

# MARYLAND'S CHILD SUPPORT CASELOAD: NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS IN 2010 & 2014

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Maryland's public child support program has benefited thousands of families by ensuring that custodians and children receive monetary support from noncustodial parents. However, child support enforcement is a complex process and may not always adequately address the needs of some families. Low-income families, in particular, pose challenges to child support enforcement, as the noncustodial parents associated with these families also tend to be low-income (Garfinkel, McLanahan, Meadow, & Mincy, 2009). These impoverished noncustodial parents may be unable to comply with child support orders because the ordered amount exceeds their ability to pay. This is especially likely if their orders were based on income imputation, which assumes full-time employment at minimum wage regardless of actual employment and earnings status (OCSE, 2006; Passarella & Born, 2014). Noncustodial parents may also have other factors placing further strain on their resources and ability to pay, including multiple orders, orders in arrearage, or additional children in their custody.

While difficult for some noncustodial parents to make, child support payments can account for up to 40% of household income for a low-income custodial family (Sorensen, 2010). Child support payments can also help families leave welfare and remain off in the future (Hall & Passarella, 2015; Wheaton, Sorensen, Russell, & Versteeg, 2005). Therefore, while non-custodial parents may struggle to comply with their child support orders, their compliance can be vital to the well-being of their children. Information about the characteristics of

noncustodial parents, their employment and earnings, and their compliance with support and arrears orders provide more context for child support enforcement administrators to consider when developing strategies to increase payments to families.

This report examines Maryland noncustodial parents with child support orders in 2014. It provides data on their employment and earnings, current support order amounts and payments, and arrears balances and payments. For comparison, selected figures also display data from noncustodial parents with orders in 2010. Most findings are presented for the state and the five largest jurisdictions in the state.

## METHODS

### Sample

This report uses a simple 5% random sample of all active child support cases in July 2010 and July 2014. For both study months, Table 1 provides the total number of cases selected into the 5% sample and the number of noncustodial parents associated with them. It also provides the number of the sampled noncustodial parents in the five largest jurisdictions—Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Prince George's County, Montgomery County, and Anne Arundel County—which together contain about three-quarters of the state's total caseload (Passarella, Nicoli, & Hall, 2015). We consolidate the remaining 19 jurisdictions into a category called *Remainder of State*, which we discuss alongside state totals.

The number of noncustodial parents (NCPs) listed for each jurisdiction in Table 1 refers to the location of the child support office that is managing NCPs' cases. While this is most likely the jurisdiction where the custodial family lives, it is not necessarily where the noncustodial parent lives. Jurisdictional categories are also not mutually exclusive, as a noncustodial parent may have multiple cases managed in different jurisdictions. If a noncustodial parent has cases in multiple jurisdictions, they are counted in each jurisdiction where they have a case.

**Table 1. Study Samples, July 2010 & July 2014**

	2010	2014
<b>Number of Cases</b>	12,209	10,665
<b>Number of NCPs</b>		
Baltimore City	4,001	3,105
Baltimore County	1,049	1,048
Prince George's County	2,243	1,913
Montgomery County	889	887
Anne Arundel County	682	645
Remainder of State	3,197	2,933
State Total	12,033	10,502
<b>NCPs with Cases in Multiple Jurisdictions</b>	35	38

**Note:** Jurisdictions are based on the location of the child support office where the case is managed. An NCP may have a case in more than one jurisdiction, so counts may not sum to state totals.

### Data Sources

Study findings are based on administrative data retrieved from the Child Support Enforcement System (CSES). CSES contains identifying information and demographic data on children, noncustodial parents, and custodians receiving services from the IV-D agency<sup>1</sup> as well as data

<sup>1</sup> The public child support program is authorized under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act and is often referred to as the IV-D program.

on payment receipt. CSES supports the intake, establishment, location, and enforcement functions of the Maryland Child Support Enforcement Administration (CSEA).

Data on employment and earnings come from the Maryland Automated Benefits System (MABS). The MABS system includes data from all employers covered by state and federal unemployment insurance (UI) programs. Some types of employees, including independent contractors and the self-employed, are not covered by the law. Informal employment considered *off-the-books* or *under-the-table* is also not covered.

