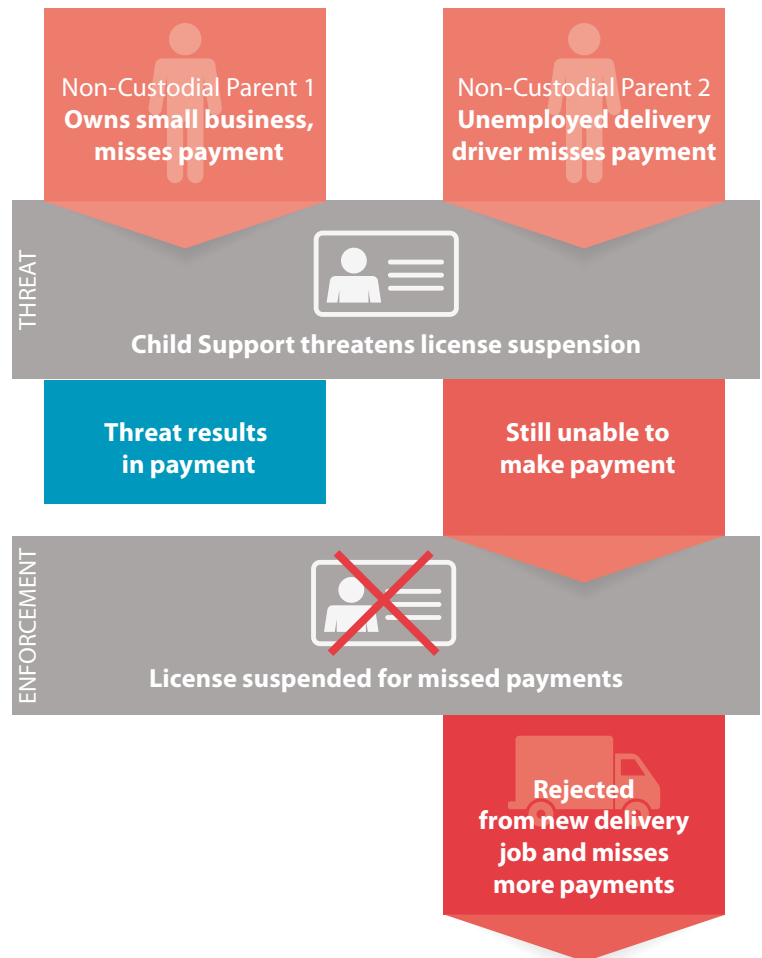
# ISSUE: How to Best Use Enforcement Mechanisms to Increase Compliance

**The child support program has multiple tools at its disposal to compel non-custodial parents to make payments, such as license suspension, civil contempt, liens, and asset seizure.** State child support agencies have flexibility in how they apply these tools to enforce orders, and the decisions regarding how these tools are used may be left to the discretion of line staff or determined by the courts. Thus, there is the potential for substantial variation in their implementation, even within a given program. This discretion is often not informed by solid evidence regarding the effect of these tools on cases with different characteristics.

**Despite the widespread use of enforcement tools, there is less known about how states and localities use these different tools and what effect they have on compliance.** Furthermore, it is unclear whether the effect of these tools differs based on case characteristics such as order amount, receipt of other public benefits programs, or number of child support cases. While enforcement measures may often result in increased compliance, they also run the risk of reducing a parent's ability to pay child support. For example, for some parents the threat of having their license suspended is the motivation needed for them to make the required payment. For other parents, the loss of a driver's license might make it that much harder for them to find or maintain a job that will allow them to meet their child support obligation.

**Recent investments in predictive analytics and advanced modeling by states and counties reflect a growing interest in understanding the differential effect that these enforcement tools can have on compliance.** These efforts include case stratification and using specialized units to enforce orders with certain case characteristics.<sup>24</sup> However, interest in the topic has not typically been accompanied by research exploring the effectiveness of these approaches. Research to better understand what enforcement tools are most effective for which families, and at what point in the process, would help programs target resources toward cases which are most likely to benefit.

## Potential Consequences of Enforcement Actions for Different Parents





## Ideas and Opportunities for Research



### Research objectives:

1. How do state, county, local, and tribal programs use enforcement tools?
2. How well do existing efforts to use data analytics and predictive models work in optimizing the use of enforcement tools?
3. What enforcement tools are most effective for which families, and at what point in the enforcement process?



### Example: Policy and operations research

#### Description of how child support programs and staff use enforcement tools:

- Review of state policies and approaches to explore which tools are most common and what methods are used to identify which cases receive which enforcement strategies
- Case studies describing innovative ways child support programs use different enforcement tools, focusing on areas such as:
  - How do staff manage caseloads and identify circumstances that warrant different enforcement approaches?
  - How do programs use administrative data and data analytics to inform staff decision-making regarding different enforcement techniques?



