

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.

SIGNIFICANCE

Child support provides a mechanism for non-custodial parents (usually fathers) to contribute to the financial support of their children. Formal agreements are established when parents divorce or separate or when a custodial parent applies for certain public benefits. In Rhode Island, the Office of Child Support Services helps custodial parents locate noncustodial parents, establish paternity/parentage, get or modify a court order, collect child support payments (mostly through payroll withholding), and enforce orders. Families may seek help voluntarily by paying a small fee.^{1,2}

The public Child Support Enforcement program was enacted in 1975 as a federal-state program (Title IV-D of the *Social Security Act*) to recover a portion of public expenditures. Federal law requires that when parents apply for cash assistance or Medicaid coverage for their children, they must participate in the public child support enforcement program and must assign their child support rights to the

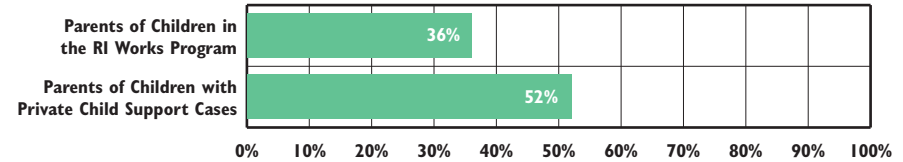
state. State child welfare agencies are also authorized under federal law to require one or both parents of children in foster care to make child support payments to the state.¹

After child support orders are established, they continue in full force until the child turns 18 or graduates from high school. Enforcement actions are often automated and include credit bureau reporting, seizure of tax refunds, revocation of driver's licenses, and incarceration.³

Child support is intended to improve the economic security of children. These payments are vital for many custodial parents, one-quarter of whom live in poverty. However, many non-custodial parents earn low wages and struggle to make payments while meeting their own basic needs. Enforcement actions often limit future income and lead to worse problems. Instead, many states are now offering employment services to noncustodial parents to help them increase their earnings. The child support system can help when non-custodial parents have financial resources, but policymakers increasingly recognize that a punitive system of child support enforcement is not an effective strategy to improve the economic security of many children.^{4,5}



On-Time, In-Full Child Support Payments Collected, Rhode Island, December 1, 2025

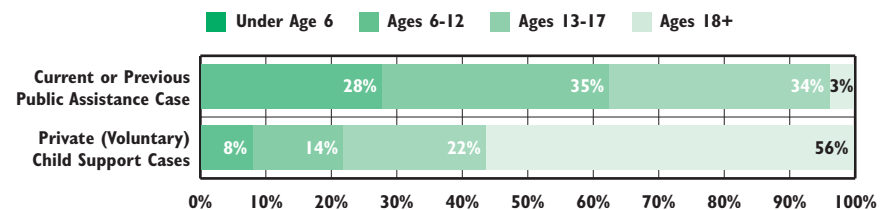


Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Office of Child Support Services, 2025. The percentage does not include cases in which paternity/parentage has not been established or cases in which the non-custodial parent is not under a court order because he/she cannot be located.

- ◆ As of December 1, 2025, there were 32,080 children associated with past or present public assistance cases and 21,078 children associated with private cases in Rhode Island's Office of Child Support Services system. Cases remain active as long as the child support order is in place, beyond the receipt of any public assistance.⁶
- ◆ Thirty-six percent of non-custodial parents of children receiving RI Works cash assistance who had a court order for child support made on-time, in-full payments as of December 1, 2025.⁶
- ◆ Fifty-two percent of non-custodial parents associated with a voluntary, private case who were under a child support court order made on time, in-full payments as of December 1, 2025.⁶



Active Child Support Cases by Age of Child, Rhode Island, December 1, 2025



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Office of Child Support Services, December 2025. The Office of Child Support Services may continue to try to collect past due child support for children who are over age 18.

