

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **1. Who is eligible for child support services?**

Any custodian of a minor child is eligible for services. This includes parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, court-appointed guardians, or others who are caring for a child. The services available include establishing paternity for their child(ren), establishing a court order for child support and/or medical support or collecting current or past due child support payments.

The non-custodial parent may also apply for child support services to determine paternity of a child born out of wedlock, to sign up for voluntary wage withholding of child support, or to request modification of the child support ordered amount.

## **2. What services are available through the local office of child support?**

- Searching for the other parent
- Legally establishing paternity
- Obtaining a court order for child support and health insurance
- Collecting support payments
- Enforcing the court order
- Reviewing and adjusting the court ordered support amount

## **3. The following services are NOT available through your local child support office. Contact private counsel for help with these issues:**

- Divorce actions
- Legal advice
- Property settlements
- Visitation and custody issues
- Collection of private attorney's fees

## **4. How do I apply for child support services?**

If you receive Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) or Medical Assistance, child support services will be provided free of charge. If not, you will need to complete an application for child support services with your local child support office and pay an application fee of \$25 with the submission of your application. To have an application mailed to you, or for further information, please contact the Child Support Administration at 800-332-6347. A separate application is required for each case. In addition to the \$25 application fee, your case will be charged an annual \$25, charged after you receive \$3,500 in child support collections for that year, assuming your case meets certain conditions.

## **5. Do I have to pay for child support services?**

Maryland law requires customers who have never received Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) for a related child support case to pay a \$25 annual collection fee. You must pay the \$25 annual collection fee if:

- You have received a least \$3,500 of child support within a 12 month period beginning October 1st of each year, and
- You have never received TCA for that child support case.

**6. You do not have to pay the \$25 annual collection fee if:**

You have not received at least \$3,500 of child support within a 12 month period beginning October one of each year, or you have received TCA for that child support case.

**7. What information will my local office need in order to process my case?**

Required information to begin a case:

1. Full name and last known address of both parents and any other names each person is known by (for example, nicknames, aliases, etc.)
2. Dates of birth and Social Security numbers for both parents
3. Marriage license, separation order, divorce decree, protective or restraining order involving either parent, other support order, Affidavit of Parentage, or any other legal documents where paternity has been acknowledged

Helpful information to process a case:

1. Children's birth certificates and Social Security numbers
2. Any other additional information about the other parent which provides information about where he or she lives or works
3. A physical description with the most current photograph of the other parent
4. Name and address of the current or most recent employer of both parents

**8. How can I get information about my child support case?**

The Maryland Child Support Administration has a toll-free Maryland Child Support Customer Care Center (1-800-332-6347) to handle all of your general questions and provide payment information. The Customer Care Center can accept requests for payment history, address changes, employment changes, and requests for enforcement of a court order.

If the information or assistance you need cannot be provided by the Customer Care Center, a work order will be prepared and emailed to your case specialist. After your case specialist reviews your case and takes appropriate action, you will be contacted within 20 days if necessary. If a work order is a priority matter, such as an issue for an upcoming court date, a driver's license suspension, or an employer with a wage lien question, you will be contacted within 48 hours.

Please allow 10 working days after a hearing date for updated information regarding your account to be posted to the case file. Please note: your calls will not be forwarded to the local child support office on a routine basis.

**9. Which office should I go to?**

Inquiries about your child support case are best handled through the Customer Care Center. The number is 1-800-332-6347.

**10. What happens if the other parent does not live in Maryland?**

Your child support office will work to establish paternity, collect support for the child, or resolve any issues you may have with your case, even if one parent lives in another state or country.

**11. Do all states handle cases the same way?**

Cases are not handled the same way in all states. While all states have the same goals of establishing paternity and child support orders and enforcement of child support orders, each state has its own child support process and its own methods of calculating child support.

