

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. One in four U.S. children (17 million) receives child support services.¹ 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 promote family self-sufficiency and child well-being by helping custodial parents locate the non-custodial parent, establishing paternity, establishing support orders, collecting support payments and providing non-custodial parents with services, such as reviews of their support orders.²

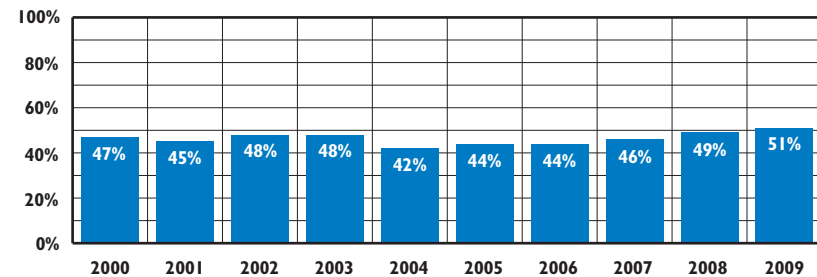
The receipt of child support payments can significantly improve the

economic well-being of a child growing up in a family with a non-resident parent.³ For poor families that receive child support, these payments represent almost one-half (48%) of their income.⁴ Custodial parents who receive steady child support payments are less likely to receive cash assistance and more likely to find work more quickly and to maintain that employment longer than those who do not.⁵

For many families, even when a child support order is in place, payments can be unreliable. Low-income non-custodial parents often earn low wages and have high rates of joblessness, and children are unlikely to receive reliable support when their non-custodial parents do not have stable employment.^{6,7} Programs that offer job training and employment services, substance abuse treatment, family counseling, and parenting education can help non-custodial parents meet their child support obligations.^{8,9}

Non-custodial fathers who pay regular child support are more involved with their children, providing them with emotional and financial support.^{10,11} Research also shows that the receipt of regular child support payments can have a positive effect on children's academic achievement.¹²

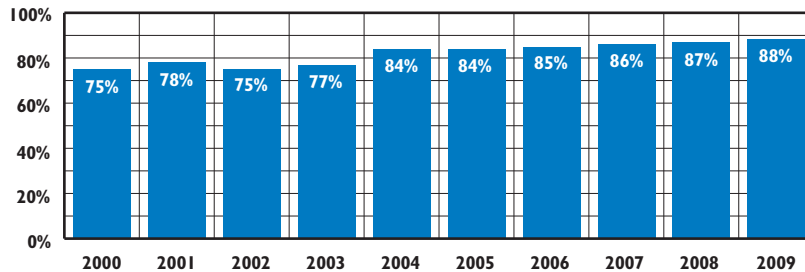
Non-Custodial Parents With Court Orders Who Pay Child Support On-Time and in Full, Rhode Island, 2000–2009



Sources: Rhode Island Department of Administration, Office of Child Support Enforcement, 2000-2004. Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Office of Child Support Services, 2005-2009.

- ◆ As of December 1, 2009, there were 84,746 Rhode Island children in the Rhode Island Office of Child Support Services system and over half (57%) of the children with a known Rhode Island residence lived in the six core cities. Fifty-one percent (51%) of non-custodial parents under court order in Rhode Island were making child support payments on time and in full.¹³
- ◆ In 2009, the Rhode Island Office of Child Support Services collected almost \$81.5 million in child support, about \$1 million less than the previous year. Eighty-five percent (\$69.1 million) of these funds were distributed directly to families.¹⁴ State officials attribute declines in the amount of collections to the state's high unemployment rate, noting that many parents who paid child support in the past are no longer able to make these payments.¹⁵ Non-custodial parents who are unable to meet their child support obligations may be required to participate in job search and matching assistance.¹⁶
- ◆ The Office of Child Support Services is a cost-effective program. For every \$1.00 Rhode Island spends, it collects \$6.76.¹⁷ Collections go towards both child support and medical support. Some funds are distributed to families and others are used to reimburse the state and federal governments for cash assistance (RI Works) and RIte Care costs.¹⁸
- ◆ During Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2009, there were 11,157 court orders for medical insurance and 8,915 orders to pay for medical coverage. A total of \$4.6 million in payments (known as "cash medical") was retained by the state to offset the cost of RIte Care, while approximately \$1.2 million was disbursed directly to families to offset the cost of private coverage or other medical expenses.¹⁹

Rhode Island Children in the Office of Child Support Services System With Paternity Established, 2000-2009



Sources: Rhode Island Department of Administration, Office of Child Support Enforcement, 2000-2004. Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Office of Child Support Services, 2005-2009. Includes all children in the child support system -- private, interstate, and IV-D cases (i.e., those cases that received assistance with child support because they were receiving RI Works, RIte Care, or child care assistance benefits).

- ◆ Between 2000 and 2009, the percentage of children in the Rhode Island child support system with paternity established increased from 75% of children in 2000 to 88% of children in 2009, an increase of 17%.²⁰
- ◆ Despite increases in the percentage of children with paternity established, in FFY 2008, Rhode Island had the lowest rate of court orders for child support established in New England (Maine – 89%; Vermont – 88%; New Hampshire – 85%; Massachusetts – 77%; Connecticut – 72%; Rhode Island – 62%) and the second lowest rate in the U.S.²¹
- ◆ In FFY 2008, Rhode Island had the highest case/staff ratio in New England, almost twice that of the next highest state (CT) and almost four times that of the lowest state (VT). In recent years, the Office of Child Support Services has faced major staff reductions, affecting the Office’s ability to establish court orders for child support.²²

References

¹ Turetsky, V. (2009). *Child support funding stimulates an economic recovery*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy.

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2009). *Fact sheet: Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE)*. Retrieved February 5, 2010 from www.acf.hhs.gov/opa/fact_sheets/cse_printable.html

^{3,7,8,29} Legler, P. (2003). *Low-income fathers and child support: Starting off on the right track*. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

⁴ Grall, T. S. (2009). *Custodial mothers and fathers and their child support: 2007*. (P60-237). Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

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Child Support and Rhode Island Works

- ◆ As of December 1, 2009, Rhode Island’s Office of Child Support Services system included 10,053 children enrolled in Rhode Island Works (RI Works).²³
- ◆ In 2009, the average child support obligation for children enrolled in RI Works was \$253 per month, compared to an average child support obligation of \$357 per month for children in non-RI Works families.²⁴ 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 2009, Rhode Island’s Office of Child Support Services collected \$6.4 million dollars in child support for children enrolled in RI Works. The federal and state governments retained \$5.8 million, and the remaining \$601,942 was passed through to families.²⁵
- ◆ 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.²⁶ The remainder of the payment is retained by the federal and state governments as reimbursement for assistance received through RI Works. In FFY 2009 in Rhode Island, an average of 1,032 families received at least one “pass-through” payment each month.²⁷
- ◆ Research suggests that child support “pass-through programs” encourage paternity establishment and higher child support payments by low-income parents.²⁸ Welfare recipients who receive child support “pass throughs” are more likely to leave welfare for work, remain off welfare and have incomes above the federal poverty line.²⁹
- ◆ In October 2008, a federal policy change went into effect which provides states 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 that 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.³⁰ Since October 2008, eight states have increased the amount they pass through to children. Rhode Island has not implemented this option.³¹