

Child Support Report



OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

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Pennsylvania Child Support Community: Painting a Pattern of 'Unprecedented' Success

By Elaine Blackman and John Clark
OCSE

Ask Director Dan Richard how the Pennsylvania Bureau of Child Support Enforcement (BCSE) continues to exceed the national averages on Federal performance measures, and he will paint a picture that recognizes many people and aspects of the program for their synergistic work together every day. For example, about the State's "percent of current collections" surpassing the national average by 19 percent (as of this July), Richard might explain the State's extensive partnerships with county agencies and organizations. Or, about the "percent of cases with arrears" exceeding the national average by 17 percent, he may detail the innovative employment-assistance project for noncustodial parents.

OCSE Commissioner Vicki Turetsky applauds Pennsylvania for "exceeding 80 percent on all measures through July—performance that's unprecedented in the history of the national child support program."

Director Richard may also mention the financial side of child support. For receiving payments, electronic income withholding is mandatory for any mid-size or large employer. This enables the State to provide quicker payments to families at a lower cost to taxpayers. For disbursing payments, customers must receive their child support payments via direct deposit or debit card (with only a few exceptions). This has expedited payments, substantially decreased undistributed collections, and reduced costs to families that no longer use check-cashing agencies.

Richard might also say that treating clients and coworkers with respect illustrates an attitude he has promoted throughout the child support community for the past 15 years. Respect is "vital in our line of work to achieve our most important outcome—financial support for children and their families," says Richard. This includes providing respectful customer service to noncustodial parents who are unable to meet their child support, for example, through case reviews for possible modification of the child support order or offering employment assistance.

Strong Blending of Partners

BCSE credits much of its success in performance to partnerships with the County Domestic Relations offices that run the program, as well as with the Domestic Relations Association of Pennsylvania. BCSE carefully considers county input during implementation of new State and Federal laws

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Child Support Enforcement



and regulations and when developing and implementing system enhancements. Every county monitors its own performance through a user-friendly data warehouse “Dashboard” system.

BCSE also is pleased with its effective partnership with hospitals through its regional BCSE offices. This has resulted in more than 75 percent of unwed births having a voluntary acknowledgement signed in the hospital. BCSE administration of the voluntary acknowledgement data base has improved its use by Pennsylvania counties and other States.

Through one project, New Opportunities for Non-Custodial Parents (NEON), BCSE helps parents in large, urban and suburban counties secure employment. The project is designed to rapidly assist noncustodial parents into the workforce through job placement, job retention, and the consistent collection of child support payments while providing medical coverage to children.

In 2008, NEON realized \$4.2 million in child support from parents—mostly fathers—who otherwise would not have been able to pay or would have struggled with the enforcement techniques used by the courts; \$2.6 million was collected in child support in Philadelphia alone.

In addition to NEON, BCSE works with 17 counties that partner with the State Workforce Agency to provide employment assistance to noncustodial parents. These partnerships have decreased the number of noncustodial parents found in contempt and increased the amount of

payments from those previously unable to meet their child support obligations.

The Big Picture

Pennsylvania BCSE is also prepared for the challenge of providing medical support to children, with an establishment rate of 85 percent and an enforcement rate of nearly 84 percent through July 2009. If parents do not have access to affordable health insurance, the State also obtains affordable health care for children

by enrolling them in the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and includes child support cash payments to

cover out-of-pocket medical expenses in every order.

For the immediate future, Richard notes, “a promising development in Pennsylvania and other States is the emphasis on realistic, collectible orders carefully tailored to the noncustodial parent’s ability to pay. This is coupled with early, 15-day intervention to foster and maintain productive payment patterns, proactive arrears management, and modifications where warranted.”

The combination of effective partnerships, innovation, and assistance to noncustodial parents—and a respectful attitude among fellow child support workers and with customers—has kept BCSE ahead of the national average in performance.

For further information about Pennsylvania BCSE, please contact Thomas Sheaffer at 717-783-7792 or thsheaffer@state.pa.us.



*Wow!
CE Credits
are being
offered!*

*Excellent!
I'll register
before the
Oct. 19
deadline.*



**OCSE 19th National
Child Support Enforcement
Training Conference
November 2 - 4, 2009
Washington, DC**

FREE Registration!