**12. How long does it take to establish a child support order?**

Generally, a child support order will be established within 90-180 days. Several factors may delay the establishment process: the noncustodial parent lives out of state, cannot be located and served with a summons, is incarcerated, fails to appear for a settlement conference or a court hearing, or if there are problems verifying income. If the parents are willing to cooperate with each other and can provide all necessary and useful information at the beginning of the case, the case can be registered more quickly and proceed to a hearing or agreement quickly.

**13. How long does it take to process a case?**

A person must be personally served with the notice of the proceedings to establish child support. Current and accurate information about the non-custodial parent's residence and mailing address is essential. The longer it takes to locate and personally serve the person, the longer it will take to establish a child support order. The Child Support Administration and your local child support office are required to follow all deadlines set by federal regulations and Maryland statute for processing your case. When one of the parents lives in another state, the other state's statutes and regulations also affect how long it takes to complete each step in the process.

**14. What if I don't know where the other parent is?**

If the location of the non-custodial parent is unknown, the child support office will conduct a search. To do this successfully, we need as much information about that parent as possible. The more information you provide, the easier it will be to find the other parent. The following conditions make it more difficult to locate the non-custodial parent.

1. Lives out of state
2. Is not working
3. Is self-employed
4. Works under assumed names or multiple Social Security numbers
5. Changes jobs often
6. Works for cash

In all cases, the child support specialist will try to locate the non-custodial parent by checking federal, state and local sources to find the mailing address, employment or assets of the non-custodial parent. The child support specialist will follow up on information you provide on the application form.

**15. How can I obtain a court order for child support and health insurance coverage?**

Your child support office has lawyers who will take your case to court, so you may not need to hire an attorney. Your local child support office will ask the court to order current child support as well as genetic testing costs, medical support and a provision for an immediate income withholding from the non-custodial parent's wages.

#### **16. Can you enforce a separation agreement?**

In order for the child support agency to collect child support or enforce an obligation, there must be a court order, signed by a judge. If your agreement has been incorporated into a court order or divorce decree, it can be enforced. Otherwise, your separation agreement may be used as a piece of evidence in requesting the court to establish a child support order. You may use private legal counsel to enforce the written contractual agreement between you and the other parent.

#### **17. How do you determine the amount of child support to be paid?**

Maryland uses an income shares model for its child support guidelines. The guidelines take into account the income of both parents, number of children, cost of health insurance for the child(ren), current child support being paid for other children, alimony being paid, alimony being received, the cost of daycare, and extraordinary medical expenses of the child(ren).

#### **18. How are child support payments disbursed?**

If the custodial parent receives Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA), any child support payments collected will be kept by the state as reimbursement for that benefit. If the custodial parent no longer receives TCA, the current support as well as any payments made on arrears due will be sent to the custodial parent. If the custodial parent has never received Temporary Cash Assistance payments, all monies collected will be sent to the custodial parent. Payments will be deposited directly into the bank account, or mailed. Contact the Customer Care Center at 1-800-332-6347 to apply for direct deposit of child support payments.

The Maryland Child Support Enforcement Administration (CSEA) automatically enrolls customers in the Electronic Payment Issuance Card (EPiC) program. The EPiC card is a VISA debit card.

If you have a checking account and would prefer to receive your child support payment via direct deposit you may download the form from our Forms webpage or call 1-800-332-6347 to request a direct deposit form. You may also pick up this form at your local child support office.

EPiC provides access to your funds 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can use your EPiC to make purchases everywhere Visa debit cards are accepted. You will also have cash access via PIN-based point-of-sale (POS) terminals and ATMs.

Here's how the cards will work:

- Once you select to receive your child support payments via EPiC, Bank of America will create an account in your name.
- Whenever you are due to receive a payment, CSEA will send the funds by Electronic Funds Transfer to your EPiC.
- You can then use EPiC to make purchases or withdrawals until the funds are exhausted.
- You cannot make any additional deposits to the account. Only CSEA can fund the card.

- This is not a credit card and attempting to use your card for purchases that exceed your balance will result in the transaction being declined.

