

Facts about Child Support

The Child Support Program

The Child Support program helps families become independent and remain self-sufficient. The program helps families by establishing legal fatherhood (paternity) and by obtaining and enforcing court orders for child support and medical support.

“Child support makes an enormous difference in the lives of millions of children—it lifts one million children out of poverty each year, helps families with incomes above the poverty line make ends meet, and most likely leads to long-term improvements in children’s lives.” [[The Child Support Enforcement Program: A Sound Investment in Improving Children’s Chances in Life](#), Vicki Turetsky, October 2005, Center for Law and Social Policy.]

The Child Support program is a cooperative local, state, and federal effort designed to ensure that **both parents support their children**. The Child Support program also has cooperative agreements with many foreign countries. Title IV-D of the Social Security Act, enacted in 1975, requires every state to provide child support services.

The Federal Role

The [federal Office of Child Support Enforcement](#) administers the federal Child Support program and provides a variety of services and assistance to the states. The federal government reimburses some child support administrative costs of state and local government and helps locate parents.

Wisconsin’s Role

The Bureau of Child Support, in the [Wisconsin Department of Children and Families](#), manages the statewide Child Support program. The Bureau works with other states, other nations, the federal office, as well as tribal and county child support agencies. [Local child support agencies](#) provide most [child support services](#). These local agencies help parents establish legal fatherhood, locate parents, and help establish and enforce child support and medical support orders. In 2008, the Wisconsin Child Support program provided full case management services to 355,000 families and provided financial management services to an additional 113,000 families.

Locate

In many child support cases, the first step is [finding one of the parents](#). KIDS, Wisconsin’s statewide computer system, automatically checks other computer databases for information about parents who owe child support. For instance, KIDS will find out if a nonpaying parent is receiving unemployment insurance or workers’ compensation. The Federal Parent Locator Service, operated by the federal office, may also be used. This federal service uses information collected from federal agencies and other states, and information reported by employers.

Legal Fatherhood

Before a court can order child support for unmarried parents, [legal fatherhood](#) (paternity) must be established. Parents who are 18 or older can establish paternity by filing a *Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgment* form. Adult and teen parents can request paternity establishment services, including genetic testing, from their local child support agency. When a mutual agreement cannot be reached, a court can issue a legal decision on paternity, based on genetic test results. Parents who marry after their child is born may file an *Acknowledgment of Marital Child* form. Genetic testing should be done if there are doubts about paternity. In 2008, the Wisconsin Child Support program established paternity for 21,500 children.

Establishing Support Orders

County and tribal child support agencies help [establish court orders](#) for financial and medical support. In 2008, the Wisconsin Child Support program helped establish support orders for 39,300 families.

Monitoring & Enforcing Support Orders

Local child support agencies [monitor and enforce the court order](#) to pay child support through a variety of tools. States and foreign countries work together cooperatively to assist each other through interstate and international actions. In Wisconsin, most support orders include [income withholding](#). The child support agency sends a notice to the paying parent's employer to withhold a certain amount of the parent's income for child support and to send the withheld money to the Wisconsin Support Collections Trust Fund. Support payments are sent to more than 19,000 Wisconsin families every day.

When parents do not pay their court-ordered support, other actions might be taken. The overdue child support might be reported to credit bureaus and may be taken from tax refunds and lottery winnings. Liens might be placed against the parents' titled property. Delinquent payers might lose their recreational, occupational, and drivers' licenses. The court might order the parent to search for work. Failure to obey a court order might result in a hearing for contempt of court. In extreme cases, the district attorney might bring criminal nonsupport charges.

Getting Services

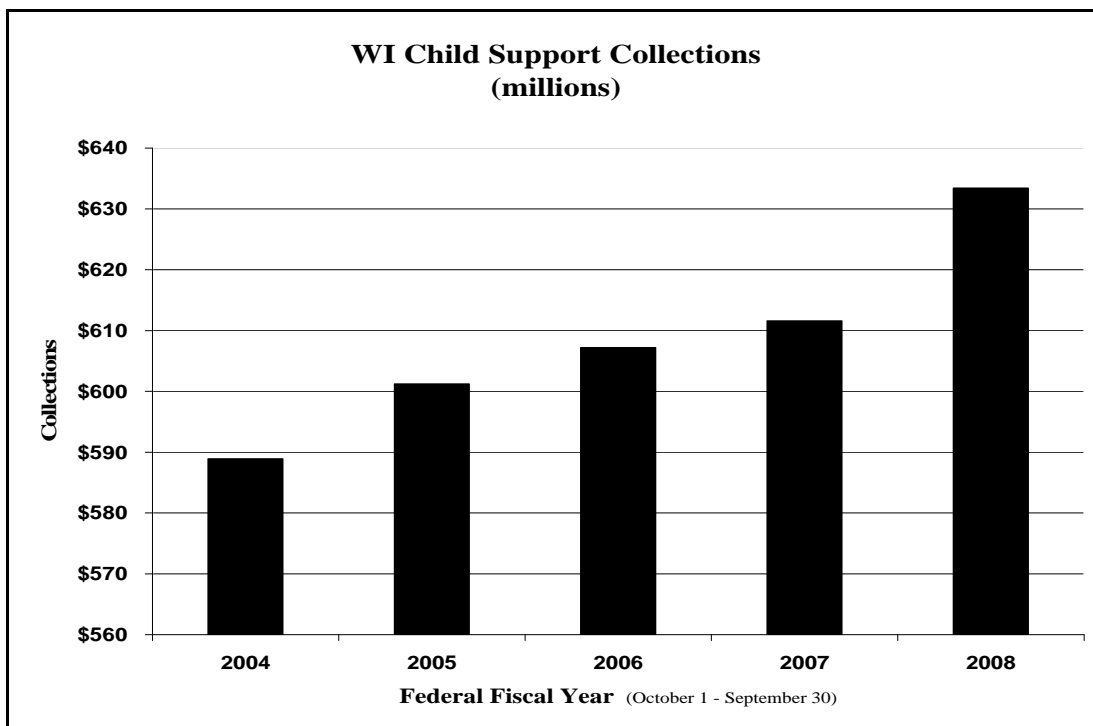
All families with a court order for support (child support, alimony/maintenance, and family support), receive [financial management services](#). Families needing child support may [apply for case management services](#) (commonly called child support services). Families in some [public assistance programs](#) automatically receive case management services for free.

Taxpayer Savings

In 2008, Wisconsin collected more than \$6.65 in child support for every \$1.00 spent for program costs. That was almost \$2.00 more than the national average. Child support collected for families who no longer receive public assistance helps to keep those families independent and reduces public assistance costs.

Amounts Collected

Wisconsin is a national leader in the collection of child support. In 2008, Wisconsin ranked fourth in the percentage of court-ordered current support that was collected. Wisconsin ranked eighth in collections per full-time child support employee, collecting \$595,362 per worker. The national average was \$422,390. The graph below shows the recent collection amounts for families in the Wisconsin Child Support program.



For more information about the Wisconsin Child Support program, go to childsupport.wisconsin.gov
For more child support statistics, go to www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pubs/index.html#annual