**Renaissance Washington Hotel
999 Ninth Street, NW
Washington, DC
202-898-9000**

**Extended:
*Register by Oct. 19!***

***“Dollars and Sense:
Child Support in a
Changing Economy”***

Commissioner's Voice

Child Support's Role in Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families



The child support program is one of the few government programs that systematically reach men, and the only one to do so in their roles as fathers. Over the past two decades, we have learned a great deal about the circumstances of low-income families and fathers, and the role of the child support program

in furthering responsible fatherhood and healthy families has continued to grow. The results of demonstration projects and research help to inform us as we pursue evidence-based practices in our program that highlight the importance of financial and emotional support from both parents. We now know that financial and emotional support go hand-in-hand.

The child support program contributes to the Federal and State funding and technical assistance available for comprehensive services to low-income parents through collaborations with TANF, child welfare, courts, the workforce system, corrections departments, veterans programs, domestic violence programs, and many faith- and community-based fatherhood programs.

These collaborations help carry out President Obama's commitment to responsible fatherhood and healthy families. The President spoke compellingly about the importance to children of having two committed and nurturing parents when the White House hosted a Father's Day event. Then, in August, the White House launched the first in a series of forums called Regional Town Hall Meetings on Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families. The forum opened with a video of the President's Father's Day speech.

This forum, held in Chicago (see the article on page 4), brought together representatives from fatherhood groups that have long partnered with the region's child support community through grant projects and case work. Discussions included topics familiar to many of us in the child support community—barriers to employment, including incarceration and transportation; working with employers and community-based organizations to support recruitment, hiring, and retention efforts; and a more holistic family-focused approach to supporting children.

The regional forums aim to gather information from parents, community leaders, and State and local government representatives. The national conversation emerging from these forums will help the Administration to identify and implement sound practices and policies that support healthy families.

Even during this economic downturn, I am pleased to see that many State child support programs are implementing policies and practices that help remove barriers to responsible fatherhood; Pennsylvania stands out as one such State. Pennsylvania's unprecedented performance numbers demonstrate that the child support program can increase its effectiveness when it includes responsible fatherhood services in its mix of enforcement strategies. The article on the front page highlights a few of the State child support efforts, under the leadership of Director Dan Richard, including a project that partners with parents and community employment resources.

I look forward to seeing more community-building efforts among all levels of government toward our mutual goal of improving our services to strengthen families and improve child well-being.

Vicki Turetsky

Chicago Town Hall Meeting Continues National Conversation on Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families

By **Debra Pontisso**
OCSE

The first of a series of Regional Town Hall Meetings on Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families was held on Aug. 5 at the University of Illinois Chicago. The event was cosponsored by the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, the Administration for Children and Families (OCSE and Office of Family Assistance), and the HHS Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

The forum was spurred by President Barack Obama's June 19 Father's Day event at the White House where he announced a series of regional meetings to be held across the country to initiate a national conversation on fatherhood and to address the challenge of father absence in America.

The meetings will explore how all can work together—individuals, families, community organizations, and government—to strengthen fathers and families. (See a [transcript](#) or a [video](#) of the President's remarks.)

The Chicago forum started with a Community Roundtable meeting to let representatives from the White House and HHS hear from leaders of community- and faith-based organizations, researchers, and service

practitioners about the challenges faced by fathers and families. Just as important, the roundtable provided information about successful local programs.

More than 70 community leaders participated in one of four roundtable discussions: connecting anti-violence and fatherhood; mentoring young men and future fathers; fatherhood and economic stability; and promising practices for increasing father involvement.

The Town Hall meeting followed with more than 300 participants, including a cross-section of fathers and mothers, service providers, community- and faith-based organizations, researchers, and State and local government representatives. Facilitating one portion of the meeting were White House officials Michael Strautmanis, Special Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff for the Office Public Engagement, and Joshua DuBois, Executive Director, Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. A highlight of this session was personal testimonials from three fathers. The other portion of the Town Hall focused on soliciting audience feedback on responsible fatherhood program practices and healthy family policy options.

The next meeting in the series was to take place Sept. 23 in Manchester, NH.



"If we want our children to succeed in life, we need fathers to step up. We need fathers to understand that their work doesn't end with conception—that what truly makes a man a father is the ability to raise a child and invest in that child."

