



## The Federal Child Support Program Turns 50

### A Milestone for an Ever-Changing Program

On January 4, 1975, President Gerald R. Ford, Jr. signed into law the Social Services Amendments of 1974 (H.R. 17045). After decades of starts and stops at the local, state, and federal levels, the child support program as we know it today suddenly came into view.

A longtime advocate of a national approach to child support, President Ford called the law “a major piece of domestic legislation and a significant step forward in Federal-State relations.”

Fifty years later, the child support program continues to deliver the same core services. Yet many elements of how we deliver those services have changed considerably. The result is a program dedicated to delivering safe, equitable services that recognize the importance of both parents in their child’s life.

### What Gave Rise to the Federal Program

The creation of the federal child support program grew out of a confluence of different political issues of the time.

One was a bipartisan Welfare reform movement that sought to reduce the number of families with children (primarily single mothers) receiving cash benefits. Research suggested that many of these families would not need to receive benefits if the other parent (typically the father) paid a proportionate amount of child support. That led the 1975 law to strengthen requirements that parents seeking public assistance had to cooperate with the child support program.

During the same period, feminists pointed to data showing that, for structural reasons, mothers were much more likely to fall into poverty without support from the other parent. But enforcing support was virtually impossible across state lines absent a national child support law.

President Ford had personal experience with just that situation as a child. For him, signing a federal child support legislation was both a personal and political achievement.

### Extending the Core Mission

Originally envisioned as a national program, child support now reaches internationally and includes more than 60 Native American tribal child support programs.

### Contact OCSS

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*President Gerald R. Ford, Jr. in the Oval Office.*

The requirement that people applying for or receiving public assistance cooperate with child support remains in place—provided those services do not endanger the well-being of parents or children. In many households, child support now fills the place where public assistance would have been in previous years.

### A Critical Change in Approach

Over time, research and our direct experience showed that children benefit in many ways from child support. Critically, many of those benefits seemed driven less by the amount of support than by its regularity. In New York City, this research reinforced the importance of aligning child support orders with noncustodial parents’ real ability to pay. As a result, we work hard to encourage both parents to present clear and reliable information in Family Court hearings.

Without a source of income and a realistic sense that they can stay out of debt, many noncustodial parents are never able to make the regular payments that make such a difference. We have long addressed these needs by offering employment and training services to noncustodial parents. We also offer a range of services to reduce debt owed to the NYC DSS.

The next 50 years will surely bring more changes and challenges. In New York City, we will continue to do all we can to keep working to make the program more effective, efficient, equitable, and safe.

## Upcoming Free Webinars

Join us on February 4 for “The Basics of Child Support for New Parents” and February 25 for “NCP Debt Reduction: Pay It Off! — How It Works.” All sessions are held virtually on Tuesdays from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. To register, go to [www.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/ocss-cbos.page](http://www.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/ocss-cbos.page) and follow the directions under “Upcoming Presentations.”