



It Makes Sound Fiscal Sense to Restore Funding for Child Support Enforcement

by Vicki Turetsky

H.R. 1386 and S. 803 would restore funds cut by the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005. Congress should restore funds because:

- The child support program collected more than \$23 billion for 17 million children participating in the program. The Congressional Research Service found that child support is one of the most important safety net programs reducing poverty rates for working families.
- The DRA made deep cuts to federal child support enforcement funding. A preliminary estimate by the Congressional Budget Office indicates that *\$11 billion in child support payments will go uncollected* over the next 10 years, even if states backfill half of the lost federal funds.
- Child support payments allowed more than 300,000 families to close their Temporary Assistance to Needy Families cases in 2004. Families go on welfare less often and leave sooner when they receive reliable support payments. In addition, federal costs for Medicaid, food stamps, and other means-tested programs decrease when both parents support their children.
- The child support program collected \$4.58 in private dollars for every \$1 spent by federal, state, and county governments. The Office of Management and Budget rated the child support program as one of the most effective government programs.
- As states implement the cuts in the DRA, fewer children will receive reliable support from their parents. States and counties will collect support less consistently and it will take longer to establish paternity and support orders. Employer outreach initiatives will be curtailed. Domestic violence services and initiatives to help low-income fathers work and stay involved with their children will be reduced or eliminated. Interstate enforcement will be less dependable.
- As program resources are reduced, a state's ability to meet federal performance measures will deteriorate. A downward spiral in performance will further decrease state program funds and increase penalty risks. Counties in particular rely on performance incentive funding to operate. The performance gap will widen between states and counties able to backfill funds and those that can not.

The goal of the child support enforcement program is to ensure that children receive financial and medical support from their parents. Over the past 10 years, child support reforms enacted by Congress, with wide bipartisan support, have doubled collection rates and boosted cost effectiveness. Restoring child support funds cut by the DRA will prevent a decade of progress from unraveling and will help millions of families toward self sufficiency.