

Children Receiving Child Support

DEFINITION

Children receiving child support is the percentage of parents who make child support payments on time and in full as indicated in the Rhode Island Office of Child Support Services system. The percentage does not include cases in which paternity has not been established or cases in which the non-custodial parent is not under a court order because he/she cannot be located. Court orders for child support and medical support require establishment of paternity.

SIGNIFICANCE

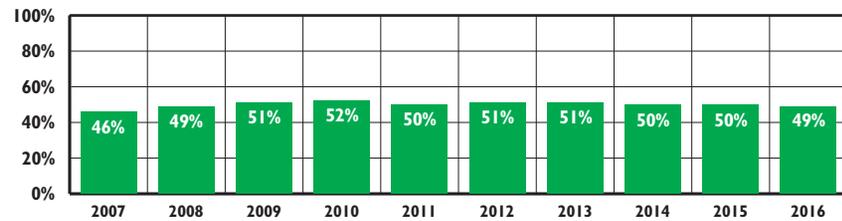
Child support is a major part of the safety net for children and families. In 2015, nearly one in four U.S. children (15.9 million) received public child support services.^{1,2} Child support provides a mechanism for non-custodial parents (usually fathers) to contribute to the financial and medical support of their children. Child support programs can increase the reliability of child support paid by helping custodial parents locate the non-custodial parent, establishing paternity and support orders, and removing barriers to payment, such as referring parents to employment services, supporting co-parenting relationships, and helping to prevent family violence.³

The receipt of child support payments can significantly improve the economic well-being of a child growing up in a

family with a non-resident parent. In 2015, child support lifted more than 750,000 U.S. children out of poverty, and for poor custodial parents that received full child support, these payments represented more than two-thirds (70%) of their mean personal income. Custodial parents who receive steady child support payments are less likely to rely on public assistance programs and more likely to find work faster and stay employed longer than those who do not.^{4,5,6}

Even when a child support order is in place, payments can be unreliable. Noncustodial parents of poor children are often poor themselves and have limited ability to provide financial support to their children.⁷ Incarcerated parents with active child support orders are unable to pay while in prison, and may face legal and financial burdens upon release.⁸ Fatherhood programs that focus on low-income, non-custodial parents and provide job skills training, employment assistance, parenting skills, relationship building with the co-parent, and links to the child support system can increase child support payments. Non-custodial parents who pay regular child support are more involved with their children, providing them with emotional and financial support. The receipt of regular child support payments can have a positive effect on children's academic achievement.^{9,10}

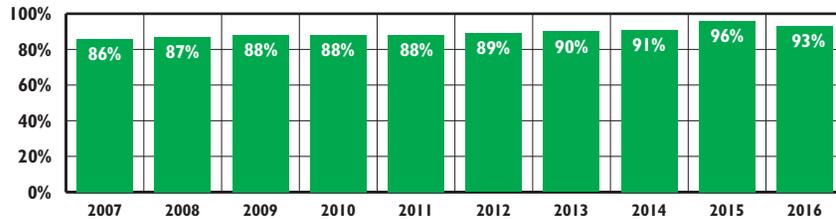
Non-Custodial Parents With Court Orders Who Pay Child Support on Time and in Full, Rhode Island, 2007-2016



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Office of Child Support Services, 2007-2016.

- ◆ As of December 1, 2016, there were 73,797 children in Rhode Island's Office of Child Support Services system, including private, interstate and IV-D cases (i.e., families receiving RI Works, RIte Care or child-care assistance). Forty-six percent of the children in the Child Support system with a known Rhode Island residence lived in the four core cities. Half (49%) of non-custodial parents under court order in Rhode Island were making child support payments on time and in full.¹¹
- ◆ In 2016, the Rhode Island Office of Child Support Services collected \$93.8 million in child support, a decrease of \$1.2 million over the previous year. Collections go toward both child support and medical support. Eighty-six percent (\$80.4 million) of the funds collected were distributed directly to families and the remainder was retained by the state and federal governments as reimbursement for RI Works (cash assistance), RIte Care health coverage, and other expenses.¹²
- ◆ In Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2015, the Rhode Island Office of Child Support Services collected \$5.86 for every \$1.00 Rhode Island spent on administering the program.¹³
- ◆ During FFY 2016, there were 19,298 court orders for non-custodial parents to provide medical insurance and 12,407 orders for non-custodial parents to contribute funds toward medical coverage. More than \$6.2 million in payments (known as "cash medical") was retained by the state to offset the cost of RIte Care, while approximately \$1.9 million was disbursed directly to families to offset the cost of private health insurance coverage or other medical expenses.¹⁴