President Barack Obama June 19, 2009



WHITE HOUSE COMMUNITY ROUNDTABLE
and TOWN HALL MEETING on
**RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD
and HEALTHY FAMILIES**

August 5, 2009

Economic Recovery Payments Bring \$108.5 Million



As of August 21, OCSE received and sent to States more than 439,000 intercepts, totaling \$108.5 million, from the one-time \$250 Economic Recovery Payments (ERP). This total includes ERP offsets from Veteran's

Compensation and Pension beneficiaries, Social Security, Supplemental Security Income and Railroad Retirement Board beneficiaries owing past-due child support.

Overall, the Federal offset program has collected more than \$2.06 billion so far this year. Check this newsletter for future tax and administrative offset program updates!

Passport Denial Program



California Sees Second Largest Collection

As temperatures started to fall in September, collections from the Passport Denial program continued to rise. The second largest collection since the program's inception—\$407,136—was reported, along with two others over \$100,000. All of these were collected as a result of employment opportunities for noncustodial parents overseas.

- **California \$407,136:** Professional athlete working in Russia. The custodial parent plans to start a savings account for her child for college.

- **New York \$158,474:** Noncustodial parent hired by a company in the Middle East.
- **South Carolina \$108,000:** Noncustodial parent works in the Far East and needed his visa renewed, which requires a valid passport.

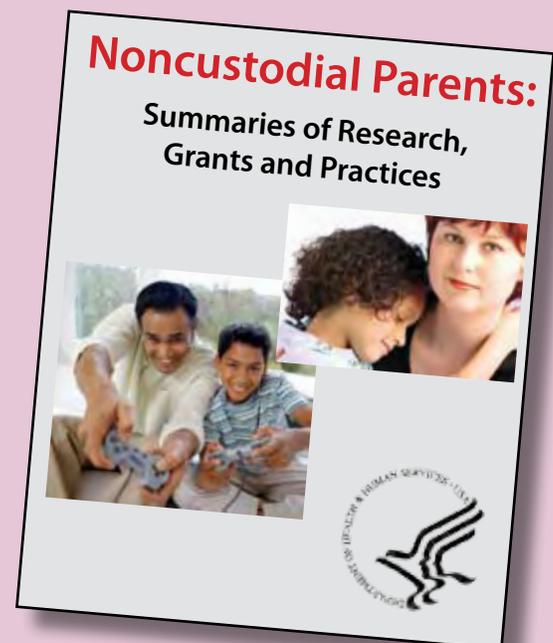
Since 1998, the Passport Denial program has collected over \$180.2 million in voluntarily reported lump-sum payments. For more information on the Passport Denial program or to report a success story, please contact Rebecca Hamil at rebecca.hamilton@acf.hhs.gov.

New Publication Highlights Noncustodial Parent Initiatives

OCSE recently published "*Noncustodial Parents: Summaries of Research, Grants and Practices*," available on the Web site.

The report contains information on projects related to: fatherhood and employment and training; child access and visitation; incarceration and reentry; and projects in progress. It is designed to disseminate information to the child support program and research communities regarding State or local experiences; share successes or lessons learned; and provide potential grantees with a baseline of information regarding past projects.

Please contact Debra Pontisso (debra.pontisso@acf.hhs.gov) or John Jolley (john.jolley@acf.hhs.gov) with any questions.



New Louisiana Law to Improve Child Support Payment Processing

By Sandra A. Broussard
OCSE



As a rule, employers are supposed to send all (IV-D and non-IV-D) child support payments to a centralized payment site called a State Disbursement Unit (SDU). Often, however, an employer receives a private order directing the child support payment to the custodial parent, or in some cases, the attorney of record for the custodial parent.

What should an employer do when a child support income withholding order arrives, directing payment to the custodial parent? In Louisiana, the answer is: Call the SES-State Office Customer Service Unit at 225-342-4780.

Louisiana recently enacted legislation that allows the Department of Social Services to redirect child support payments through the SDU by notifying the affected parties: custodial parent, noncustodial parent/employee, and employer. A copy of the notice will also be filed with the court of continuing jurisdiction. (See pages 3 – 5 in the [legislation](#).)

Why is it a problem for employers to NOT send payments to SDUs? Employers prefer, and in fact are required, to send all payments to the SDU; however,

employers are also required to withhold child support payments from their employees' pay per the terms of the court or administrative order.

