

NYC

Human Resources
Administration
Department of
Social Services

CHILD SUPPORT
SERVICES



Office of Child Support Services

OCCSS
Annual Report 2022

OCSS puts children first by helping parents provide for the economic and social well-being, health, and stability of their children.



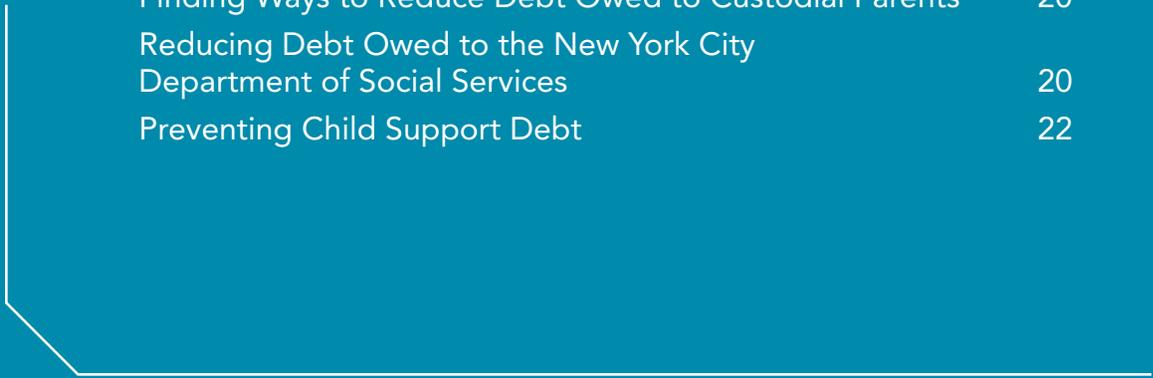
Note: Photos used throughout this document are of models used for illustrative purposes only.





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Special thanks to David Ramm for his work on this report.

Our Values

We believe every encounter with our program should reflect these values:

- **Respect:** the right to be treated with dignity and have your voice heard and concerns addressed
- **Fairness:** the need to be transparent and unbiased when making decisions
- **Clarity:** the need to make processes and criteria for judgment clear and comprehensible
- **Helpfulness:** the recognition that assisting people is at the heart of our work

Message from the OCSS Executive Deputy Commissioner



For those of us in the New York City Office of Child Support Services (OCSS), 2022 was a year of renewal.

Supported by forward-looking, effectiveness-focused leadership in the City and the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Human Resources Administration (HRA), we worked hard to build on the

positive changes to our service delivery model that the pandemic had hastened into practice.

At the same time, leaving behind the churning uncertainty of those 18 to 20 months allowed us to focus on our core services: establishing parentage and medical and child support orders and ensuring those orders are enforced to the benefit of children.

An App for Child Support in New York City

This combination of rapid innovation and a concentration on core services is probably best exemplified by the launch in January 2022 of the New York City Child Support – ACCESS HRA Child Support Mobile app.

The pandemic made it clear how urgently New York City parents—whether they receive child support or pay it—need faster and more convenient ways of applying for and managing child support without physically walking into an office.

As we detail later in this report, custodial parents can use the app to enroll in services and upload documents. Noncustodial parents can apply for debt-reduction programs, respond to certain administrative enforcement actions, and even make payments directly through the app.

Reaching Agreements to Simplify the Court Process

In 2022 we redoubled our efforts to encourage parents and guardians to work with our staff to reach agreements to set and change child support orders ahead of a hearing with the court.

We also put additional effort into a process to facilitate the reduction of debt owed to custodial parents using trained mediators across the five boroughs who offer their services for free or at a very low cost. The amount of debt owed to custodial parents is genuinely staggering, and we feel a responsibility to both parties to find a way to address it.

All of these processes are designed to be safe, transparent, and inclusive. They represent our ongoing commitment to serving both parents equally, so both parents can keep their focus where it should be: on their child.

What's Next

In 2023 we plan to continue to expand the functionality of the mobile app for custodial and noncustodial parents, introduce an electronic case filing system for staff, and begin implementing a program to help young parents find their footing in the child support program and elsewhere.

At the same time, we will maintain our steady focus on delivering our core services. As a recognized anti-poverty program, we will push ourselves to find new ways to make them easier to access and improve the customer experience because we want to improve outcomes for two generations: the parents we serve and the children they care for. And we will strive to embody our values of respect, fairness, clarity, and helpfulness in all that we do.

Any feedback you have would be welcome. We know from experience that we can only realize our goals by embracing partnership and the open exchange of ideas that it requires.

You can email us at dcse.cseweb@dfa.state.ny.us.

Frances Pardus-abbadessa
Executive Deputy Commissioner, OCSS

Want to Know More about Our Programs and Goals? Get in Touch

We regularly meet with nonprofits, foundations, community-based organizations, and other government programs and agencies for discussions about child support and potential collaborations.

If your organization would like to know more about child support in New York City and our programs, outcome data, or our larger goals to improve the lives of parents, guardians, and children, contact us at dcse.cseweb@dfa.state.ny.us.

We welcome partnerships with groups throughout the city and across the country!



Child Support: A Two-Generation Anti-poverty Program

One of the most important goals of our program is to deliver on the two-generational anti-poverty potential of child support.

