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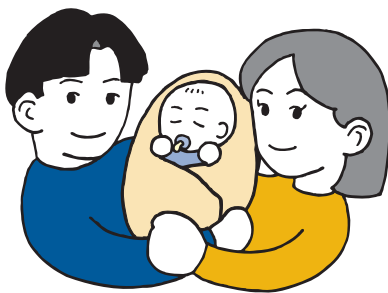
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# Child Support

## *A Guide to Services in Connecticut*



Dear Parent:

The State of Connecticut's child support program is designed to get your child the financial and medical support he or she deserves. We firmly believe that both parents are responsible for supporting their children.

Collecting support is not easy in many cases. It can take time and patience. But with your help, the state will not rest until all steps are taken to obtain support for your child. New laws and enforcement tools each year give the state a better chance of collecting money for your child.

This booklet provides an overview of Connecticut's child support services. We believe that the more you know about child support, the more you can help us benefit your child.

If you have any questions at any time, please call your child support worker, or our automated telephone line (**VOICES**) at **1-800-647-8872**.

We want to work closely with you to help secure your child's financial rights.

**Robert C. Leuba, Judge**  
Chief Court Administrator  
Judicial Branch



**Patricia A. Wilson-Coker**  
Commissioner  
Department of Social Services

## Common Words in Child Support

### *Child Support*

The world of child support can be hard to understand. It involves complex laws and procedures. We've tried to make this booklet as clear as possible while giving you information you need to know.

Here are some of the words and terms used in child support.

• • •

### *Child Support Order*

Money paid by a parent to help meet the needs of a child.

An order by a Superior Court judge or family support magistrate that requires a parent to pay child support.

### *Enforcement*

A term for legal measures to make sure a child support order is obeyed.

### *TFA*

Short for Temporary Family Assistance, the government program that provides financial or medical assistance to families.

### *Custodial Party*

The person with whom the child lives. This may be another relative or person besides a birth or adoptive parent.

### *Noncustodial Parent*

The parent with whom the child does not live; sometimes called the "absent parent."

### *Obligor*

A noncustodial parent who is required by a court order to pay child support.

### *Paternity*

Legal fatherhood.

### *IV-D*

Short for Title IV-D of the Social Security Act, the federal law governing the child support program.

### *Visitation*

The legal right under a court order of a noncustodial parent to spend time with the child. Visitation and child support are separate requirements under the law. Therefore, support must be paid even if there are visitation problems.

### *Family Support Magistrate*

Magistrates hear and decide matters about child support in cases in which parents receive child support services from the state. Magistrates act like judges.

### *Medical Support*

A court order that requires a parent to provide medical insurance if it can be obtained at a reasonable cost.

## Agencies Involved in Child Support

### *Bureau of Child Support Enforcement (BCSE) of the Department of Social Services*

The following state agencies work together to provide child support services to families in Connecticut.

Responsible for: coordinating all child support services, taking all applications, finding absent parents, establishing paternity, establishing support orders and some enforcement activities such as credit reporting, lottery offset, state and federal tax offset and fair hearings.

### *Support Enforcement Division (SED) of the Judicial Branch Attorney General's Office (AG)*

Responsible for: enforcing and changing child support orders, auditing accounts.

Provides legal assistance to the state in child support cases in court.

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## Child Support Services

There are six major child support services provided by the State of Connecticut. Depending on your family's situation, you may need help in any or all of the following areas:

- Locating noncustodial parents.
- Determining the legal father (paternity).
- Getting or changing a support order (modification).
- Enforcing a support order.
- Getting or enforcing medical support.
- Collecting and distributing support.

These services are available to all families, regardless of their financial situation. Let's take a look at how they can work for your child.