Louisiana Support Enforcement Services became aware of this problem when a large employer was sent numerous child support income withholding orders directing payments be sent to the custodial parents and not to the SDU. This violated both State and Federal law, which mandates one standard payment address in each State for employers to use.

Before the recent legislation, changing the payment flow on court-ordered withholdings was a cumbersome and lengthy process. Attorneys and custodial parents had to be notified, and in one jurisdiction, the chief judge was not convinced that the change was necessary.

How did Louisiana fix this problem? Easy! It turned to its neighbor for a model: Texas legislation allows the child support agency to administratively redirect payments on court-ordered income withholdings.

Was this legislative change hard to accomplish? While it was anticipated there would be some objections to the legislation, the bill moved through the house and senate with just one amendment to the bill.

What are the results? Employers greatly appreciate Louisiana's quick response to the issue they raised. Since payments from employers comprise almost 70 percent of all child support collections, Louisiana wanted to make the remittance process easier. You can bet employers will be prompt in sharing Louisiana's good news, and results will show faster payments to families!

Florida FIDM Breaks Record

By Mike Ellis

Florida Child Support Enforcement



Florida broke its in-state record for Financial Institution Data Match (FIDM) collections in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2009, collecting \$5.22 million—an 11.4-percent increase from its previous record in 2005 and an 18-percent increase in collections from SFY 2008.

Florida's automated enforcement system sorts FIDM matches and generates levies to the financial institutions. The Automated Tracking of Levy Actions Statewide system, or ATLAS, streamlines the lien and levy processes and helps increase productivity. Among other things, ATLAS has the ability to track financial institution compliance, generate lien and levy requests (for financial institutions conducting business in and outside of the

State), and maintain a log for all correspondence.

In addition to ATLAS, Florida has a small, dedicated staff that works tirelessly contacting financial institutions and proactively seeking the assets located through FIDM. FIDM process supervisor Joanna Jenije said, "We had so many matches in the latter portion of the fiscal year that we asked some staff to work a half-day on Saturdays to get freeze notices prepared to send on Mondays."

OCSE sends 2 million accounts belonging to over 1 million individuals to States each quarter. To assist States with the high volume of matches received each quarter, OCSE is able to create a report that sorts the matches by highest potential collection by comparing the arrears balance with the account balance provided by the Multistate Financial Institution. If your State is interested in receiving this report, please contact matthew.marsolais@acf.hhs.gov.

Los Angeles County Staff Fit 'Children's Closet' Into Their Lives

By Al Reyes

Los Angeles County Child Support Services Department

Staff at California's L.A. County Child Support Services Department (CSSD) is going above and beyond its mission of collecting child support and providing good services to families and children. Last winter, staff established Children's Closet, a volunteer project that provides free clothing to needy families who use CSSD services.

The idea began in the Torrance Division in the South Bay area of L.A. County. Carol Freeman-Elliott, a division child support officer, was moved by watching a family leave the CSSD office.

"It was a cold Wednesday and I was letting my car warm up," recalled Freeman-Elliott. "I noticed two little girls walking out of the building with their mother. Following were more children and none of them had on coats. The oldest brother had on a coat that didn't fit and the mother was holding an infant with only a receiving blanket. The mother had on flip flops, shorts, and a tank top. There were seven children total."

Freeman-Elliott talked with coworkers and found out the family needed some help. She received permission to send an e-mail to staff requesting donations of clothes. The response filled four boxes that were delivered to the very grateful custodial parent.

Freeman-Elliott held a follow-up meeting with Division Area Administrator Claudia Myles and Staff Attorney

(From left)
Carolyn Freeman-Elliott, Sherrie Barmore, and Gleda Anderson add new clothes to the "Closet"



Gleda Anderson. They agreed there was an ongoing need to help families with clothes, and the Children's Closet was born on March 1. It was created for families with open cases with CSSD.

A small, unused office was commandeered and outfitted with hanging racks and small plastic carts with drawers. A committee was quickly formed with staff volunteering much of their own time before and after work and during their lunch hours. They organized and inventoried all of the items that flowed in from the division's generous staff.

"It was heartwarming to see the response with the donations of gently worn clothing as well as the cash donations and purchases of new underwear and socks and all sizes of children's shoes, clothes, and jackets," commented Gleda Anderson. "Not only is the Children's Closet bursting with clothing in every size, but each committee member also has at least one large bin under her desk filled with back-up clothing to keep their particular area filled!"

