
Child Support Debt in Mississippi Frustrates Economic Stability for Black Parents and Families

Parents who are behind in child support payments—called “arrears”—often owe a significant portion to the government to repay cash assistance that their child’s household received. Because African-American families are more likely than other families to have received cash assistance benefits, black parents who are court-ordered to pay child support are also more likely to owe child support debt to the government.

Nationally, as of 2013, according to the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE):

- Parents owed **\$30 billion** in child support debt to federal and state governments—not to children.
- 26% of all child support debt is owed to, and can be kept by, federal and state governments.

In Mississippi, as of 2013, according to OCSE:

- **\$54 million** in child support debt is owed to the Mississippi and federal governments—not to kids.
- This is more than 5% of the total child support debt owed by parents in Mississippi.

States have the option to pass through a portion of current-month child support payments to families who receive cash benefits. However, Mississippi state’s policy does not pass through any amount to families. Additionally, payments for past-due child support owed to the government are retained by the government.

African-American parents who are court-ordered to pay child support debt are much more likely to owe a portion of their debt to the Mississippi and federal governments—not to their children. This is because:

- Black children in Mississippi are **more than six times** as likely as white children to get cash assistance benefits (TANF) according to CFFPP’s analysis of federal TANF and Census data.
- **84%** of children that received TANF benefits in Mississippi were African American in 2011 according to the federal Office of Family Assistance (HHS).
- However, black children were only 43% of all children in Mississippi in 2011, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The Center for Family Policy and Practice makes the following policy recommendations:

- Require that 100% of all child support payments go to children and families.
- Eliminate the requirement that recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance benefits assign their child support payments to the government.
- Require child support agencies to report the demographics—race, ethnicity, gender, income—of all noncustodial and custodial parents and their children, so that racial disparities can be tracked.

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