We want to help custodial parents get the support they need for their child without putting the economic well-being of the noncustodial parent at risk. When the child support process delivers steady income to children—almost regardless of the actual dollar amount paid—children seem to benefit, as research has consistently shown.

Poverty is a particularly pressing issue for the families we serve. In 2021, nearly a third of all children with an absent parent were living below the poverty level—more than twice the overall child poverty rate of 14.4%. Children who receive child support services from programs like ours—which come from Title IV-D of the Social Security Act—are even poorer. A study of 2017 data showed 61% of children connected to the federal child support program live in or near poverty, compared to 49% of children in custodial families not receiving our services and 29% for children who are not eligible for child support.¹

That percentage would be even higher if families did not receive child support. According to one study, between 11% and 15% of all children in custodial parent families nationwide are lifted out of poverty thanks to child support.²

For all of the program's undoubted success, we know we still have farther to go to deliver on its full promise. Some of our most significant efforts at the moment are summarized in the sections of this report on equity and accessibility and reducing and avoiding debt.

1 Elaine Sorensen (2021), "Characteristics of Custodial Parents and Their Children: Who Receives Child Support (IV-D) Services and Who Doesn't?" U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Services. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ocse/characteristics_cps_and_their_children.pdf.

2 Laura Cuesta and Daniel R. Meyer (2018), "Child Poverty and Child Support Policy: A Comparative Analysis of Colombia and the United States." *Children and Youth Services Review* (93): 143-153. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.07.013>.



A Primer on the Child Support Process in New York City

Opening a Case

In New York City, child support cases start with a custodial parent—the person living with and taking day-to-day care of the child at the center of the case. Custodial parents can be mothers, fathers, or guardians. Custodial parents applying for or receiving Cash Assistance open their child support cases with staff located in our Borough Offices. All other custodial parents open their case with staff in our Family Court offices.

Establishing Parentage

While often done outside of the child support process, establishing legal parentage is required before establishing a child support order. It also grants important rights to both fathers and children. By establishing parentage, fathers gain the right to seek court-ordered visitation or custody and to be consulted in legal proceedings related to the child, among other rights. Children gain a broad spectrum of legal rights as well, especially around inheritance and access to potential Social Security and military benefits through the father. Parentage must be established before an order is established.

Establishing Orders

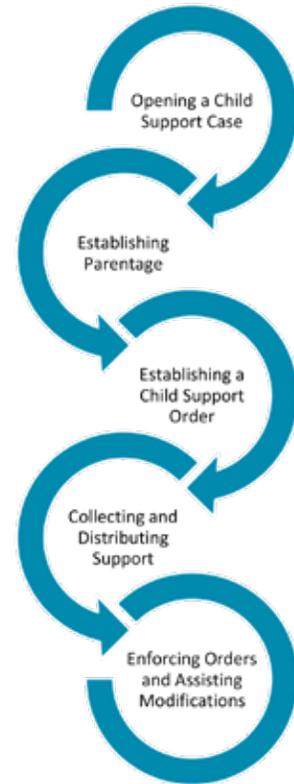
In New York State, child support orders are set by the Family Court as a percentage of the parents' income. The court also considers how to provide the child with medical support and cover education and childcare costs.

Collecting and Distributing Support

Custodial parents not currently receiving Cash Assistance—about 87% of our current caseload—receive all of the money we collect as current support on their behalf. Our Cash Assistance clients get up to \$100 of current support collected for one child or up to \$200 for two or more children, the remainder going to reimburse the Department of Social Services (DSS) for Cash Assistance payments.

Enforcing Orders and Assisting in Requests to Modify Them

For noncustodial parents, the key to success in the child support program is having an order that is calculated based on their current income and meets the needs of their child. Staying engaged with the child support program from the beginning of their case to the day it's closed is also key. Yet the needs of their children can change, as can noncustodial parents' income and ability to work. Modifying child support orders allows custodial and noncustodial parents to address these changes in a fair and equitable way. And when parents fail to pay their current support, OCSS and the courts have enforcement options to help ensure that the needs of the child are met.





Promoting Racial Equity through the Child Support Program

Every part of DSS, including OCSS, has long worked to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion through policies and practices. We believe our broad anti-poverty mission and two-generational impact contribute to those goals, as do our early emphasis on employment programs for noncustodial parents and our concerted efforts to reduce child support debt owed to the New York City DSS.

All of this work addresses racial equity to some degree, but in recent years we have come to more deeply understand the need to look at our program more consistently through that lens to advance the shared goal of a more racially equitable city and country. In July 2022 NYC DSS's Office of Equity and Inclusion released a [Racial Equity Toolkit](#) that highlights the importance of consciously and directly examining racial equity in particular:

As racism is systemic, the work of dismantling racism across all communities, must extend beyond reacting to instances of racism through thoughtful, vigilant, and sustained practices. Advancing antiracism across our community necessitates collective cultivation of an organizational culture that embraces continuing education and engagement to assess and address racial inequity present in behaviors, practices, policies, settings, and outcomes.

For these reasons, we began to look at everything we were already doing and discuss what else we could do.