The MABS system only tracks employment in Maryland. Out-of-state employment, however, is relatively common for Maryland residents, as the state shares borders with four states and the District of Columbia. Overall, the rate of out-of-state employment by Maryland residents (17.4%) is more than four times the national average (3.8%).<sup>2</sup> Hence, the figures in this report undercount the number of noncustodial parents who are employed.

### Analysis

This profile of Maryland's child support caseload uses univariate statistics to describe noncustodial parents with cases in 2010 and 2014. When appropriate, we compare differences between the two years using chi-square and analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests.

<sup>2</sup> Data obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates for Sex of Workers by Place of Work – State and County Level (B08007) at <http://www.factfinder.census.gov>.

## FINDINGS

### Child Support Caseload

Nationally, there has been a 5% decline in the child support caseload between federal fiscal years (FY) 2010 and 2014 (OCSE, 2015). In the same period of time, Maryland had a more substantial (14%) decline in its child support caseload. According to the Maryland Department of Legislative Services (DLS), caseload declines in Maryland can be attributed to the enhanced case closure process initiated by CSEA (DLS, 2015).

The decline in the larger child support caseload is represented in the two samples selected for this report. Not only is the 2014 sample of child support cases 13% smaller than the sample in 2010, the number of noncustodial parents is smaller especially in Baltimore City and Prince George's County. As shown in Table 1, the number of noncustodial parents in Baltimore City declined by 22% from 2010 to 2014 and by 15% in Prince George's County. These declines almost certainly affect changes over time in outcomes like the percentage of cases with support orders and the percentage of cases with payments.

### Characteristics of Noncustodial Parents

The general profile of noncustodial parents in Maryland has not changed over time (Gleason, Passarella, & Born, 2013). In 2014, as in previous years, the large majority (92%) of NCPs were male. About 70% were African American, and one quarter (25.8%) were Caucasian. The majority (56.9%) of NCPs were 36 to 55 years old, and the average age of NCPs in the sample was about 40 years. Very few (4.5%) NCPs were younger than 26 years of age.

**Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of NCPs, 2014**

Gender		
Male	92.0%	(9,626)
Female	8.0%	(835)
Race		
African American	68.3%	(6,477)
Caucasian	25.8%	(2,445)
Other	5.9%	(561)
Age		
17 - 25 years	4.5%	(470)
26 - 35 years	28.1%	(2,941)
36 - 45 years	32.8%	(3,430)
46 - 55 years	24.1%	(2,519)
Older than 55	10.6%	(1,107)
Average [Median]	40.19	[39.58]

**Note:** Counts may not sum to totals due to missing data. Valid percentages are provided.

### Employment and Earnings

It is important that child support orders are proportionate to a noncustodial parent's employment and level of income. When noncustodial parents cannot or do not pay their current support obligations, they accrue arrears balances. Right-sizing current support orders at the outset, by ensuring that they are consistent with noncustodial parents' incomes, can prevent large arrears balances from accruing in the first place. Understanding the employment and earnings of noncustodial parents is thus critical.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of noncustodial parents in the 2014 sample employed in a Maryland job covered by Unemployment Insurance (UI) between July 2013 and June 2014. Even in the jurisdictions with the highest rates of countable employment for noncustodial parents, only about half of NCPs were employed at some point in the year. Baltimore County had