Rhode Island Children in the Office of Child Support Services System With Paternity Established, 2007-2016



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Office of Child Support Services, 2007-2016. Includes all children in the child support system – private, interstate, and IV-D cases (i.e., cases that received assistance with child support because they were receiving RI Works, RIte Care, or child care assistance benefits).

- ◆ The percentage of children in the Rhode Island child support system with paternity established increased from 86% in 2007 to 93% of children in 2016.¹⁵
- ◆ When applying for cash assistance, child care assistance, or RIte Care, parents are asked to provide information on the other parent to the Office of Child Support Services. This information is used to establish paternity (if not already established), and to seek child support payments and/or medical support. Victims of domestic violence can apply for a waiver of this requirement if providing this information could endanger themselves or their children.^{16,17}
- ◆ In FFY 2015, Rhode Island had the lowest rate of court orders established for child support in New England (Maine – 95%; Vermont – 90%; Connecticut – 87%; Massachusetts – 86%; New Hampshire – 81%; Rhode Island – 76%). The national average for cases with child support orders established is 86%.¹⁸ In FFY 2015, Rhode Island had the highest case/staff ratio in New England at 759 cases per person, nearly five times that of the lowest state, Vermont.¹⁹ High caseloads and a low number of full time staff affects the Office of Child Support Services’ ability to establish court orders for child support.

References

^{1,13,18,19} U.S. Office of Child Support Enforcement, Administration for Children & Families. (2016). *FY 2015 preliminary report*. Table P-93. Retrieved January 17, 2017, from www.acf.hhs.gov

² Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (2016). *Table POP-1: Child population: Number of children (in millions) ages 0-17 in the United States by Age, 1950-2015 and projected 2016-2050*. Retrieved January 19, 2017, from www.childstats.gov

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Child Support and Rhode Island Works

- ◆ As of December 1, 2016, Rhode Island’s Office of Child Support Services system included 5,713 children enrolled in Rhode Island Works (RI Works).²⁰
- ◆ In 2016, the average child support obligation for children enrolled in RI Works was \$278 per month, compared to an average child support obligation of \$388 per month for children in non-RI Works families.²¹ (Calculations for child support payments are based on both parents’ incomes, so it is expected that the average child support obligation for children enrolled in RI Works would be lower.)
- ◆ In Rhode Island, only the first \$50 of child support paid on time each month on behalf of a child receiving RI Works cash assistance (called a “pass-through” payment) goes to the custodial parent caring for the child. The remainder of the payment is retained by the federal and state governments as reimbursement for assistance received through RI Works.²²
- ◆ In FFY 2016 in Rhode Island, an average of 539 families received at least one “pass-through” payment each month, for a total of \$313,927 paid to families enrolled in RI Works during FFY 2016.²³
- ◆ States have the option to increase the amount of money passed through to children. States that pass through up to \$100 per month for one child (and up to \$200 per month for two or more children) and disregard this income in calculating eligibility for cash assistance do not have to reimburse the federal government for its share of the child support collected. Since this federal policy change went into effect, a number of states have increased the amount they pass through to children.²⁴ Rhode Island has not implemented this option.²⁵
- ◆ More generous child support “pass-through” policies for families receiving cash assistance provide a greater incentive for custodial parents to seek child support and for noncustodial parents to make regular payments because more of the child support payment goes to the child. Increased “pass-throughs” could therefore increase total child support collections, increase family income, and potentially reduce the amount of other benefits.²⁶