Who OCSS Serves

Most of the parents and children served by OCSS are Black or Latino or both. In fact, for those cases where we have information on ethnicity and race, about 93% of the custodial parents and 94% of the noncustodial parents on our caseload are either Black or Latino. This is far out of proportion to the city itself, where upwards of 45% of the population identifies as either white, Asian, American Indian, Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian, or another Pacific Island group.

The national child support program that we are a part of also tends to over-represent people of color. According to [2018 data](#) analyzed by the federal Office of Child Support Services (OCSS), an estimated 48% of custodial parents are either Black (24%) or Latino (24%). Another 5% identified as a group other than white, Black, or Latino. By contrast, [in 2018](#) only 40% of people in the U.S. identified as Black, Latino, Asian, American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or another Pacific Islander group.

Some Historical Sources of Inequity

The reasons for the over-representation of Black and Latino families are both historical and ongoing.

The federal child support program is in part a product of the early to mid-1970s bipartisan Welfare reform movement that saw child support as a tool for recovering the costs of public benefits.

Some arguments for formally connecting child support to Welfare relied on racist imagery of Black fathers.³ Others echoed frustrations voiced by second-wave feminists that men—implicitly white and well-employed—had abandoned their children, pushing the burdens of emotional and financial labor entirely onto women.

Most public commentary on the incipient program recognized the distinction between people who could not pay child support due to unemployment versus those willfully refusing to pay. Yet then, as now, the federal child support program did not fund employment services for parents unable to pay their support.

The Present-Day Picture

In the decades since the federal program was founded, child support has deemphasized its cost recovery function, but the fundamental policy mechanism connecting child support to cash assistance has not changed. Then as now, a single parent seeking cash benefits for their children virtually anywhere in the country is required to seek child support services.

In fact, in 1996, that requirement was further strengthened by the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. Since then, parents who fail to comply with the child support cooperation requirement may have their benefits reduced (or, in some areas, effectively eliminated) unless they are granted an exemption as a victim or survivor of domestic violence.

Effectively, then, groups that have been subject to policies and ideologies that have created systemic barriers to building and transferring wealth are more likely to be connected to child support through the need for cash supports. That connection explains the 53% of all OCSS cases in 2022 that involved a child currently or formerly in receipt of benefits.

Income levels also likely explain the remaining 46% of OCSS cases with children who have never received those same benefits. Research suggests that the custodial parents connected to the federal child support program come from households with lower incomes—even lower than other custodial parents. An analysis of [2015 Census data](#) by the federal OCSS found that 45% of custodial families not connected to the federal program had incomes over \$50,000, while just 23% of custodial families with cases related to the federal program exceeded that income level.

Poised between formal poverty and an income that would allow them and their children to get by without additional income, these custodial parents seek out a government program that can potentially provide their households with much needed income at little to no cost: child support.

³ An interview with Senator Russell Long in the *Washington Post* in 1971 quotes him as saying, “The beginning of a welfare reform program should be a federal child support law.... As it stands today, little if anything is being done [to recover the cost Welfare]—so little, in fact, that in the ghetto areas most fathers seem to think that they can have children of other women to whom they’re not married, without really incurring any danger of being sued for child support at all.” “Sen. Long on Work and Welfare” (December 19, 1971). *Washington Post*. Pg. C1.

Our importance to these families inspires us to do all we can to deliver on the program's potential to serve as lever of greater equity. In September 2022, Tangler Gray, the current commissioner of the federal OCSS, [described her vision](#) for this part of the program:

Equity is an essential part of administering child support to ensure we have quality services and fair outcomes. At [the federal OCSS], we strive to create an environment that advances racial equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and held back by persistent poverty and inequality.

How We Have Responded So Far

As a program that has long tried to broaden the anti-poverty effects of child support, many of our current activities align with the goals of reducing inequities and making our services more broadly accessible. We have signaled that focus on services by changing our name from the Office of Child Support Enforcement to the Office of Child Support Services, a pattern recently followed by the federal OCSS as well.

Addressing issues as soon as they arise—or, ideally, before they have even appeared—has been a focus of ours for some time. These efforts take many forms, from early engagement with noncustodial parents who might not have the supports needed to pay their child support to outreach to custodial parents receiving Cash Assistance to resolve sanctions. The through-line in all of these cases is thoughtful program and policy development and clear, direct communications. For more details on this aspect of our work, see the sections below on reducing and avoiding child support debt and bringing services to the community.

We have also been addressing issues related to equity by training staff on how to serve clients in line with procedural justice and trauma-informed practices. These distinct but complementary approaches encourage staff to put themselves in the place of the people they serve, recognizing the importance of clarity and transparency about processes as well as shining light on the kinds of experiences that might inform clients' responses to our work.

In 2017, in collaboration with Hunter College's Silberman School of Social Work, we developed a [curriculum](#) on fatherhood for use in social work schools at no cost to the school. The curriculum has been taught at Columbia University by Dr. Flona Mincy and is now a permanent course at the School of Social Welfare at Stony Brook University, where it is being taught by Associate Professor R. Anna Hayward.

While the curriculum speaks to the experiences of all kinds of fathers in the U.S., the current and future social workers who are the curriculum's intended audience will in many cases be working with people of color—very often Black and Latino mothers with children by Black and Latino men. By making social workers aware of the many ways that positive relationships with fathers benefit children, we hope to bring the too-often-negative image of fathers in line with the overwhelmingly positive reality.

