



Photo: Rick Demopolis

Resources to support fathers returning from prison or jail to families in Minnesota



What can child support agencies do?

Why should child support agencies pay attention to incarceration and reentry?

More than half (55%) of state inmates are parents. Half of these parents have an open child support case. Typically, parents owe \$10,000 entering prison and \$20,000+ upon release. Flexible and proactive management of child support obligations during incarceration increases the likelihood of legal employment after release, positive parent/child relationships, and long-term child support payments.

Upon entry into a corrections facility:

1. Child Support agencies should initiate child support modifications when parents are incarcerated because modifications lead to less arrears accumulation over time and a more realistic likelihood that they will be able to pay support when they get out of prison or jail.

- The barriers in prison or jail for filing pro se modification requests are insurmountable for most fathers. The child support agency can initiate the modification and use a streamlined procedure that doesn't require financial statements.
- Fathers leaving prison face many barriers to finding employment and housing and it is often unrealistic to assume that they can pay support soon after release. Unrealistic orders can lead to underground employment to avoid child support enforcement.
- Suspend orders while the parent is in a corrections facility. Reinstate orders when it is realistic for employment to begin again or set a hearing to review the ability to pay after release.
- If the order is unrealistic, set the case for a review hearing.

Modifying orders for parents in prison and setting realistic orders after release will lead to better outcomes for families and agencies.

Prior to release from a corrections facility:

2. Prior to release, child support agencies should contact fathers to remind them what is going to happen with their case and let them know who their worker is.

- Don't wait until they are released. Sixty days prior to release, send child support information that the parent can use in release planning, such as the noncustodial parent case summary document from PRISM.
- Develop a local resource list for the fathers who are coming out of prison or jail and include that in the mailing.
- Consider releasing the hold on the driver's license to enable employment search.

After release from a corrections facility:

3. After release, focus on engagement first, then payment. Personal, face-to-face, and persistent communication pays off in long-term outcomes.

- Work in partnership with reentry organizations, and encourage these agencies to include a child support case management component. Become familiar with these organizations so you can refer to as appropriate.
- Consider arrears management as a viable option.
- Full payment on some cases may be an unrealistic expectation. Previous orders may need to be modified to be fair and reasonable given the new circumstances. Graduated payment agreements can also be put in place to allow fathers time to get on their feet and have a driver's license that will help them seek and keep employment.

Learn more:

- Take opportunities to better understand the barriers parents face coming out of corrections.
- Watch videos, read research, and find supportive resources for fathers at:

www.mnfathers.org/mindthegap

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