## Finding Absent Parents

*The best information you can give us is the noncustodial parent's social security number.*

Finding a noncustodial parent is a key first step in collecting support for many children. To do this, child support workers can search many sources of information. Staff in our local offices and in our central office State Parent Locator Service check state and national computer banks. We can look at records of the Internal Revenue Service, Social Security Administration, Department of Defense and state motor vehicle, labor and law enforcement agencies around the nation. With the help of the Federal Parent Locator Service in Washington, we can find a noncustodial parent anywhere in the U.S., its territories and armed services, and some other countries, if certain information is known.

The more information you give us, the easier it is for us to locate the noncustodial parent. The best information you can give us is the noncustodial parent's social security number. If you don't know the social security number, you may find it in bank, insurance or credit card records, income tax returns or other papers. If you can't find it this way, we can use other clues: the name of a former employer; the noncustodial parent's date and place of birth; or the noncustodial parent's own parents' names and addresses. Names, addresses and phone numbers of friends, relatives and organizations of which the noncustodial parent is a member may also help.

The location process can take time and patience. But the odds are good for success. We find thousands of noncustodial parents every year.

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## Legally Determining the Father

*The child benefits most  
if you act as quickly  
as possible  
to establish paternity...*

## The Child Support Order

When a child is born to unmarried parents, a legal relationship between the father and child must be established before a court will order child support. This legal relationship is called paternity. Establishing paternity allows the child to receive medical support through the father's insurance, Social Security benefits, inheritance rights and other forms of support.

In many cases, the father admits paternity by signing an acknowledgment after the mother names him by signing an affirmation of paternity. These papers can be signed at the hospital. If he does not admit paternity, the state must begin a court action.

Child support staff collect information and other evidence about the father and refer the case to the Attorney General for legal action. This legal assistance should benefit the mother and child, but remember that in all cases the Attorney General represents the state child support agency and not the parent. A parent can also hire a private attorney to represent him or her.

When the case goes to trial, the mother must be present in court to testify about the father. In addition, the mother, the child and the alleged father may need to take genetic tests to help the court determine paternity.

A court case for paternity can be started any time until the child is 18 years old, but your child benefits most if you act quickly. Back support can only be ordered for the three years before the court action begins. Acting right after the birth of your child also makes it easier to find the father.

### • Establishment

The process of getting a court to order support is called establishment. The court uses statewide guidelines to make fair and consistent support orders. Copies of the guidelines are available to the public free of charge at court clerks' offices throughout the state, or on-line at [www.jud.state.ct.us/pub.htm](http://www.jud.state.ct.us/pub.htm).

The first step in getting a support order is to collect financial information from both parents. This includes wages and other income as well as debts and expenses.

The easiest and quickest way to get a support order is through a voluntary agreement. If the noncustodial parent agrees to the amount owed under the guidelines, we ask him or her to sign an agreement form. When the agreement is approved by a family support magistrate and filed with the clerk of the court, it is legal (or binding).

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## The Child Support Order

(continued)

We can also get a support order by bringing a legal action before a judge or magistrate. Judges handle divorce cases and magistrates specialize in child support matters. The Bureau of Child Support Enforcement can go to court with the help of the Attorney General's Office. The state presents information about the parent's finances. Each parent may also be required to testify about his or her ability to support the child.

If the noncustodial parent is not living in Connecticut, the state will ask the state or county where the noncustodial parent lives to help get an order. If there is already a support order issued by Connecticut or another state, we pursue support based on that order.

If there is no order, we can ask the other state or county to issue a support order based on its own guidelines. Paternity can also be established across state lines. Collecting support from parents who live out of state is more complicated and may take more time. Your child support worker will give you information about the ways to get support in your case.

### • Modification

After child support is ordered by the court, the order can be changed (or modified) if any of the following situations occur: the financial situation of one or both parents changes; the support order is no longer adequate to meet the needs of the child; the support order did not include medical insurance; or the circumstances of either parent or the child have changed substantially. Generally, if the support amount is either 15% higher or lower than the guidelines used by the courts, the order will be changed.

