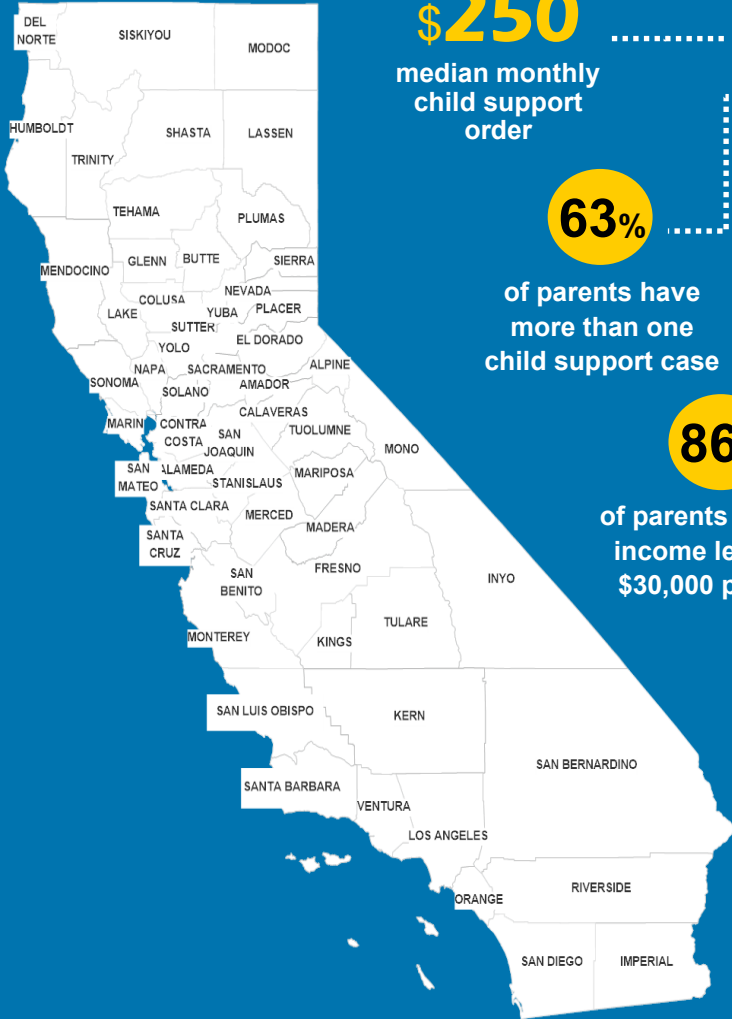


# Child Support and Foster Care in California



**\$250**  
median monthly  
child support  
order

**63%**

of parents have  
more than one  
child support case

**86%**

of parents reported  
income less than  
\$30,000 per year

**62,500**<sup>3</sup>

Foster Care Cases  
in the California  
Child Support Program  
(FFY 2018)

pay support  
at a rate of

**37%**

of cases paid  
less than 7% of  
support due

**50%**

**57%**

of parents  
are non-  
white

**60%**

of parents owe

**\$490<sub>M</sub>**

in arrears

which is **3%**  
of total arrears  
owed in the  
state

**41%**

of obligors  
are females

Foster Care cases make up 5% of California's Child Support Caseload



Federal law requires the child support program to establish and enforce orders when appropriate for parents who have a child in foster care. The purpose of ordering parents to pay child support is to offset the government-incurred costs of Title IV-E foster care maintenance payments. Orange County Child Support Services examined Foster Care cases in the California child support caseload to answer the following:

- Are foster care cases similar to the rest of the of child support caseload?
- Are child support orders against parents in the foster care system cost effective for California Child Support program?
- Do child support collections from these orders substantially reimburse the federal government for foster care maintenance payments?
- Are child support enforcement actions consistent with state and federal welfare policy goals?

Based on focus groups with child welfare professionals and an internal operational analysis, child support enforcement actions against parents in the foster care system can have a negative impact on families and are not cost effective.

“She was a domestic violence victim; her child was removed from the home and a child support case was opened against her. A \$150 order turned into \$8,000 in arrears that took her 30 years to pay off. She is now an advocate for victims.”

- An Orange County case manager's story



## FOSTER CARE CASES



## UNPRODUCTIVE & COMPLEX WORK



## COST EFFECTIVE

### Foster care cases are different from non-foster care cases.

- They are in deeper poverty
- Payment rates are lower
- No money goes directly to support the child
- The parent required to pay support is more often the mother
- At least one of the obligated parties is often working simultaneously towards reunification with their child

### SHARES RECOUPMENT

**FEDERAL**  
13¢ return  
for every \$1  
(Negative Return)

**STATE**  
\$0 return  
for every \$1  
(Negative Return)

**COUNTY**  
No investment  
\$13.4m  
100% Gain

Collects **27¢**<sup>1</sup>  
for every dollar  
expended

Requires **50%**  
more effort to  
manage

### These orders are costly for the child support program in California with little return.

- **48%** of cases with zero-dollar orders
- **14%** of cases do not have a support order
- **46%** of cases pay nothing
- **Multiple** court hearings in Dependency and Child Support courts
- Many parents have more than one child support case
- Require **extensive research**
- Additional **communication burden** between Child Support and Social Services

### Child Support collections do not substantially reimburse the federal government.

For every **\$1** paid in foster care maintenance payments, the federal government recoups only **4¢** through child support collections.<sup>2</sup>

**\$181.2m**  
Foster Care  
Maintenance  
Payments

**\$6.6m**  
Federal  
Recoupment

## CSS IMPACT ON FOSTER CARE FAMILIES

- Paying child support places a financial burden that can thwart reunification requirements
- Not paying child support subjects parents to enforcement actions that can jeopardize reunification



### ENFORCEMENT TOOLS

Wage, Unemployment Insurance, and or Disability Benefit garnishment

Negative Credit Reporting

Property liens

Bank levies

Suspension or revocation of driver's and professional license

Intercepts of tax refunds, worker's compensation payouts, and insurance payouts

### Data Sources:

1. Expense data is from "Annual Report to the Legislature" for FFY 2017. Recoupment data is from CS 34/35 Report for FFY 2018.
2. Expense data is from "Child Welfare Agency Spending in California" for SFY 2016. Recoupment data is from CS 34/35 Report for FFY 2016.
3. California Statewide Data Repository; Line 1, 24, 25, 26 from Preliminary CS 1257 for FFY 2018.

A copy of the full study is available upon request.  
[CSS-research@css.ocgov.com](mailto:CSS-research@css.ocgov.com)