

CHILD SUPPORT DEBT RELIEF IN ILLINOIS



Under the sweeping welfare reforms passed by the Clinton Administration in 1996, child support became tied to social service benefits in a direct way. If a parent—usually a mother living with children—is entitled to child support from her child’s other parent and receives Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF helps pay for food, shelter, utilities, and non-medical expenses), she must assign a portion of her child support payments back to the state. If the parent obligated to pay child support falls behind, a portion of the unpaid child support obligation is owed not to the parent on behalf of the children, but to the state.

THE CLEAN SLATE PROGRAM IN ILLINOIS IS INTENDED TO HELP PARENTS WHO ARE UNABLE TO PAY THEIR CHILD SUPPORT ELIMINATE THE DEBT OWED TO THE STATE AND START FRESH.

To apply for the Clean Slate Program, people must complete an application and provide proof that they could not make their child support payments during the "assistance period" because the applicant: (1) was unemployed; (2) incarcerated; or (3) had a serious illness which prevented them from paying child support. Applicants must also provide proof of their current income or ability to make payments.

To receive relief, those who qualify must make their regularly-ordered child support payments to the state for *six months*. Once those support payments are made, the child support debt owed to the State of Illinois will be permanently removed. However, any child support debt still owed directly to the custodial parent is still owed and must be paid to the custodial parent.



UNFORTUNATELY, THE CLEAN SLATE PROGRAM IS INFLEXIBLE AND DOES NOT ADEQUATELY ACCOUNT FOR LONG-TERM ECONOMIC INSECURITY.

70% OF PARENTS WHO OWE CHILD SUPPORT IN THE U.S. EARN LESS THAN \$10,000 PER YEAR. PARENTS WHO EARN MORE THAN \$40,000 REPRESENT LESS THAN 4% OF ALL THE PARENTS WHO OWE UNPAID CHILD SUPPORT.*



The Clean Slate Program has been unsuccessful because many parents cannot find the stable and consistent employment required to complete the program. Requiring parents to pay back state assistance deprives low-income children of valuable resources; disproportionately impacts families of color; pushes low income parents to exit the formal economy; and is, ultimately, not cost-effective as most of the debt is uncollectible.

**According to the Office of Child Support Enforcement*

POLICY REFORM RECOMMENDATIONS

- SEND 100% OF CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENTS DIRECTLY TO CHILDREN;
- STOP THE USE OF OVERLY PUNITIVE PENALTIES, AND INSTEAD SUPPORT PARENTS WITH MORE ROBUST AND FLEXIBLE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES;
- ENSURE CHILD SUPPORT ORDERS ARE BASED ON PARENTS’ FINANCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES;
- ELIMINATE ALL OUTSTANDING PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PAYBACK DEBT, SO MORE PARENTS’ PAYMENTS GO TO CHILDREN.