Either parent may request that the state review the support order to see if it should be changed. If the order should be changed, the state will pursue the change by preparing the legal papers and taking the case to court. In some cases, the Attorney General's office helps with the court presentation. Requests for a review should be made in writing to your support enforcement officer, and should state the reason(s) you believe the order should be changed. The state has 180 days from your request to complete the review of your order and present the modification request to the court.

## Medical Support

Medical and dental insurance can be just as important as financial support for your child. When the state goes to court for a support order, we also ask the magistrate to order the noncustodial parent to provide insurance for the child. If you only want medical support for your child, we can go to court for that. Medical support is also included in all voluntary support agreements.

The noncustodial parent must provide medical and dental insurance if it can be obtained at a "reasonable" cost. This usually means insurance available through the parent's employer or another group plan. If the insurance is available through an employer, a judge or magistrate can order the employer to take insurance premiums directly from the parent's paycheck.

## Enforcing Support

*Income withholding is the best way to enforce child support...*

After a child support order is in place, support checks should begin arriving for your child.

For many families, however, checks may be late, too small, or may not come at all. Too often, the parent required to pay support does not follow the court order ... and children suffer.

The good news is that there are many methods that the state can use to collect support. They include:

- **Income withholding** – Child support payments can be taken directly out of paychecks, unemployment and workers' compensation, and retirement checks. State law requires the judge or family support magistrate to order withholding right away in most cases. If a parent's payments fall 30 days behind, we can also start withholding so long as we notify him or her and offer a court hearing.

- **Contempt citation** – If a parent does not obey a court order, he or she may be found in contempt of the order. The Support Enforcement Division can ask a magistrate to find a parent in contempt if he or she is 30 days late in support payments or does not maintain required medical insurance. The parent must receive the court papers in person. If the parent is found in contempt, it means he or she did not obey the support order on purpose. The parent could be sent to jail.

- **Capias mittimus** – The magistrate may order the arrest of a parent who personally receives notice of a court hearing if he or she does not come to the hearing. The parent is then brought to court (or to jail if the court is not in session). The arrest order is called a "capias mittimus." The Bureau of Child Support Enforcement has enforcement officers to carry out these orders, and can also hire sheriffs.

- **Income tax refund intercept** – If a parent owes back support (at least \$150 if his or her child receives TFA or \$500 if the child does not receive TFA), the state can report the parent to the Internal Revenue Service and the State Department of Revenue Services. Support is then deducted from the parent's federal or state tax refund and paid to the family (or to the state if the child is receiving TFA). Parents have the right to a hearing before this action is taken.



## Enforcing Support (continued)

*A parent's ability to get credit may be damaged if he or she does not pay child support...*

- **Credit bureau reporting** – If a parent falls behind in support payments by at least \$1,000, we can report his or her name and debt to consumer reporting agencies. Known as credit bureaus, these agencies collect information about consumers and make it available to banks, mortgage companies, stores and other lenders. Once reported, the parent may have a hard time borrowing money to buy a house, car, etc. Before a parent's name is sent to a credit bureau, the parent is notified and given 60 days to ask for a hearing or to pay the overdue support.

- **Liens** – If a parent owes at least \$500 in back child support, we can place a lien on real or personal property. A lien is a legal hold on property so that the debt must be paid before the property can be sold or refinanced. The state places a lien on real estate by filing a notice in city or town land records. Normally we collect on the lien when the parent wants to sell or refinance, or when another creditor is foreclosing. Before a lien is placed, the parent is notified and has the chance for a hearing to protest the action.

- **Lottery offset** – If a parent who owes back child support wins the state lottery, we can ask the Division of Special Revenue to withhold winnings. Parents can request a hearing on the amount withheld.

- **IRS full collection** – A last resort involves asking the Internal Revenue Service for action to collect back support of at least \$750. In order to do this, we must identify assets or annual income of the noncustodial parent, and know the parent's social security number and address or place of employment.

