

FGA Child Support Cooperation

What is child support cooperation?

Federal law gives states the option to require parents receiving food stamps to cooperate with the state's efforts to collect child support. In states that require it, absent parents must make court-ordered payments as a condition of receiving food stamps and custodial parents cannot refuse to assist state caseworkers to find absent parents, establish paternity, or secure child support orders.

Do child support payments reduce poverty?

Child support is a critical tool for reducing poverty, especially for children growing up in single-parent families. According to the most recent data, child support lifts nearly a million individuals out of poverty every year and, as a direct result, brings millions closer to exiting poverty.¹

How much do child support payments increase single-parent families' income?

Single-parent families on food stamps receive an average of nearly \$6,000 per year in child support if absent parents are making required payments in full.² That support represents an average household income increase of more than 54 percent.³

How many single-parent families on food stamps receive child support?

Fewer than one in four single-parent families on food stamps receive child support.⁴ The remaining 77 percent of single-parent families receive no payments from absent parents at all – either because there is no court order mandating payment or because the absent parent is ignoring the court order.⁵ Even those families receiving child support often do not get what is owed.⁶ Just half of those receiving payments actually receive the full amount required.⁷

How much additional child support could families expect to receive as a result of this child support reform?

Based on the recent experiences in states that have implemented child support cooperation rules, even without full compliance, families could expect to receive more than \$300 million in additional support each year.⁸ In Kansas, child support collections for these families increased by an estimated \$1 million to \$2 million per year.⁹

How many states require child support cooperation for welfare enrollees?

A growing number of states now require cooperation for single-parent families on food stamps. In 2010, just 3 states enforced child support cooperation in food stamps. But by 2018, that number had grown to 9 states.¹⁰



Will child support cooperation requirements save taxpayers money?

Child support cooperation rules can have a significant impact on welfare spending more broadly because single-parent families who receive child support need far less government assistance. In fact, families who receive no child support are nearly 50 percent more likely to receive Medicaid, nearly 60 percent more likely to be on food stamps, and nearly 70 percent more likely to receive public housing or rent subsidies as families who receive the full amount of owed child support.¹¹ In food stamps, families who receive no child support cost taxpayers nearly 30 percent more per-person than families receiving at least \$500 in child support per month.¹² The additional income from child support payments can help to lift more kids out of poverty and, in many situations, cycle off the program.¹³ Altogether, taxpayers could save up to \$1 billion per year in reduced food stamp spending.¹⁴

1. Administration for Children and Families, "The child support program is a good investment," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2016), https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/programs/css/sbtn_csp_is_a_good_investment.pdf.
2. Author's calculations based upon data provided by the Census Bureau on average child support income among single-parent families receiving food stamps.
3. Jonathan Ingram, "Child Support Cooperation: Ending the cycle of dependency," Foundation for Government Accountability (2018), <https://thefga.org/research/child-support-cooperation-ending-cycle-dependency/>.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Data from the Census Bureau indicated a similar rate of single-parent families on food stamps receiving no child support in 2013. See, e.g., <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/tables/families/2013/chldsu13.pdf>.
7. Author's calculations based upon data provided by the Census Bureau on poverty rates among single-parent families who receive the full amount of court-ordered child support.
8. Author's calculations based upon the average annualized increase in child support collections per disqualification in Kansas, the average annualized number of disqualifications for noncooperation in Kansas during the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2016, annualized disqualifications as a share of total single-parent households receiving no child support in Kansas, and total single-parent households receiving no child support in other states.
9. Author's calculations based upon data provided by the Kansas Department for Children and Families.
10. "State Check-Up Map," Foundation for Government Accountability (2018), <https://thefga.org/state-check-map/>.
11. Jonathan Ingram, "Child Support Cooperation: Ending the cycle of dependency," Foundation for Government Accountability (2018), <https://thefga.org/research/child-support-cooperation-ending-cycle-dependency/>.
12. Ibid.
13. Author's calculations based upon the completed spell lengths and cumulative exit rates among a cross-sectional sample of adults in families with children and one adult. Joshua Leftin et al., "Dynamics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program participation from 2008 to 2012," U.S. Department of Agriculture (2014), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/Dynamics2008-2012.pdf>.
14. Author's calculations based upon data provided by the Census Bureau on welfare receipt among single-parent families who receive the full amount of court-ordered child support.