**19. The other parent is paid "under the table". Can you attach that money by income withholding?**

No, that money cannot be attached. The very nature of "under the table" wages means those wages are not subject to payroll taxes or income withholding because the employer is not doing the necessary record keeping or paperwork.

**20. The other parent is self-employed. Can you attach those earnings?**

Attaching earnings of a self-employed person requires the cooperation of the self-employed person to arrange for payroll withholding.

How do I change my: name, address, telephone number, and employment information?

The order for support requires that the person paying child support notify the court within 10 days of any change in address or employment. You must also notify your local child support office by contacting the Customer Care Center at 1-800-332-6347, or by notifying your local office in writing by mail or fax along with a clear copy of your photo ID. Please include your nine digit case number on all correspondence.

**21. How can I establish paternity for my child?**

If you were not married at the time your child was conceived or born, your child support office will help you establish paternity. Establishing paternity is important for several reasons:

1. It will establish a father-child relationship, enable your child to benefit from that relationship, and strengthen your child's sense of identity
2. It will allow the father's name to be listed on the child's birth certificate
3. It will give the father the right to seek child custody and visitation through a court action and to be consulted about adoption
4. It will give the child the right to important benefits from both parents; such as financial support, inheritance, social security veteran's benefits, life insurance and health insurance
5. It will make it easier for the child to learn the medical histories of both parents and to possibly benefit from medical insurance through a parent's employer, union or military service
6. Paternity must be established before the court can order child support

If the father acknowledges paternity, it is not always necessary to have a court trial.

Either parent may apply for paternity establishment without filing for child support. To have an application mailed to you or for further information, contact Customer Care Center at 1-800-332-6347.

**22. Can I request genetic testing?**

If paternity has not been established either the custodial parent or alleged father may request genetic testing. The child support office will schedule genetic testing which is usually done at the child support office. The cost of genetic testing varies across the state. The average cost of the test is \$120.

**23. What if paternity for the child is denied?**

The mother, child and the alleged father will be scheduled for a genetic testing appointment. Currently, this is done by collecting a DNA sample from the inside of the cheek by gently rubbing. There is no need to collect a blood sample and needles are not used in this process. If an Affidavit of Parentage was signed in the hospital at the time the child was born, or if there is already a court order establishing paternity, the local child support office cannot disestablish paternity. You may contact an attorney. If the child was born during the time the parents were married, the husband is presumed to be the father of the child. You may wish to contact an attorney for legal advice.

**24. Can I get retroactive child support?**

The Court has the authority to award support retroactive to the date a complaint is filed with the court. The court may give the non-custodial parent credit for any financial contribution made for the children since the filing date of the case.

**25. How do I request an increase/decrease in my child support?**

You have the right to request a review for a modification if there has been a change in circumstances since the order was entered, or if three years have passed since the order was entered or last reviewed for modification. Examples of changes in circumstance that may be grounds for a modification are: significant changes in income, changes in work-related day care cost, changes in health care costs, a change in custody, or a change in the financial needs of the child. You may download an Application for Services and a Financial Statement from our Forms page and mail the documents to the child support office. Contact the Customer Care Center at 1-800-332-6347 for additional information.

**26. If either parent has had another child since the current child support order was entered, will this affect the amount of child support due?**

The child support order will remain in effect unless and until it is modified. If either parent requests a modification, the Court may consider the obligations of each parent to support other children. If there is a support order for other children the amount of support will be considered in the guidelines calculation.

**27. The child is now living with the other parent. Do I need to notify the Child Support Administration?**

When custody of the child changes the child support case specialist must be notified in writing about the change, stating who now has custody of the child. A copy of the court order stating that there has been a change in custody or school enrollment information should be provided to show that custody has changed.

**28. I want to close my case. What should I do?**

Contact the Customer Care Center at 1-800-332-6347 for further information.

**29. Whom do I contact if I do not receive child support payments?**

Contact the Customer Care Center at 1-800-332-6347 if you are not receiving payments as ordered.