CSSD Director Steven Golightly says Children's Closet is an exceptional effort. "Over the past year our staff has faced a lot of change from our conversion to California's statewide child support computer system and is always working hard to continue to improve performance to help families," said Golightly. "The fact that staff still found

time to establish Children's Closet and involve their coworkers shows tremendous compassion and commitment to our customers."

For further information, please contact Al Reyes, Division Chief, Communications and Marketing, at 323-832-7216 or al_reyes@cssd.lacounty.gov.



Many members of L.A. County's Torrance Division pitched in on the clothing project.



In-Kind Payments a Useful Enforcement Strategy

By Deborah Yates

Director, Comanche Nation Child Support Program

Tribal child support programs continually seek new strategies that encourage responsible parenting so that children will know that both parents love and provide for them. Keeping this outcome in mind, several programs have pursued financial support effectively through in-kind (or non-cash) payments, an innovative enforcement strategy unique to Tribal programs.

The Federal regulations that authorize Tribal child support state that Tribal programs may accept in-kind payments for child support. Basically, if a parent is unable to work, but can provide another service or product, this may be applied to a current child support obligation. Use of this strategy must be clearly stated in the Tribal code. This non-cash option is written in the Comanche Children and Relations Code 2008 and states that the Children's Court may allow part of the child support obligation to be paid with non-cash support, if the custodial parent agrees, and if a dollar amount is assigned to the non-cash support.

This means a noncustodial parent may provide beadwork, auto repair, firewood, wild game, fish, or child care for the family or the child. It is important to note that the custodial parent must agree to this and the court will assign a dollar amount for this product or service.

Here's one scenario: Mom has a 2004 Honda Accord; Dad is a pretty good "shade tree mechanic" and so he repairs the starter. Dad will determine how much this repair would cost Mom if she took it into the shop. Mom must agree to the repair and the dollar amount and if it is \$175, that amount will go towards current child support. This must be approved by the Children's Court Judge as well. The car starts; Mom can safely drive children to school or wherever needed and the children know that Dad helped out the family.

Another scenario: Junior wants to fancy dance and Mom knows that Dad does the best beadwork in all of Comanche Country. Dad will do the beadwork for Junior's outfit and the cost will be applied to current child support. Junior wins first place in contests all across Indian Country, and he feels the pride of being a Comanche and the love of both parents.

Please remember that non-cash support will not be accepted for public assistance money debt (State-owed monies) and only Tribal child support programs may practice this option. Also, this may not be an option if there is any indicator of domestic violence.

For further information, please contact the child support office in the Comanche Nation Family Services Building at 1921 E. Gore Blvd., Lawton, OK; call 1-877-357-2627; visit the Comanche Nation Web site at www.comanchenation.com/ChildSupport.html; or e-mail childsupport@comanchenation.com.

Promising Practices

OCSE 'Promising Practices' Moving to *Child Support Report*



For the past several years, OCSE has published a periodic "Compendium of Promising Practices/Good Ideas in Child Support Enforcement." The publication offers summaries of innovative State and local program operations that highlight cost-effective results.

The final 2008 edition of the *compendium* is available on the Web site.

In the future, new reports on promising practices will appear in the *Child Support Report*. Please continue to send "promising practices" to sue.sosler@acf.hhs.gov. We depend on your submissions to provide this valuable publication.



National Out-of-Wedlock Birth Rate Sets Record High

By Debra Pontisso
OCSE

Based on preliminary data from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), more children (4.3 million) were born in 2007 than any year in the Nation's history. Of this number, nearly 40 percent or 1.7 million of all live births were to unmarried women—another record high. (See the *National Vital Statistics Report*, released March 18.)

The chart below illustrates the steady increase in the national out-of-wedlock birth rates in the last 30 years.

Impact on State Child Support Programs

Evidence shows that unwed parents will likely comprise a growing majority of the child support client caseload based on demographic changes.