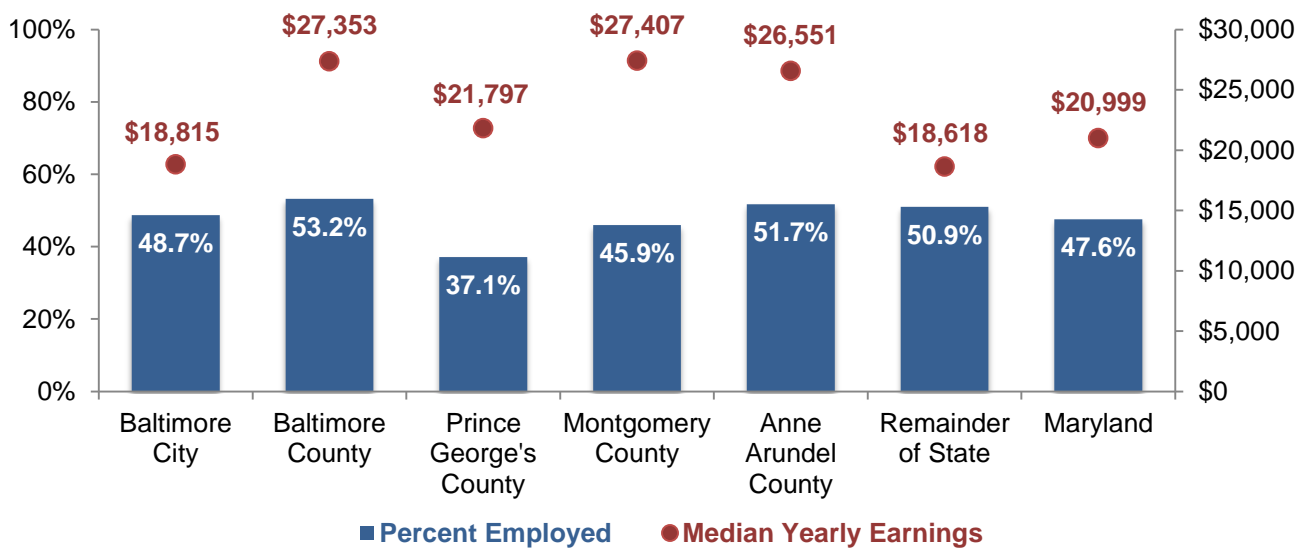
the highest employment rate at 53.2% of noncustodial parents. The lowest employment rate was in Prince George’s County, where 37.1% of NCPs were employed. We cannot, however, say whether these NCPs are employed outside of Maryland or in jobs not covered by Unemployment Insurance.

Among noncustodial parents with employment in a Maryland UI-covered job, median annual earnings were about \$21,000. Noncustodial parents in Baltimore City had earnings below the state median, about \$18,800, while Baltimore and Montgomery Counties had earnings above the state median, about \$27,000. For comparison, median earnings in 2013 for an individual in Maryland were \$40,331 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). While the earnings counted here may not be a noncustodial parent’s only source of income, it is clear that many NCPs earn substantially less than other Maryland residents.

For some noncustodial parents, however, actual earned income was not used in calculating their child support orders. Their income was instead imputed to full-time minimum wage, either because they did not participate in the order establishment process, or because they were unemployed or only working part-time at establishment (Saunders, Passarella, & Born, 2014). In 2014, income imputation at full-time, minimum wage meant that a noncustodial parent’s support order amount was calculated based on an annual income of about \$15,000.

While Figure 1 shows that many NCPs’ earnings are higher than this amount, unemployed NCPs who have their income imputed may end up with orders beyond their ability to pay. Recognizing the problems this may cause, CSEA has made efforts to minimize the use of imputed income, both by providing judges with empirical data on its negative effects as well as releasing a policy update limiting its use (CSEA, 2015).