Our Next Steps

We are committed to finding other ways to guide the New York City child support program toward more equitable outcomes. The question is how to do that within the scope of our authority.

While large for a child support program, OCSS is only one of 57 local child support programs in the state, all of them governed by the same state and federal laws and regulations. The primary interpreter of those laws is the New York State Family Court, which is responsible to other courts not programs such as ours.

Yet we must act.

One step we plan to take in 2023 is to directly confront structural racism in the child support program in our next policy conference. Attendees, many of them advocates or service providers with community-based organizations or legal services groups,



will have a chance to hear what we know about ways that child support intersects with the systemic racism identified by NYC DSS's Office of Equity and Inclusion, among others. They will also be able to help guide us toward concrete solutions.

Taking this first step is an essential part of the process of understanding an issue this complex. As economist Maria Cancian—a leading child support researcher and the dean of the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University—has written about the need to understand inequity related to the program: “Our failure to grapple seriously with structural inequities tied to race, class, and gender often undercuts our ability to understand the problem, and therefore, to design effective solutions.”

We are always open to ideas for additional ways to promote equity, accessibility, and inclusiveness in our program. Email your ideas to us at dcse.cseweb@dfa.state.ny.us.





Reducing and Avoiding Child Support Debt

For well over a decade, OCSS has had programs in place to help noncustodial parents reduce existing child support debt owed to DSS and avoid the accumulation of debt in the first place.

As a result, by the end of 2022 we had reduced tens of millions in child support debt owed to the government for about 24,000 noncustodial parents. The average reduction for each was over \$10,000.

The Negative Effects of Debt

Debt of any type can negatively affect a person’s mental and physical health. But recent research suggests that debt from child support—uniquely among other kinds of debt—negatively affects outcomes for children in low-income households.⁴ Worse outcomes for these children almost certainly then contribute to larger inequities for the predominantly Black and Latino families we serve.

Table 1 summarizes some of the most well-supported research on the negative effects of child support debt.

Table 1: The Effects of Child Support Debt: What the Research Shows*

Outcome Studied	Effect of Having Debt from Nonpayment of Child Support
Child support payments from noncustodial parents	Decreased ongoing child support payments from noncustodial parents substantially
In-kind child support from noncustodial parents (such as groceries, diapers, and additional child care)	Reduced in-kind support from noncustodial parents
Noncustodial parents’ formal employment	Decreased noncustodial parents’ formal employment
Noncustodial fathers’ involvement with their children	Significantly reduced noncustodial fathers’ contact with children
Low-income noncustodial fathers’ physical, psychological, and economic well-being	Worse physical, psychological, and economic outcomes for low-income noncustodial fathers with high child support debt
Children’s socioemotional well-being	Worse socioemotional outcomes for 9- and 15-year-old children

* We are grateful to Elaine Sorensen of the federal Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families for inspiring this table.

4 Nepomnyaschy, Lenna, Allison Dwyer Emory, Kasey J. Eickmeyer, Maureen R. Waller, and Daniel P. Miller. "Parental Debt and Child Well-Being: What Type of Debt Matters for Child Outcomes?" *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 7, no. 3 (2021): 122. <https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2021.7.3.06>.

Finding Ways to Reduce Debt Owed to Custodial Parents

About five years ago we finalized a framework to allow custodial parents to—safely—forgive all or part of the uncollectable child support debt owed to them by noncustodial parents.

Our voluntary approach draws on the expertise of free or low-cost mediation providers in the five boroughs. Mediators lead a conversation with both parents about what they can do to come together for their children.

That could mean agreeing to a lump sum payment in exchange for a significant reduction in debt or forgiving it in entirety. Mediators can also help parents address ongoing problems with custody, parenting time, or communication.

The goal, as always, to improve the lives of parents and children in the short and long term.

Reducing Debt Owed to the New York City Department of Social Services

In New York City, parents who receive Cash Assistance benefits for their children assign any child support payments they receive to the City's Department of Social Services to reimburse the government for benefits issued. When unpaid, this type of child support accumulates the same way it would in other cases. A similar mechanism is in place for some foster care cases.

After more than four and a half decades under these kinds of policies, the amount of debt that has accumulated is staggering. It also is fundamentally inequitable.

Research has repeatedly shown that most child support debt nationwide is owed by parents with little to no reported income. In New York City, we primarily serve Black and Latino parents, so we know that much of the debt on our caseload is owed by those families.

Over a decade ago, we acted to address this problem by creating programs that would allow noncustodial parents to reduce their government-owed arrears. We have continued to add new debt-reduction programs over the years, including ways to reduce debt through our Support Through Employment Program (STEP), and the occupational training program Families Forward (FFD).

In 2020 we launched our newest debt-reduction program: the Parent Success Program, which lowers up to \$10,000 in child support debt owed to the City's Department of Social Services for qualifying parents who complete a substance use treatment program certified by the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services. We plan to extend this approach to other areas that support parents' well-being and strengthen their ability to support their children.