For example, the following data from States confirm that, as of 2006, unwed parents make up over half of the caseloads:

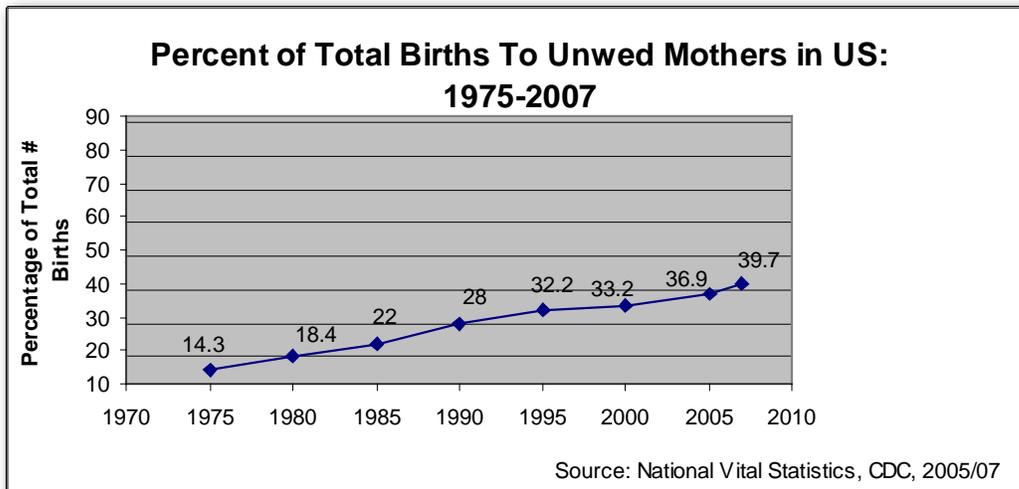
- Connecticut 67%
- Iowa 68%
- Michigan 62%
- New Hampshire 63%
- Virginia 66%
- Texas 68%



The significant change in the landscape of families and children in America over the past couple of decades has been influenced, to a large degree, by the increase in out-of-wedlock births and the number of children being raised in households with one biological parent.

Family formation issues—due to continued increase in the nonmarital births—are exacerbated by other dynamics, such as incarceration, economic downturn, and multiple partner fertility. All of these foretell the changing face of the State child support caseload.

The hallmark of good planning is to anticipate future trends. For the child support program, this should include the likelihood that the caseload will continue to encompass a large percentage of unwed parents.





USDA Releases 'Expenditures on Children by Families, 2008'

Since 1960, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has provided estimates of annual expenditures on children from birth through age 17. Estimates are for husband-wife and single-parent families and are provided by age of children, household income level, major budgetary component (housing, food, etc.), and region (for husband-wife families). These estimates may be used by States in setting child support guidelines and foster care payments.

USDA recently released the latest report, "Expenditures on Children by Families, 2008." The report is based on 2005 – 2006 Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE) data, updated to 2008 dollars using the Consumer Price Index.

The CE collects overall household expenditure data for some budgetary components (housing, food, transportation, health care, and miscellaneous goods and services) and child-specific expenditure data for other components (clothing, child care, and education). Child-specific expenses were allocated directly to children. Food and health care were allocated to children based on findings from Federal surveys on children's budget shares. Family-related transportation expenses and miscellaneous expenses were allocated by using a per capita method. The average cost of an additional bedroom approach was used to estimate housing expenses on a child.

Some of the findings from the most recent study are:

- Child-rearing expenses vary considerably by household income level and age of the child. For a child in a two-child, husband-wife family, annual expenses ranged from \$8,330 to \$9,450 (depending on age on the child) for households with before-tax income less than \$56,870, from \$11,610 to \$13,480 for households with before-tax income between \$56,870 and \$98,470, and from \$19,250 to \$22,960 for households with before-tax income more than \$98,470.
- As a proportion of total child-rearing expenses, housing accounted for the largest share across income groups, comprising 32 to 35 percent of total expenses on a child. For families in the middle

income group, food and child care/education (for those with the expense) were the next largest expenditures on a child, each accounting for 16 percent of child-rearing expenses.

- Overall annual child-rearing expenses were highest for husband-wife families in the urban Northeast, followed by families in the urban West and urban Midwest; families in the urban South and rural areas had the lowest child-rearing expenses.
- Compared with expenditures on each child in a two-child, husband-wife family, expenditures by husband-wife households with one child averaged 25 percent more on the single child and expenditures by households with three or more children averaged 22 percent less on each child.

The report is available on the [USDA Web site](#).

Child Support Report



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