**Figure 1. Percent Employed and Median Yearly Earnings, 2014**

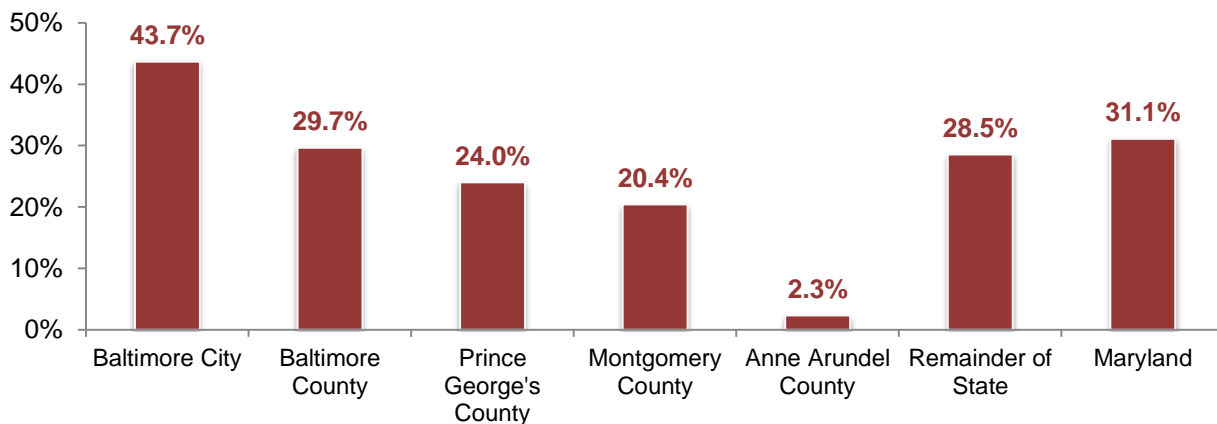


**Note:** This figure excludes individuals for whom we have no unique identifier (n=131). Valid percentages are shown. Employment and earnings are for individuals with employment in a Maryland job covered by Unemployment Insurance. \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Noncustodial parents' earnings may need to contribute not only to multiple children on a single case, but also to multiple child support orders. These noncustodial parents often owe more money in total (Kolupanowich, Williamson, Saunders, & Born, 2010), although Maryland's establishment process takes into account any paid child support from other orders [Child Support Guidelines, §12-201(c) (1)]. Figure 2 shows the percentages of noncustodial parents who had multiple child support cases in 2014, which have remained consistent over time (Kolupanowich, et. al., 2010).

Baltimore City had the highest percentage of noncustodial parents with multiple cases, at 43.7%. This is 13 percentage points higher than the percentage of noncustodial parents with multiple cases in the state as a whole (31.1%). Very few (2.3%) noncustodial parents in Anne Arundel County had multiple child support cases. Other jurisdictions had percentages ranging from about 20% to about 30%. Noncustodial parents can also be custodial parents on different child support cases, but the percentages of NCPs with any cases as a custodian were very low, about 2% to 4% in each jurisdictional category.

**Figure 2. Percent of NCPs with Multiple Cases, 2014**



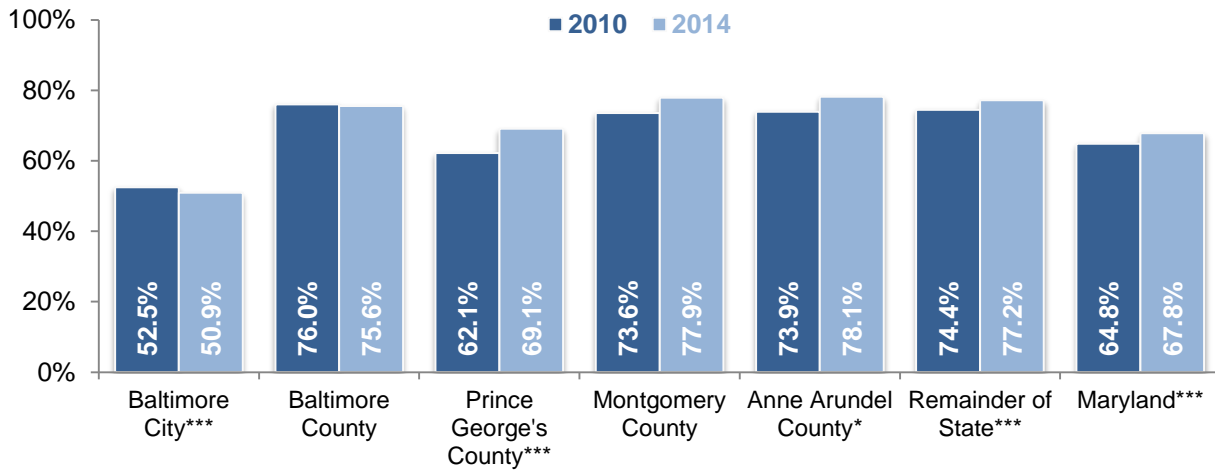
**Note:** NCPs with cases in different jurisdictions are represented in each jurisdiction.

### Current Support Orders and Payments

Child support orders can only be established once paternity is formally recognized between a child and a noncustodial parent. As such, not all noncustodial parents in the caseload owe current support in the years we examine. Additionally, noncustodial parents may lack current support orders because they have only paternity or medical support orders or solely owe arrears. However, Figure 3 shows that the majority of noncustodial parents do have at least one current support order. The percentages of

NCPs owing current support were consistently high in both 2010 and 2014, ranging from half of the NCPs in Baltimore City to about 75% of the NCPs in Baltimore, Montgomery, and Anne Arundel Counties. There was a slight increase in the percentage of noncustodial parents with current support due between 2010 and 2014 in all jurisdictions except Baltimore City and Baltimore County, where the percentages remained relatively stable.