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Child Support Collections in Millions, Rhode Island, Calendar Year 2025

	TOTAL OBLIGATIONS	TOTAL COLLECTED	TOTAL RETAINED BY STATE/FEDERAL GOVERNMENT	TOTAL DISTRIBUTED TO CUSTODIAL PARENTS
Current or Past Public Assistance Cases	\$71.1	\$47.7	\$7.6	\$40.1
Private Child Support Cases	\$91.3	\$42.0	\$0	\$38.9
Total	\$162.4	\$89.7	\$7.6	\$79.0

Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Office of Child Support Services, 2025.

◆ In Calendar Year 2025, the Rhode Island Office of Child Support Services collected \$89.7 million in child support payments (excluding interstate cases), including 67% of funds owed for public assistance cases and 46% owed for private cases.⁶

◆ For current or past public assistance cases, 84% of funds collected were distributed to custodial parents and 16% of funds were retained as cost-recovery for public benefits. For private cases, 93% of funds were distributed to custodial parents.⁶

◆ In Federal Fiscal Year 2024, the Rhode Island Office of Child Support Services collected \$3.62 from non-custodial parents for every \$1.00 spent on administering the program down from \$5.36 in 2020.⁷



Past Due Child Support, Rhode Island, Calendar Year 2025

	TOTAL PAST-DUE PAYMENTS OWED BY NON-CUSTODIAL PARENTS	NUMBER OF PARENTS WITH PAST-DUE AMOUNTS OVER \$10,000
Current or Past Public Assistance Cases	\$164.9 million	4,339
Private Child Support Cases	\$629.9 million	10,189
Total	\$794.8 million	14,528

Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Office of Child Support Services, 2025.

◆ Almost all parents who owe substantial child support debt have very low incomes. Enforcement mechanisms, including suspending driver's licenses, criminal prosecution, and incarceration, can make it more difficult for non-custodial parents to achieve financial stability and pay child support.⁶

◆ As of 2016, the federal government requires states to consider non-custodial parents' ability to pay when determining child support orders and pursuing enforcement actions. Rhode Island law requires the Office of Child Support Services to file a motion for relief when a non-custodial parent is or will be incarcerated for 180 days or more.⁸



RI Public Assistance Programs and Child Support

◆ **RI Works Cash Assistance:** In Rhode Island, only the first \$50 of child support paid on time each month is passed through to custodial parents enrolled in RI Works. The rest is retained as cost-recovery for cash assistance. Increasing the amount of child support funds passed through to custodial parents is associated with increased collections and can reduce child poverty and the risk of child maltreatment.^{6,9} During Federal Fiscal Year 2025, the state collected \$1.7 million in child support for custodial parents who received RI Works benefits and distributed \$444,884 to families. On average, 384 families received a pass-through payment each month. Increasing the pass-through to \$100 for one child and \$200 for two or more children would have resulted in an additional \$594,800 in support for families.⁶

◆ **Medicaid and Cash Medical Child Support:** During Federal Fiscal Year 2025, there were 5,853 court orders associated with past or present public assistance, 1,626 court orders associated with private cases, and 219 court orders associated with interstate cases for cash payments to cover health insurance for children. Rhode Island collected \$7.1 million in cash medical payments, retaining \$5.2 million (74%) as cost-recovery for Medicaid/RIte Care and transferring \$1.9 million (26%) to custodial parents to help cover commercial insurance.¹⁰

◆ **Children in Foster Care/Out-of-Home Placement:** As of December 1, 2025, 86 children in foster care or out-of-home placement had an active case in the RI Office of Child Support Services system; most did not have child support orders established. Information was not available on the collection or distribution of child support funds for these children. In 2022, the federal government issued guidance encouraging states to stop seeking child support payments for children in foster care because it was counter-productive and not cost-effective.⁶

◆ **Children Enrolled in the Child Care Assistance Program:** As of December 1, 2025, 7,001 children with current or past participation in the RI Child Care Assistance Program had an active child support case in the RI Office of Child Support Services system. Rhode Island is one of only a few states that require participation in Child Support Enforcement to qualify for a child care subsidy. This requirement can be burdensome and there is no evidence it helps families access additional funds to improve their financial security.^{11,12}

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