**30. What will happen if the noncustodial parent just won't pay?**

If the noncustodial parent does not pay on time, or does not pay in full, your child support office will initiate the following automated enforcement actions:

1. Withhold child support from wages and unemployment benefits, Workers' Compensation claims, etc.
2. Intercept federal and state tax refunds to pay child support arrears
3. Report parents owing past-due support to credit bureaus
4. Refer parents owing past-due support to the Motor Vehicle Administration for driver's license suspension
5. Intercept Maryland lottery winnings to pay child support arrears
6. Garnish accounts at financial institutions
7. Request the suspension or revocation of a professional or recreational license
8. Deny the issuance or renewal of a passport

The child support office may also initiate contempt of court proceedings against that parent if it appears the parent has the present ability to pay support.

Contact the Customer Care Center at 1-800-332-6347 for additional information.

**31. Will the non-custodial parent's tax refund be intercepted?**

A non-custodial parent will be certified for state tax offset if the arrears are \$150 or more. Certification for federal tax offset will occur if arrears are \$500 or more. Certifying a case for tax offset is not a guarantee that a payment will be received.

**32. Why are my payments splitting between my case and the non-custodial parent's second case?**

Federal law states that payments received by income withholding must be divided among all of the non-custodial parent's cases giving priority first to current support, then to arrears. Payments are divided automatically by the Child Support Computer System (CSES). Even though the amounts received each month may differ, at the end of the year the custodial parent should receive the total court ordered amount of child support provided payments are made as ordered on a regular and consistent basis provided that the noncustodial parent earns enough to satisfy all of the support obligations.

**33. How do I get someone out of jail when s/he is there for being behind in child support payments?**

A purge/bond amount is generally set on the warrant. You can contact the court or your local office for payment information.

**34. The non-custodial parent was arrested, but has now been released. As the custodial parent, how can I find out how much s/he paid and when will we go back to court?**

Contact the Customer Care Center at 800-332-6347.

# Apply for Support Services

To start a new case, please read our fee disclosure statement below and apply for services. Please use our online application. Applying online is the fastest and most secure method of applying. Please note there is a \$1.50 convenience fee for applying online if you are required to pay the \$25 application fee (more information below).

Notice to Out of State Applicants:

You are encouraged to apply for child support services in your state of residence. Applying directly with the State of Maryland may result in your having to personally appear in Maryland on numerous occasions. Your state can file an Uniform Interstate Family Support Act (UIFSA) case with Maryland, under which your personal appearance is not required, and you may appear telephonically.

Apply Online (Recommended):

[Online Child Support Application](#)

Apply By Mail:

The Child Support Enforcement Administration discourages customers from mailing child support applications. Placing your application in the mail not only takes longer but may place you at risk of disclosure of your personally identifiable information and identity theft.

Should you choose to apply by mail, you may pick up an application at your [local Child Support office](#), request an application be mailed to you by contacting Child Support Services at [800-332-6347](tel:800-332-6347), or download and print the application using the link below. If you are seeking establishment or modification of a court order for child support, please include a [Financial Statement](#) with your application.

- [Form 980/980A: Application for Child Support Services](#)
- [Form 980/980A: Application for Child Support Services, Spanish](#)
- [Financial Statement](#)

Note: We are unable to accept applications via e-mail as it is not secure. Please mail, fax, or hand deliver your paper application to [your local Child Support office](#).



## Fee Disclosure

There is a one-time, \$25 fee to apply for child support services. You may be exempt from the application fee if you currently or previously received Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) or Medical Assistance. A separate application is required for each case.

In addition to the \$25 application fee, certain cases will be charged an annual fee of \$25 after \$3,500 in payments are distributed in that year. Some cases may also be assessed a Federal Tax Offset Fee not to exceed \$25 and a State Tax Intercept Fee not to exceed \$10. Please note that any tax fees will be deducted from the tax payment.

## Paternity Establishment

Paternity Establishment is Important!