We have three other critical debt-reduction programs:

- **Arrears Cap Program.** Reduces to as little as \$500 any child support debt that parents accrued to the City's Department of Social Services while earning at or below the federal poverty level.
- **Arrears Credit Program.** Reduces up to \$5,000 per year in child support debt owed to the City's Department of Social Services when participants pay their regular child support in full for a year. Participants can remain in the program up to three years, for a total maximum reduction of \$15,000 per case.
- **Pay It Off.** During a designated time-limited period, matches payments that meet a minimum amount with an equal amount of a reduction in child support debt owed to the City's Department of Social Services (up to the total of all debt of that kind that they owe). In 2022, the more than 200 noncustodial parents who participated in Pay It Off had their child support debt lowered by over \$926,000—more than doubling the total payment amount of \$457,500. While most of the money collected goes to lowering debt owed to the New York City Department of Social Services, almost a third of it—about \$131,000—will go to the custodial parents on these cases, in keeping with federal and state child support distribution requirements.



Table 2 summarizes some of the more easily measured outcomes of two of these programs. We believe each program also brings harder to measure but more directly meaningful benefits to its participants and their families.

Table 2: Selected Outcomes of Debt-Reduction Programs

	Arrears Cap	Pay It Off
Year Program Began through 2022	2009	2013
Number of Participants Since Program Began	17,003	3,142
\$ Paid (% Change, 3 Months Before vs. 3 Months After)	44%	113%
# of Paying Cases (% Change, 3 Months Before vs. 3 Months After)	22%	40%
# Cases Closed (% of Participating Cases)	17%	34%

Preventing Child Support Debt

In our ideal child support case, the order is aligned with the paying parent's income and the child or children directly benefit from steady payments made by the noncustodial parent. When the paying parent finds the order suddenly no longer aligns with their income—they lose their job, for example, or their income unavoidably falls for another reason—they go back to court immediately to modify their order.

To encourage more cases to move closer to this ideal, we have taken extra steps to:

- Help ensure orders are right-sized
- Help noncustodial parents find jobs
- Simplify the modification process as much as possible outside of court

Table 3 outlines the steps we have taken in each of these cases. Such steps, of course, fall short of realizing our ideal, but we will continue to look for new ways to work toward these goals.

Goal	Some Approaches We Have Taken to Achieving That Goal
Right-sizing Orders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We created a set of instructions, informed by behavioral economics, that we hope will clarify for noncustodial parents what they need to do when they receive a summons in a child support case. • We developed a process to prepare agreements—called stipulations—for child support orders before the case goes to court. The agreements would still need to be approved by the court but the overall process should be smoother and allow for the parents’ voices to be heard. We hope it will also lead to better long-term outcomes
Supporting Employment for Noncustodial Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Until it was disrupted by the pandemic, our Support Through Employment Program (STEP) provided noncustodial parents on OCSS cases with access to the same employment services provided to HRA’s Cash Assistance clients, leading to hundreds of parents finding jobs or beginning to make payments every year. We continue to connect noncustodial parents to employment programs in the community, as well as the Workforce Investment Act’s Workforce One and HRA’s Cash Assistance program. • Part of a national study to identify ways to improve the economic well-being of low-income noncustodial parents, custodial parents, and their children, Families Forward offers occupational skills training and employment services, financial advice, and support services, including responsive child support practices. OCSS oversees the New York City version of the program. A network of contracted providers deliver the occupational training services.
Simplifying the Modification Process before Court	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have offered different versions of our order modification program over the years. The most recent variation—MOTS or Modifying Orders Through Stipulation—was launched in response to COVID-19, when the court was not accepting new modification petitions. A key difference from prior programs is that both orders payable to the government and to the custodial parent can participate and there is no income requirement. • When we developed our process to facilitate child support agreements ahead of court hearings, we made sure it would work to change existing orders. In both cases, the goal is to determine an amount in line with the standard child support guidelines that the paying parent can realistically afford while reducing the time burden on both the parents and the court.



OCSS STAFF SPOTLIGHT Afusat Omotosho



As a supervisor in our Customer Service Walk-In Center, Afusat Omotosho works with clients to resolve issues, answer any questions, and recommend new approaches or special programs that might benefit them. She also assists other OCSS staff with particularly challenging cases.

Omotosho works hard to meet clients with a sense of empathy and understanding—which at times can mean recommending they take extra steps now to avoid frustration in the future.

She recalls, for example, a time when she helped a noncustodial parent whose driver's license had been suspended due to child support debt, putting his employment at stake. Working with him, she began to be concerned that

his eagerness to resolve the situation by agreeing to the most immediate solution—a payment plan that would allow us to lift the suspension on his license—might not be in his long-term interest.

So she took time to review his case and discovered that his payments could be reduced to an amount he could really afford. "He was able to engage in our agreement process with a clear mind and have his driving privileges reinstated, which also allowed him to continue his employment."

Another customer came to the center distraught with the amount of time it was taking for her to receive a large child support payment. "Hearing and seeing her tears and frustration, I politely intervened and explained things to her in a calm and respectful manner," said Omotosho. "I took her telephone number, promising to monitor her account and call when the monies were released to her." When the customer received her check, she wanted to give Omotosho a bouquet of flowers. When Omotosho politely refused the flowers for simply doing her job, the customer put the bouquet in the Center lobby for all to enjoy.