### Example: Impact evaluation research

Test the effect of license suspension (or other enforcement tools) for noncompliant cases with different payment profiles or other variations in case characteristics, to understand dimensions such as:

- For which cases was license suspension (or another enforcement tool) more effective in increasing compliance?

# ISSUE: Supporting Employment for Non-Custodial Parents

## **There is a long-term decline in labor force participation among men in the United States.<sup>25</sup>**

Given that roughly 80 percent of non-custodial parents are men, this decline in employment has substantial implications for the ability of non-custodial parents to meet their child support obligations. Census survey data reinforce this, with roughly one-third of custodial parents reporting that they have no legal child support agreement established because the other parent could not afford to pay.<sup>26</sup> Absent steady income, few non-custodial parents are able to make the child support payments that are critical to support the costs of raising a child.

## **The child support program has not historically played a role in providing employment services for non-custodial parents even though un- or under-employment can be a significant barrier to paying child support.**

However, child support programs can encourage non-custodial parents to participate in workforce programs designed to increase employment and income. In recent years, some child support agencies have begun to address this barrier by offering employment supports.<sup>27</sup> This includes instances where participation in these programs is mandatory and others in which participation in such programs is voluntary.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, recent policy guidance from the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement has reinforced that state child support agencies can obtain exemptions that allow them to use their federal incentive funds to fund employment programs.<sup>29</sup> Forthcoming evaluation results from the National Child Support Parent Employment Demonstration, funded by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, will provide an opportunity for additional learning and potential replication studies.<sup>30</sup>

## **While some non-custodial parents evade payment of formal child support, there are others whose low earnings impede their ability to pay.**

Unstable employment arrangements of low-income populations also have consequences for the stability of child support payments. Many low-income, non-custodial parents are employed in the underground economy, work as independent contractors, or switch jobs frequently.<sup>31</sup> Understanding how the child support program can best use employment services to support non-custodial parents and increase earnings stability is a critical step for increasing child support collections.

## Multiple Options to Support Parent Employment



## Ideas and Opportunities for Research



### Research objectives:

1. How does child support involvement in the provision of employment services affect child support outcomes, such as payment?
2. How can the child support program collaborate with the workforce system and other agencies providing employment services to better serve customers?



### Example: Descriptive research

Document how child support agencies engage with employment services and foster partnerships that go beyond referrals to workforce agencies:

Case studies describing:

- What are the different ways local, county, state, and tribal child support programs partner with workforce agencies?
- How do local, county, state, and tribal agencies apply evidence-based employment strategies within the child support context?



### Example: Impact evaluation research

Continued program evaluation on how the child support program can support employment of non-custodial parents:

- Does providing employment services to non-custodial parents increase child support compliance? What types of employment services are most effective?
- What unique challenges do non-custodial parents in the child support program face in finding and maintaining employment?



### Example: Policy and operations research

Describe options for child support agencies to take advantage of existing employment infrastructure, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act or the SNAP Employment and Training program:

- Are there ways to create more systematic relationships between child support agencies and employment services providers that might increase the take-up of employment services among non-custodial parents?
- Are the necessary systems in place to allow child support agencies to track participation in partner agencies' employment programs?

Longitudinal analysis linking historical survey and wage data, to examine questions such as:

- How do labor force trends vary across different family types (e.g., single-parent households, low-income, different numbers of children)?
- How can survey and wage data inform decisions about the child support program's employment efforts?

# Conclusion

**This agenda presents multiple opportunities for research that can inform the policies and operations of child support programs.** It is not exhaustive. Child support often sits at the nexus of complex family relationships and multiple public benefits programs. There are a multitude of factors that influence parents' ability to meet their child support obligations outside the control of the child support program, such as the broader economy, public health trends like the current opioid epidemic, or the increase in multi-partner fertility. However, the research and analysis ideas described in this agenda can serve as a starting point to help child support programs and research funders use the large amounts of data at their disposal to promote innovation and improvement in policy and operations.

## Suggested Citation

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## Disclaimer

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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- <sup>1</sup> Office of Child Support Enforcement (2018). *2016 Child Support Annual Report to Congress*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- <sup>2</sup> Administration for Children and Family: Archives (2004). *TANF Caseload Data 2000*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Office of Family Assistance (2016). *TANF Caseload Data 2015*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Service; Loprest, Pamela J. (2012). *How Has the TANF Caseload Changed over Time?* Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
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- <sup>5</sup> Parents must cooperate with the child support program to receive TANF, Medicaid, and foster care maintenance payments under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. States may require individuals receiving other means-tested programs to cooperate with the child support program as well, which has led to variation in which states have cooperation requirements. For more information, see Antelo, Lauren and Erica Meade (2018). *How Many Families Might be Newly Reached by Child Support Cooperation Requirements in SNAP and Subsidized Child Care, and What are their Characteristics?* Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
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