



Child Support

The Child Support Program serves one in four children in the United States and one in two poor children and their families from a child's birth until adulthood. Child Support is a national program, but policies and practices vary from state to state. Child support is particularly important to reentry because child support obligations

typically do not automatically stop during incarceration or unemployment. Realistic child support policies help parents provide for their families and facilitate successful reentry and can provide an on-ramp to many other supportive services.

Accomplishments to Date

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) published five fact sheets on [establishing realistic orders](#), [modification practices](#), [state-specific modification policies and programs regarding incarcerated parents](#), [federal prisoners with child support obligations](#), and [access to justice initiatives](#).
- OCSE has produced a "[Changing a Child Support Order](#)" guide and accompanying state-specific modules. The guide offers information to help parents—and people who work with parents—better understand the child support review and modification process. It explains how parents can request to have their child support order changed when their financial situation changes.
- OCSE created a [new webpage](#) to compile OCSE's reentry resources.
- OCSE funds employment demonstration grants in eight states for unemployed noncustodial parents to increase reliable payment of child support. Justice-involved parents tend to owe large amounts of child support, much of which accumulated while incarcerated, and these debts can create a barrier to successful reintegration. To reduce this barrier, six of the eight grantees offer state-owed debt compromise programs. In addition, other services and partnerships have been developed to meet the needs of the justice-involved population, such as expungement services in three sites, legal assistance in one site, and close collaboration with parole staff in one site.
- OCSE provided [factsheets](#) and guidance to Veterans Affairs (VA) staff members in the Veterans Justice Outreach Program and Health Care for Reentry Veterans Program, to the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) Reentry Affairs Coordinators in each federal prison, and to Reentry Council agencies' contacts.
- OCSE produced policy [guidance](#) on the U.S. Supreme Court case *Turner v. Rogers*, including guidance on [alternatives to incarceration](#) for nonpayment of child support.
- OCSE wrote items for the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and BOP's newsletters about the fact sheets; provided a guide for the BOP called "Four Basic Facts About Child Support," and provided materials to the National Reentry Resource Center Newsletter about the connection between child support and reentry.
- The Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) project, sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families, was an effort to apply a behavioral economics lens to programs that serve poor and vulnerable families. A behavioral intervention designed to increase the number of incarcerated parents who apply for modifications to reduce the amount of their child support orders was tested in Texas. This action is critical to minimizing the accumulation of arrearages while serving time. The project redesigned the mailings informing parents of the option to apply for an order modification,

which resulted in a significant increase (39 percent) in application response rate at relatively low cost. The report published in September 2014 can be found at

acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/resource/taking-the-first-step-using-behavioral-economics-to-help-incarcerated-parents-apply-for-child-support-order-modifications.

Agenda Moving Forward

Disseminate Child Support Information

The Child Support subcommittee will continue to create materials about child support and reentry for a variety of audiences, including corrections, child support, and reentry professionals. This includes creating new Reentry MythBusters to highlight the connections between reentry and the core mission of the Child Support Program, especially the relationship between child support and employment. The subcommittee will promote the “Changing a Child Support Order” guide.

Improve Court Practice and Improve Access to Justice

The Child Support subcommittee intends to identify ways to improve court practices including creating specialized resources and collaborating with attorneys and judges in the criminal justice area. They will create materials for federal judges, such as a bench card, on the importance of child support to reentry; collaborate with legal associations and organizations; publicize a

variety of models for service delivery, such as specialized courts; and improve access to justice and strengthen *pro se* initiatives. Another strategy is to encourage the identification of child support responsibilities in pre-sentence reports and identify other pre-trial services that could assist federal prisoners with child support services.

Coordinate Communications about Reentry

The Child Support subcommittee intends to identify additional opportunities to promote the intersection of child support and reentry through conference presentations, newsletter articles, and web-based learning. The subcommittee plans to improve materials available to non-child support personnel working with reentry populations by facilitating revisions to federal program and agency operating procedures, manuals, or guides to include current and specifically tailored information on child support. The Child Support subcommittee also intends to identify and promote promising practices in states and promote new grants and new partnerships.

Key Resources (Child Support)

Reentry Council

<http://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/projects/firc/>

Reentry MythBuster

<http://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/projects/mythbusters/>

National Reentry Resource Center

<http://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/>

Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE)

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css>

OCSE Fact Sheet on Realistic Orders for Incarcerated Parents and State-By-State Chart

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css/resource/realistic-child-support-orders-for-incarcerated-parents>

OCSE Fact Sheet on Collaborations with Criminal Justice Agencies

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css/resource/child-support-collaboration-with-federal-criminal-justice-agencies>

OCSE Fact Sheet on Access to Justice Innovations

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css/resource/access-to-justice-innovations>

OCSE Turner v. Rogers Policy Guidance

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css/resource/alternatives-to-incarceration> and

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css/resource/turner-v-rogers-guidance>

OCSE Guide on “Changing a Child Support Order” and State-by-State Modules

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css/resource/state-by-state-how-to-change-a-child-support-order>

OCSE Reentry Resources

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css/resource/reentry>

OCSE Newsletter Featuring Practices For Working With Incarcerated And Reentering Parents

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css/resource/march-april-2015-child-support-report>