Omotosho finds the most rewarding part of her work at OCSS is "being able to get a resolution to a very difficult and complex case." Because of her patience, empathy, and knowledge, she has become the "go to" person for handling complex cases at the OCSS Customer Service Walk-In Center and a source of comfort for her colleagues and the people she serves.



Distributing Support

Performance Indicator	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total Collections	\$782,803,852	\$862,591,677	\$795,885,523	\$670,975,022
Percentage of Total Collections Going Directly to Families	92%	89%	91%	92%
Percentage of Total Collections Retained by DSS to Reimburse Cash Assistance	8%	11%	9%	8%
Cases	323,341	282,627	252,371	244,491
Cases with an Order	257,384	232,232	215,819	204,067
Percentage of Cases with Parentage Established	85%	88%	90%	88%
Percentage of Cases with a Child Support Order	80%	82%	86%	83%
Percentage of Cases Where a Child Is Currently in Receipt of Cash Assistance	13%	13%	13%	13%
Percentage of Cases Where a Child Was Formerly in Receipt of Cash Assistance	40%	39%	41%	40%
Percentage of Cases Where a Child Has Never Received Cash Assistance	47%	47%	46%	47%

Note: All data as of December of each calendar year.



Bringing Services to the Community

Parents are busy—and New York City parents especially so.

Factoring that level of busyness into our process has long been a priority. But the arrival of the pandemic in 2020 took it from an important consideration to the central issue facing almost everyone in our program. Though finding solutions was not easy, this crisis led to many innovations that we plan to keep in place going forward.

Complete Customer Service over the Phone

As important as New York State’s Child Support Helpline has long been to custodial and noncustodial parents, its services are necessarily limited to high-level support and providing referrals to the local programs that have direct responsibility for managing their own cases.

When the pandemic shut down our in-person Customer Service center office along with our Family Court and Borough Offices, we moved as quickly as we could to find other ways that clients could receive services easily and without risk of exposure to the virus. One of the most important results was the creation of an entirely new process for telephonic appointments.

Telephonic services were especially important to the clients referred to us through Cash Assistance, since their cooperation with child support is required as part of their eligibility for that benefit program.

In 2020, when the process started, we held just under 1,400 virtual Customer Service appointments. In 2021, we served nearly 10 times as many people that way—reaching a high of nearly 13,000 appointments before settling back down in 2022 at just over 7,500.

During the pandemic we also began accepting credit card payments by phone. This option allows noncustodial parents to pay directly over the phone with no added fees. This was already true of our in-person credit card payments but online credit card payment options through the State website come with significant fees.

Texting and Email

Government communications can be difficult to distill into the 160-character limit of text messages. Email is more open-ended but comes with significant questions of security and user trust. But the ubiquity of texting and email means we as a program must do what we can to embrace both methods of communication.

At OCSS we have attempted to thread this needle by deploying text messaging for delivering short, highly relevant messages that relate to services, such as notifications about money waiting to be disbursed (UDC) or to inform noncustodial parents about our occupational training program Families Forward.

While we also promoted Families Forward by email, the most important recent change in our processes allows parents to arrange telephonic appointments, ask case-related questions, and even apply for services through email.

These changes allow parents to communicate with us at a time that works for them—not just us.

How-To Videos

Virtually every common task—from removing stains in laundry to repairing a boat motor and well beyond—can be learned through videos on YouTube and other platforms. In fact, [research](#) suggests that half of all adults in the U.S. use YouTube videos to learn new skills.

For virtually everyone without a law degree, child support forms and processes are both new and intimidating, making them especially helpful to explain in how-to videos.

We have already produced videos on:

- The New York City Child Support – ACCESS HRA Child Support Mobile app: <https://youtu.be/NX6kx8SBmkl>
- The Financial Disclosure Agreement (part 1: <https://youtu.be/6zdpvsen2Pg>; part 2: <https://youtu.be/g6haYC3HukQ>)
- Challenging Administrative Enforcement Actions: <https://youtu.be/BlmDZjv9xV4>
- The Direct Deposit Enrollment form: <https://youtu.be/dy0DQJ91IKE>
- Requesting a phone appointment: <https://youtu.be/u9Drs7YByE0>
- Changing address or employment information: <https://youtu.be/u9Drs7YByE0>

We also welcome suggestions for other topics to cover this way.



An App for Child Support in New York City

In 2022 we launched another channel for direct engagement of parents: the new [NYC Child Support – ACCESS HRA Child Support Mobile app](#).

Available as a free download for [Apple](#) and [Android](#) phones at [nyc.gov/childsupportmobile](#), the app is intended to make a wide variety of processes simpler for custodial and noncustodial parents.

Custodial parents can use the app to enroll in services, upload documents and update their contact information. Noncustodial parents can use it to apply for debt-reduction programs and respond to certain administrative enforcement actions. Noncustodial parents can even make payments directly through the app.

In 2022, more than 10,000 users downloaded the app on Android phones alone. About 5,400 custodial parents used the app to apply for services. In the process, they submitted more than 18,000 documents.

NYC
Human Resources
Administration
Department of
Social Services
CHILD SUPPORT
SERVICES

It's never been easier to access Child Support Services.

