
Child Support Debt in Louisiana Frustrates Economic Security for Black Parents and Families

Parents who are behind in child support payments—called “arrears”—may, by federal law, owe a significant portion to the government to reimburse cash assistance that their child’s household received from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Because African-American families are much more likely than others to have received TANF cash benefits, black parents who are court-ordered to pay child support are also much more likely to owe child support debt to the government.

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

- Child support debt totaled **\$112 billion** as of October, 2015.
- **\$27 billion—24%**—of this debt is owed to the federal and state governments to reimburse TANF.

In **Louisiana**, as of 2015, according to OCSE:

- Child support debt totaled **\$1.6 billion**.
- **\$158 million—10%**—of this debt is owed to the government to repay Family Independence Temporary Assistance Program (FITAP) benefits, Louisiana’s TANF program.

States have the option, authorized by federal law, to give a portion of parents’ child support payments to families who receive TANF cash benefits—this is called a “pass through.” However, Louisiana state’s policy does not pass through any amount of child support payments to families who receive FITAP/TANF.

African-American parents who are court-ordered to pay child support are much more likely to owe child support debt to the Louisiana and federal governments. This is because:

- Black children in Louisiana were **more than six times** as likely as white children to get cash benefits (FITAP/TANF) in 2014, according to CFFPP’s analysis of TANF and Census data.
- Black children accounted for **78%** of all children in Louisiana who received FITAP/TANF benefits in 2014, however, they were only 37% of all children in the state.

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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