To strengthen enforcement, the state has developed a computer system that tracks payments and amounts owed, links government agencies and speeds up the process. The system automatically sends notices to parents and even flags problem cases for child support workers.

## VOICES

*VOICES* is an automated information system which can give you general information about child support services provided by the state, and if the state is helping you get child support, it can give you up-to-date information about your case. You can call anytime between 6 a.m. and midnight, seven days a week. (You need a 'tone' push button phone.)

To get information about your case, you need to use your PIN number (personal identification number) which is given to you if you are the custodial or noncustodial parent, provided your correct Social Security number is in our automated system. If you do not have a PIN number or you wish to correct your Social Security number, write to: PIN Administrator, DSS-BCSE, 25 Sigourney St. (10th floor), Hartford, CT 06106-5033. Include your full name, address, and social security number.

**VOICES 1-800-647-8872**

## Collecting & Distributing Support

Processing child support payments is another service provided by the state. When the state receives payments from non-custodial parents it is called *collection*. When the state pays out money to custodial parents or the state it is called *distribution*.

### • Collection

The state disbursement unit receives all child support payments and enters them in the computer system. Monthly statements are mailed to parents required to pay child support. These statements are not mailed to parents whose employers deduct payments from their checks.

### • Distribution

#### ***If you have never received AFDC or TFA –***

The child support payment is sent directly to you. Usually, a payment is sent to you two to three days after we receive it.

#### ***If you now receive TFA –***

The child support payment is distributed differently depending on whether you are part of the Jobs First program, or you are part of the control group that receives benefits under the rules that were in effect before Connecticut's welfare reform initiatives.

#### ***If you are part of the Jobs First program–***

- We send you all current child support payments that were collected in the month in which they were due. You receive these payments in the second month after we get them. The first \$100 of these payments is disregarded as income when calculating the amount of your TFA check. Anything over \$100 is subtracted from the amount of TFA you would otherwise receive.
- Any amount collected above the current support order is applied to what a parent owes in back support, and is kept by the state as reimbursement for AFDC and or TFA payments made in prior months.
- After all past AFDC and TFA is reimbursed, we credit any remaining child support amounts against future payments due.





## Collecting & Distributing Support

(continued)

### *If you are part of the Control Group –*

- After the support payment comes in, we send you what's called the "disregard" – up to the first \$50 of current support collected each month for your child. This is usually sent to you in the second month after the payment is made.
- After you are paid the disregard, the state keeps as reimbursement an amount of support, up to the TFA payment made to you that month.
- We pay you any child support we collect which is more than the amount of your TFA benefit and up to the amount of the support order.
- Any amount collected above the current support order is applied to what a parent owes in back support, and is kept by the state as reimbursement for AFDC and or TFA payments made in prior months.
- After all past AFDC and TFA are reimbursed, we credit any remaining child support amounts against future support payments due.

### *If you used to receive AFDC and or TFA–*

Effective October 1, 1997, the state distributes child support collections (other than those made through Federal Income Tax Refund Withholding) in former assistance case as follows:

- First, you receive child support collected in any month - up to the amount of the current support order.
- Second, any amount collected above the current support obligation is sent to you to satisfy any arrearages the noncustodial parent owes to you for periods after you stopped receiving assistance (post-assistance arrears).
- Third, once the post- assistance arrears are satisfied, any remaining amounts are applied to arrears owed the state.

Effective October 1, 1997, the state distributes child support collections made through Federal Income Tax Withholding in former assistance case as follows:

- First, the state keeps all collections up to the amount necessary to reimburse the state for the assistance you received.
- Second, any amount collected above the amount of assistance you received is paid to you.