**New York City Office of Child Support Services (OCSS)
ACCESS HRA Child Support Mobile App lets you:**

- ✓ Enroll in child support via your phone
- ✓ Pay child support by credit, debit, PayPal*
- ✓ Scan and upload required documents
- ✓ Submit a challenge or debt reduction form
- ✓ Download the app (Apple & Android) for free

* Allow 2-3 business days for payment processing.

Learn more at
nyc.gov/childsupportmobile.

Download the app from the
App Store or Google Play.

Contact us by email at
dcse.cseweb@dfa.state.ny.us.

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OCSS STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Barbara Biasini



In many cases, the payment process in child support is straightforward: a noncustodial parent makes a payment, the payment gets allocated to the right case, and a party on the other side receives the payment. But many collections—and even many failures to collect—are not so straightforward, since they involve complex questions of policy and practice and a willingness to check every detail, past and present, to ensure that no errors have been made.

During her 42 years of truly exemplary public service, Barbara Biasini has brought an incredible clarity of mind and an unstintingly empathetic approach to analyzing and resolving these surprisingly intricate questions.

As the Director of the Account Maintenance unit within OCSS's Fiscal area, Barbara ensured that child support accounts were adjusted in line with child support orders and that support payments were appropriately disbursed. Barbara also oversaw the desk review process, which makes sure that cases are checked to confirm that they have been handled correctly and that the parents requesting the review are answered in a timely manner.

The dryness of that description belies the urgent, deeply human reality of the program that Barbara so clearly understood. She treated every one of the tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of cases that she touched over the years with respect, with fairness, and with sincerity. She earned the admiration and trust of everyone at OCSS and our partners at the State and the Court.

In 1986—just a few years after Barbara started as a civil servant—Mayor Ed Koch said, “I have always perceived, and have always said, that public service is the noblest of professions if it’s done honestly and done well.” Across a long career that ended with retirement in 2023, Barbara has epitomized the nobility of public service and set a standard of skill and personal warmth that has elevated our entire program.



Looking Ahead

In 2023, while continuing to focus on our core services, we will also continue to build on our model of inclusive, transparent, parent-centered services. Some of the initiatives we are most excited about include:

Extending our partnership with the Department of Homeless Services

OCSS and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) will coordinate special outreach to thousands of people who are residents of DHS shelters, have a child support case, and owe money to the DSS.



Outreach to veterans

To put military veterans in the best position to secure employment and permanent housing, OCSS is partnering with the Veteran's Administration to develop an outreach plan for veterans with child support debt or high child support orders. The outreach will be focused on making providers and veterans aware of ways to avoid high child support orders as well as programs available to reduce child support debt.



Youth Model

The OCSS Young Parent Initiative (YPI) identifies parents between the ages of 18 and 24 during the intake process and provides a dedicated navigator to explain the child support process and services. When interacting with the youth, the navigator will use customized services that incorporate youth principles, recognizing the strengths of custodial and noncustodial parents, and supporting their long-term development as parents.





Partners

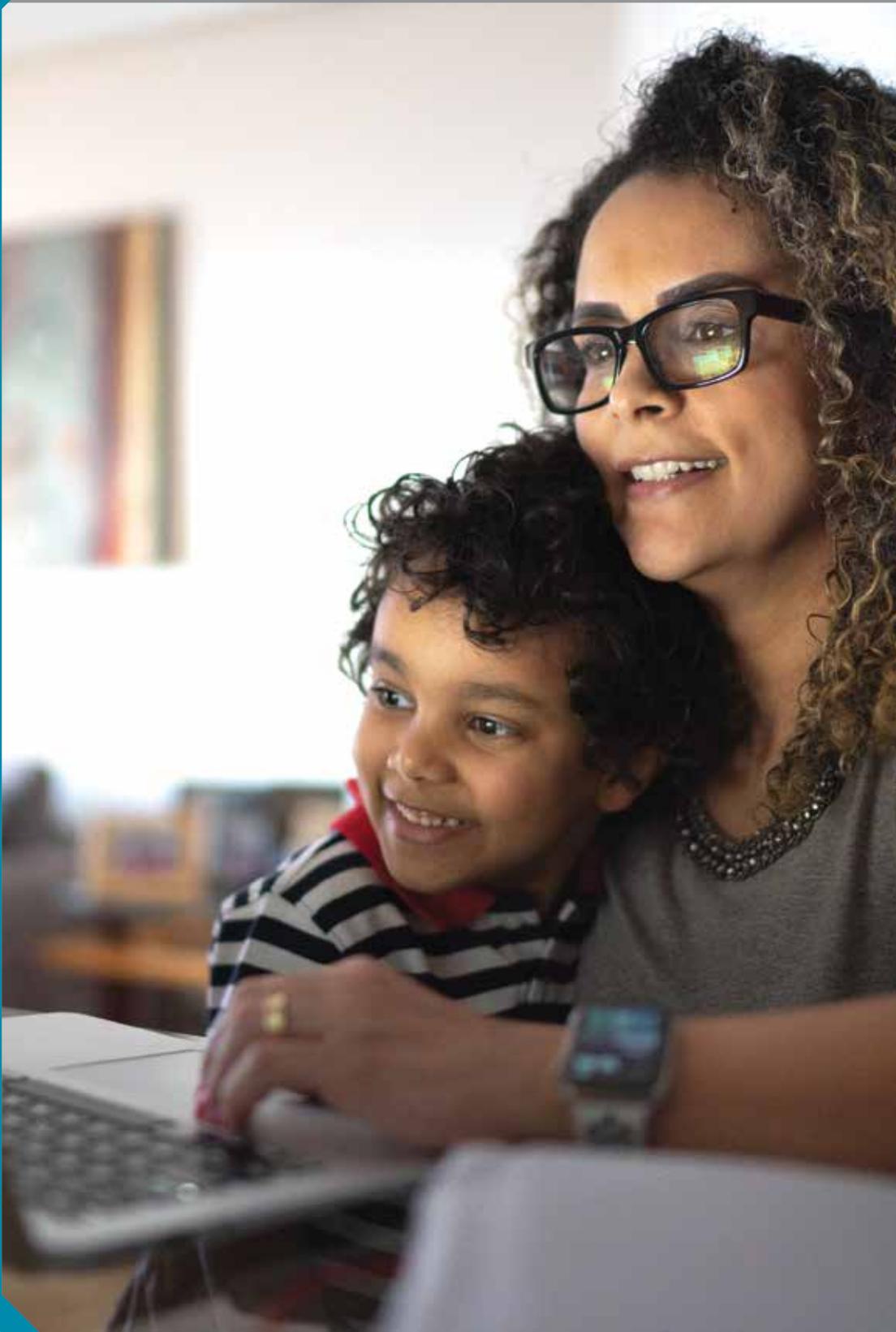
Our local, state, and federal partners provide critical support for all parts of OCSS.

