



MYTHS vs. REALITY: Child Support Enforcement

MYTH

Unpaid child support isn't really a problem.

REALITY

Absent parents owe nearly \$116 billion.

Some of this unpaid debt dates back decades. And the amount of unpaid child support has grown by \$32 billion since 2000, despite states' increased collection efforts.

MYTH

This policy punishes kids and moms for the sins of a deadbeat dad.

REALITY

Only uncooperative parents are removed from food stamps.

Children are never removed from food stamps as a result of these cooperation requirements. The policy only affects parents who refuse to cooperate without good cause. If a parent later chooses to cooperate, they may return to the program. Additionally, this policy actually helps families by increasing the likelihood they get the child support they are owed.

MYTH

Unpaid child support isn't financially significant to families.

REALITY

If absent parents paid their part, families could receive over \$200 more per month.

Child support increases incomes by an average of 54 percent for families who receive what they are owed. If all absent parents paid child support, families could expect to receive, on average, roughly \$2,600 more in income per year.



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MYTH

Using unpaid child support to cut off food stamp benefits is unfair.

REALITY

States currently require child support cooperation for individuals receiving other welfare benefits, including cash assistance.

Sanctions in other welfare programs are often even stricter than food stamp sanctions. Some states sanction entire households for the parents' non-cooperation and can extend sanctions for up to 12 months, even if a parent begins cooperating.

MYTH

Enforcing child support will increase administrative costs.

REALITY

Additional enforcement costs are typically offset by lower caseloads.

When Kansas implemented the policy in 2015, for example, the Department for Children and Families reported that it absorbed the administrative costs of the policy in its existing budget.