## Your Rights

*When you receive  
child support services  
from the state,  
you have  
a number of rights...*

When you receive support services from the State of Connecticut, you have the right to:

- **Full and fair treatment** – You have the right to receive all the services necessary and appropriate in your case to get or collect child support. You have the right to receive those services regardless of your sex, color, race, national origin, or any handicap or disability. Notices are posted in all our offices telling you what to do if you think you are being treated unfairly. Or you can call the Department's Affirmative Action Office at (860) 424-5040.
- **Confidentiality** – You have the right to confidential treatment of all the private information that you give us, or that we find in our investigation about your case. This means that the agencies involved will not tell any outside agency or individual what we know about you or your family, unless we must to get or collect child support for your child. Even then, we will only tell what is absolutely necessary to help your case.
- **Notification** – You have the right to be told about all important actions concerning your case. We will tell you about the progress of your case whenever you ask us. We will also tell you whenever there is going to be a court hearing in your case, and whenever we get an order or determine that we cannot get an order in your case. If you receive TFA, we will continue to provide child support services when your TFA payments eventually stop, unless you ask us not to. If you do not receive TFA, we will tell you whenever the noncustodial parent asks for a hearing to protest an action we are taking, or for a change to the court order. We will also tell you about how much money we have collected in your case, and how we have distributed it. If you receive TFA, we will tell you monthly; if you do not, we will tell you every three months. Finally, we will tell you when we plan to close your case.
- **Participation** – You have the right to participate in any court actions involving your case. You have the right to ask for and participate in the review of your support order.
- **Account reviews** – If you used to get TFA, you have the right to ask for an account review. This is a chance to look at the records of the money we have collected for you and how it was distributed. Instructions for how to request a review are included in the collection notice we send you. You have the right to ask for a hearing if you are not happy with the decision on an account review.
- **Review and Adjustment** – You have the right to request a review of your support order to ensure that it is fair and appropriate. The request must be made in writing and state why you believe the order should be changed. If our review finds that your support order should be changed (modified), we will prepare the legal papers and arrange a court hearing for you.

## Your Responsibilities



When you receive child support services, you have these responsibilities:

- **Cooperation** – You must tell us all you can to help us provide the child support services you need. This includes personal and family information about you and your child's other parent. At the time of application a determination of cooperation will be made. This determination will be based on information provided by you and if any exemptions for cooperating apply such as; exceptional circumstances, good faith reasons and domestic violence. However, if you have not cooperated you will not be granted cash assistance. You may have to testify at a court hearing about the establishment of paternity or support. If you are receiving TFA and you do not cooperate in pursuing child support, your TFA benefits may be stopped. If you are not receiving TFA and you do not cooperate in pursuing child support, we may have to close your case.

- **Assignment of rights** – When you apply for TFA benefits, under the law you give all of your rights to collect child support – past, present and future – to the State of Connecticut. This means that while you are getting TFA you must turn over to the state any child support payments you receive directly from the noncustodial parent. The state also has the right to collect child support owed to you before you began receiving TFA. The state may keep this support as reimbursement for all TFA payments. This assignment of rights ends when you leave TFA. However, the state will keep collecting any past support owed to you or the state at the time your TFA benefits stopped until the state is fully paid back for all the TFA payments made to you.

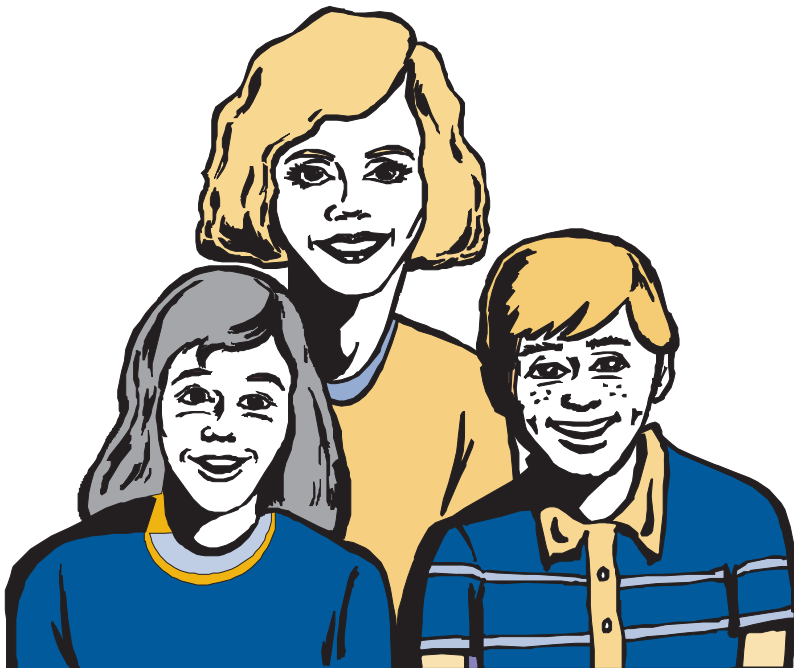
- **Overpayments** – If the state makes a mistake and pays you too much money, you must repay the amount overpaid.