The Office of Legal Affairs within the Department of Social Services deserves special mention, since their partnership is integral to so much of our success, from establishing court orders to reducing child support debt. The City's Law Department (also known as Corporation Counsel) offer similarly essential assistance every day.

We also could not accomplish all that we do without the partnership of the New York State Office of Disability and Temporary Services (OTDA) and especially OTDA's Division of Child Support Services.

The list below, then, is only partial. A full list would include the many other essential partners in the Department of Social Services, as well community-based organizations, that support our efforts to help New York City families in more ways than we could ever name.

- Borough Presidents' Offices
- Center for Justice Innovation
- City University of New York
- District Attorneys' Offices of the City of New York
- Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs
- New York City Council Members
- NYC Administration for Children's Services
- NYC Comptroller's Office
- NYC Department of Correction
- NYC Department of Education
- NYC Department of Finance, Sheriff's Office
- NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
- NYC Department of Probation
- NYC Department of Social Services, Information Technology Services
- NYC Department of Youth and Community Development
- NYC Division of Consumer Affairs, Office of Financial Empowerment
- NYC Human Resources Administration, Office of Legal Affairs
- NYC Law Department
- NYC Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence
- NYC Office of the Mayor, Citywide Fatherhood Initiative
- NYC Police Department
- NYC Taxi and Limousine Commission
- NYS Assembly Members
- NYS Department of Taxation and Finance
- NYS Division of Parole
- NYS Office of Court Administration
- NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Division of Child Support Services
- NYS Senate Members
- US Attorney's Office
- US Department of Health and Human Services
- US Federal Bureau of Prisons



Contact

Contact by Phone

New York State Child Support Helpline

To speak to a representative
8:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m., Monday–Friday
888-208-4485
TTY (Hearing Impaired): (866) 875-9975

New York State Information Line

For automated information
24 hours a day/7 days a week
800-846-0773

Contact in Person

New York City OCSS Customer Service

Walk-In Center
151 West Broadway, 4th floor
(lower Manhattan between
Worth and Thomas Streets)
New York, NY 10013
8:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m., Monday–Friday
(walk-in)

Correspondence by Mail

New York City Office of Child Support Services

P.O. Box 830
Canal Street Station
New York, NY 10013

Individual Payments by Phone

Call 929-252-5201
9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday–Friday

Individual Payments by Mail

NYS Child Support Processing Center
P.O. Box 15363
Albany, NY 12212-5363

NYC OCSS Paternity Services and Outreach

Call 929-221-5008. Leave a message
if no one is available.

On the Internet

OCSS/New York City Office of Child Support Services

www.nyc.gov/hra/ocss

For materials from OCSS and other
HRA programs in languages other than
English, visit bit.ly/HRAImmigrants
or go directly to HRA's pages in each
of the following languages:

Spanish

bit.ly/HRASpanishResources

Arabic

bit.ly/HRAArabicResources

Bengali

bit.ly/HRABengaliResources

French

bit.ly/HRAFrenchResources

Haitian Creole

bit.ly/HRAHaitianCreoleResources

Korean

bit.ly/HRAKoreanResources

Polish

bit.ly/HRAPolishResources

Russian

bit.ly/HRARussianResources

Simplified Chinese

bit.ly/HRASimChineseResources

Traditional Chinese

bit.ly/HRATradChineseResources

Urdu

bit.ly/HRAUrduResources

New York State Child Support Services

View account information with your
Social Security number and the PIN
for your account

www.childsupport.ny.gov

On Social Media (HRA)

 facebook.com/nychra

 twitter.com/nychra

 youtube.com/hranyc

 instagram.com/nychra/

Feedback on Our Annual Report

OCSS welcomes your comments on our
annual report. Please email them to
dcse.cseweb@dfa.state.ny.us.



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