Your child deserves all of the advantages in life that two parents can give. There are some special reasons to establish paternity.

**Benefits For Your Child:** Your child may be eligible for some benefits because you have established paternity. These benefits may include Social Security, veteran's benefits, health insurance, life insurance and inheritance. Establishing paternity ensures you can provide for your child even when the unexpected occurs.

**Family Medical History:** Knowing the family's full history of diseases, illnesses and birth defects will help your doctor if your child becomes sick. It's important to know the father's medical history for this reason.

**Child Support:** Your child needs and deserves both emotional and financial support from both parents. You may think that you can get by on your own and live without any help from your child's father. But you may change your mind some day. A court can't order child support without legal proof of paternity. It's easier to get that proof today than to wait.

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- [The Gift of Parenthood \(English\)](#)
  - [Affidavit of Parentage | Rights and Responsibilities \(English\)](#)

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- [The Gift of Parenthood \(Español\)](#)
  - [Affidavit of Parentage | Rights and Responsibilities \(Español\)](#)
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### Establishing Paternity:

Maryland law allows you to establish paternity through a court order or through an Affidavit of Parentage form. If the issue of paternity is contested and cannot be resolved through genetic testing alone, a judicial proceeding may be scheduled to decide the issue of paternity. A representative from your local child support office can explain the process of establishing paternity to you. Your local office of child support can also explain the rights and responsibilities that go along with paternity and answer questions. If you are currently receiving Temporary Cash Assistance payments, your case will automatically be referred to your local office of child support enforcement by the Department of Social Services and you will need to apply for services.

### Affidavit of Parentage:

Right after your baby is born, you can encourage the father to start the paternity process by signing the Affidavit of Parentage while you are still in the hospital. This action will allow the father's name to be placed on the birth certificate. You can also take the form home with you, complete it and send it back to the Division of Vital Records. If you choose to take the form home, each parent must sign the Affidavit in the presence of a notary public. You may contact the Maryland Department of Health & Mental Hygiene/Division of Vital Records at [410-764-3182](tel:410-764-3182) to request an Affidavit. You can establish paternity using an Affidavit up until your child's 18th birthday.

Signing the Affidavit is your choice. Once it is signed, it becomes a legal finding of paternity. An Affidavit of Parentage cannot be executed if the mother was married at the time of conception or birth of the child. An Affidavit should not be executed unless the mother is sure that there is only one possible father of the child. Keep in mind that before signing the Affidavit, the person named as the father has the right to request a genetic test or consult an attorney. You can sign the Affidavit even if you are under the age of eighteen without getting permission from an adult or legal guardian. You may want to seek the advice of a parent or legal guardian before signing this form.

The hospital staff can help you complete the form free of charge. They can even act as your witness. Be prepared to show them your identification and give your Social Security numbers. The hospital staff will send the Affidavit to the Division of Vital Records.

### Rescinding an Affidavit:

A person who has signed an Affidavit of Parentage claiming to be the parent of a child may rescind (cancel) the Affidavit by completing a Rescission Form for Affidavit of Parentage and signing and dating it in the presence of a notary public within 60 days of the date the Affidavit was signed by both parties. If more than 60 days have passed from the date the Affidavit was signed, the Rescission Form will NOT rescind the Affidavit. If the Parents signed on different dates, count from the date that the last parent signed.

After the expiration of the 60 day period, the Affidavit can only be nullified by a court order, upon a finding of fraud, duress or material mistake of fact.

You may obtain a Rescission Form by calling the Maryland Department of Health & Mental Hygiene/Division of Vital Records at [410-764-3182](tel:410-764-3182).

#### Contested Cases:

Either parent can request genetic testing if the issue of paternity is uncertain. The Child Support Enforcement Administration can request the parties appear for genetic testing. If genetic test results indicate a probability of paternity greater than 99%, the parties can enter a consent order to resolve the issue of paternity and/or support. If the issue of paternity and/or support remains contested, a court hearing will be scheduled to resolve those issues.