- **Notification** – You must tell us when any of the following occur: TFA is granted; you start a court action for child support without our help; custody of your child changes; you change your name, address or employment; your child leaves home or is legally emancipated; you begin living with your child's other parent; or anything else happens that may affect the amount of child support and your right to receive it for your child.

## Fees for Services

Connecticut does not ask parents to pay the actual cost of child support services we provide (for example, legal representation by the Attorney General's Office or preparing court documents). However, we do charge fees for certain services if you do not receive TFA.

- **Application fee** – Depending on your income, \$25 is charged when you apply for child support services. You will not have to pay the fee if your family income is less than a family your size would receive from TFA. If you are now receiving TFA, Medicaid or foster care assistance, you do not have to pay the fee to continue using child support services after TFA, Medicaid or foster care assistance stops.
- **Location only fee** – We charge a \$10 fee when the only service you want is locating the noncustodial parent. You must pay another \$4 if you cannot give us the noncustodial parent's social security number.
- **Federal income tax refund offset fee** – We charge a \$15 fee for each parent's name sent to the Internal Revenue Service for intercepting a federal income tax refund. You do not have to pay it yourself; it will be deducted from any amounts we collect for you through this process.
- **IRS full collection fee** – A fee of \$122.50 is charged if you ask us to apply to the Internal Revenue Service for action to collect back support of at least \$750. This fee is charged up-front, and is non-refundable.



## How to Get Help

Take these steps to get child support services from the state:

***If you receive TFA, Medicaid or foster care assistance*** – you automatically receive all child support services. A child support worker in the Department of Social Services will be assigned to work with you.

***If you do not receive TFA, Medicaid or foster care assistance*** – you can apply for services by contacting a local office of the Department of Social Services.

***If you are already receiving child support services and need your child support order enforced or changed*** – you should contact the nearest office of the Support Enforcement Division of the Judicial Branch.

***If you have questions or need more information...***

- If you want general information about child support services or information about your case including payment information, you can call our automated telephone line called **VOICES**. Call toll-free **1-800-647-8872** anytime between 6 a.m. and midnight, seven days a week. (You need a 'touch tone' push-button phone.)
- If you need more specific information or if you have a problem with the way your case is being handled, you can call our "Information and Problem Resolution Unit." Call toll-free 1-800-228-KIDS, Monday-Friday between 8:30 am and 4:30 pm.

