

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

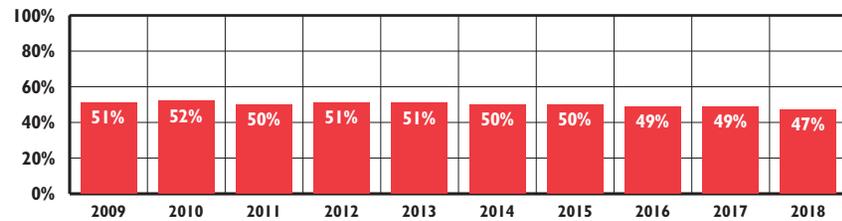
Child support is a major part of the safety net for children and families. In 2017, one in five U.S. children (15.1 million) received public child support services.^{1,2} Child support provides a mechanism for non-custodial parents (usually fathers) to contribute to the financial and medical support of their children. Child support programs can encourage responsible co-parenting and increase the reliability of child support paid by helping custodial parents locate the non-custodial parent, establishing paternity and support orders, and monitoring and enforcing child support obligations.³

Child support is a critical tool to provide resources for children living in poverty. 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 kept 790,000 U.S. children out of poverty, and for poor custodial parents that received full child support, these payments represented more than half (58%) 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 than those who do not.^{4,5,6}

For many families, 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 Child support systems that encourage relationship building with the co-parent, positive parenting, and can strengthen parent-child relationships and increase child support payments. Non-custodial parents who pay regular child support are more involved with their children, providing them with critical emotional support and care. Child support reduces the risk of child maltreatment, and has a positive effect on children's academics and behavior.^{9,10}

Non-Custodial Parents With Court Orders Who Pay Child Support on Time and in Full, Rhode Island, 2009-2018



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Office of Child Support Services, 2009-2018.

◆ As of December 1, 2018, there were 71,628 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-five percent of the children in the Child Support system with a known Rhode Island residence lived in the four core cities. Nearly half (47%) of non-custodial parents under court order in Rhode Island were making child support payments on time and in full.¹¹

◆ In 2018, the Rhode Island Office of Child Support Services collected \$94.7 million in child support, an increase of about \$273,000 over the previous year. Eighty-seven percent (\$82.7 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

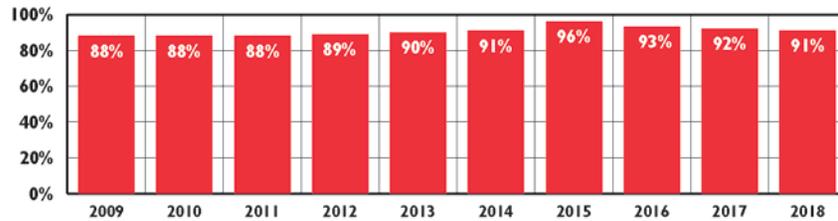
◆ In Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2017, the Rhode Island Office of Child Support Services collected \$5.85 for every \$1.00 Rhode Island spent on administering the program.¹³

◆ During FFY 2018, there were 16,313 court orders for non-custodial parents to provide medical insurance and 9,650 orders for non-custodial parents to contribute funds toward medical coverage. More than \$4.3 million in payments was retained by the state to offset the cost of RIte Care, while approximately \$3.1 million was disbursed directly to families to offset the cost of private health insurance coverage or other medical expenses.¹⁴

◆ In 2017, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed a law that allows the Office of Child Support Services to automatically file a motion to modify or a motion for relief when a noncustodial parent is or will be incarcerated for 180 days or more. This law also clarifies that incarceration may not be considered by the court as "voluntary unemployment."¹⁵

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Rhode Island Children in the Office of Child Support Services System With Paternity Established, 2009-2018



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Office of Child Support Services, 2009-2018. 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 88% of children in 2009 to 91% of children in 2018.¹⁶
- ◆ 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.^{17,18}
- ◆ In FFY 2017, Rhode Island had the lowest rate of court orders established for child support in New England (Maine – 95%; Connecticut – 93%; Vermont – 89%; Massachusetts – 89%; New Hampshire – 82%; Rhode Island – 77%). The national average for cases with child support orders established is 87%.¹⁹
- ◆ In FFY 2017, Rhode Island had the highest case/staff ratio in New England at 704 cases per person, nearly five times that of the lowest state, Vermont (141 cases per person).²⁰ 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

^{1,13,19,20} U.S. Office of Child Support Enforcement, Administration for Children & Families. (2018). *FY 2017 preliminary report*. Retrieved January 29, 2019, 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, 1950-2017 and projected 2018-2050*. Retrieved January 29, 2019, from www.childstats.gov

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Child Support and Rhode Island Works

- ◆ As of December 1, 2018, Rhode Island's Office of Child Support Services system included 4,883 children enrolled in the cash assistance program (Rhode Island Works [RI Works]).²¹
- ◆ In December 2018, the average child support obligation for children enrolled in RI Works was \$295 per month, compared to an average child support obligation of \$407 per month for children in non-RI Works families.²² (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.²³
- ◆ An average of 413 families received at least one "pass-through" payment each month, for a total of \$239,512 paid to families enrolled in RI Works in FFY 2018.²⁴
- ◆ States have the option to increase the amount of money passed through to children. Pass through money is not included in calculating eligibility for cash assistance, which means it does not reduce the amount of the family's cash assistance. Under this federal policy, a number of states have increased the amount they pass through to children. Some states pass through up to \$100 per month for one child (and up to \$200 per month for two or more children). Rhode Island is one of eight states with a pass-through policy that limits the pass-through amount to \$50, regardless of the number of children in the household.^{25,26}
- ◆ 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 custodial family income, and potentially encourage constructive coparenting.^{27,28}