**Bureau of  
Child Support  
Enforcement,  
Department of  
Social Services**

### REGIONAL OFFICES

**Bridgeport:** 925 Housatonic Ave. 06603; **203-551-2703**

**Danbury:** 342 Main St. 06810; **203-207-8986**

**Hartford:** 3580 Main St. 06120; **860-723-1002**

**Manchester:** 699 East Middle Tnpk. 06040; **860-647-1441**

**Middletown:** 117 Main St. Ext. 06457; **860-704-3126**

**New Britain:** 270 Lafayette St. 06051; **860-612-3465**

**New Haven:** 194 Bassett St. 06511; **203-974-8248**

**Norwich:** 401 W.Thames, Unit 102. 06360; **860-823-3325**

**Stamford:** 1642 Bedford St. 06905; **203-251-9417**

**Torrington:** 62 Commercial Blvd. Suite 1 06790; **860-496-6944**

**Waterbury:** 249 Thomaston Ave. 06702; **203-597-4171**

**Toll-Free TDD/TTY line: 1-800-842-4524**

**Support  
Enforcement  
Division,  
Judicial Branch**

**Bridgeport:** 172 Golden Hill Street 06604; **203-579-6590**  
**Danbury:** 72 Main Street 06810; **203-731-2940**  
**Hartford:** 999 Asylum Avenue 06105; **860-566-8723**  
**Middletown:** 484 Main Street 06457; **860-344-2957**  
**New Britain:** 20 Franklin Square 06051; **860-515-5300**  
**New Haven:** 414 Chapel Street 06511; **203-789-7485**  
**Norwich:** 99 Main Street 06360; **860-886-2694**  
**Putnam:** 263 Kennedy Drive 06260; **860-963-2580**  
**Rockville:** 30 Lafayette Square 06066; **860-870-4010**  
**Stamford:** 229 North Street 06901; **203-961-1048**  
**Waterbury:** 11 Scovill Street 06702; **203-596-4188**

## **Information and Problem Resolution Unit**

The Child Support Information and Problem Resolution Unit is a joint effort between the Judicial Branch and the Department of Social Services. The Unit is staffed by support enforcement specialists (Child Support Advocates) with significant field experience, whose function is to analyze, evaluate and trouble shoot child support cases which cannot be resolved by the field offices. In addition, the Child Support Advocate provides follow-up toward effective resolution of complaints. The IPRU is a mechanism to improve customer service and make a multi-agency program transparent to the public.

The National toll-free child support help-line number is 1-800-228-KIDS. The help-line is staffed from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Letters can also be FAXed to (860) 566-2452, or mailed to the Information and Problem Resolution Unit, 999 Asylum Avenue, 4th floor, Hartford, CT 06105.

**VOICES 1-800-647-8872**

Connecticut Child Support Enforcement Program. . .

A partnership of the state Department of Social Services, Support Enforcement  
Division of the Judicial Branch, and the Attorney General's Office.... and you.

## Organizations Involved in Child Support

### Connecticut Women's Education & Legal Fund

135 Broad St., Hartford, CT 06105; 247-6090

### Legal Services

Call INFOLINE (listed in white pages) for referral to a local office.

### State Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

18-20 Trinity St., Hartford, CT 06106; 240-8300

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March 2000

For more copies of *The Child Support Guide*, clip and mail or fax to:

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Publication No. 95-2

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street address \_\_\_\_\_

City or town \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip code \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like a Child Support Investigator to call you to discuss your  
situation? If yes please clip and mail to:

State of Connecticut  
Department of Social Services, Bureau of Child Support Enforcement  
25 Sigourney St., 10th Floor, Hartford, CT 06106-5033

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime phone \_\_\_\_\_ Best time to call \_\_\_\_\_

City or town you live in \_\_\_\_\_

Are you receiving TFA? Yes  No

Do you need help in... Finding the other parent

Legally determining the father

Getting or changing a support order

Enforcing an order  Other \_\_\_\_\_

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*Services are available  
to all applicants and recipients  
without regard to race, color, creed, sex, sexual  
orientation, age, disabilities, learning disabilities,  
national origin, ancestry or language barriers.  
The Department has a TDD/TTY line for persons  
who are deaf or hearing impaired  
and have a TDD/TTY: 1-860-297-4911  
Auxiliary aids are also available for blind or  
visually impaired persons.  
The Department of Social Services is an equal  
opportunity, affirmative action employer.*

**State of Connecticut  
Department of Social Services  
25 Sigourney Street  
Hartford, CT 06106-5033**

Publication No. 95-2 March 2000

**VOICES  
1-800-647-8872**

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