**Figure 3. Percent of NCPs with Current Support Due in the Previous Year**



**Note:** The figure is based on the percentage of NCPs from the 2010 sample with current support due in the 12 months prior to July 2010; for 2014, the figure is based on the percentage of NCPs from the 2014 sample with current support due in the 12 months prior to July 2014. \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Noncustodial parents who owed current support had obligations ranging from about \$4,500 to about \$6,500, as shown in Figure 4.<sup>3</sup> Across the state, the average amount of current support due increased by about 5% between 2010 and 2014. For example, in Prince George’s County, the average amount due was \$6,041 in 2010 and \$6,366 in 2014. Montgomery County was the only jurisdiction where the average amount declined, but it did so by a very small amount.

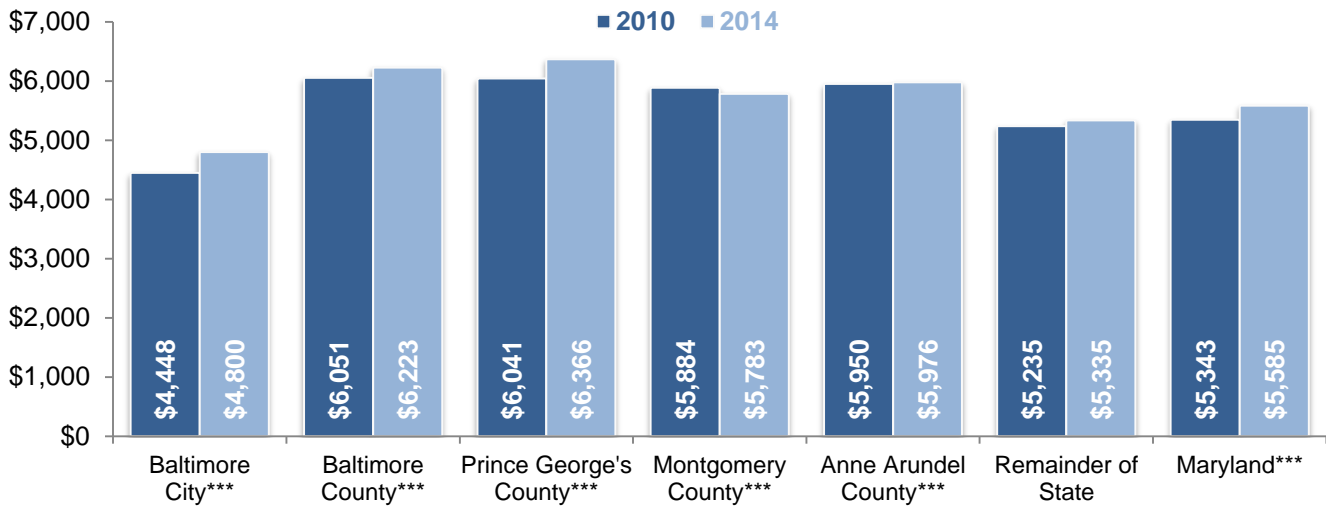
In all of the five largest jurisdictions except Baltimore City, average current support due was around \$6,000. In Baltimore City, however, the average was less than \$5,000 in both years. This is logical, given that Baltimore City also had the lowest median earnings of the five largest jurisdictions, and support order amounts should be based on income.

Our past research has found that noncustodial parents may only be able to pay about 20% to 30% of their earnings towards current support (Hall, Passarella, & Born, 2014). Figure 4 shows that the average current support due for NCPs in 2014 tends to fall in this range when calculated as a percentage of median earnings in the year. For example, average current support due in Baltimore City in 2014 was \$4,800, which is approximately 26% of median yearly earnings for employed NCPs in 2014 (\$18,815). However, since only half of noncustodial parents were employed in a Maryland UI-covered job in 2014, as shown in Figure 1, a sizable percentage of NCPs have no earnings to put towards current support.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Average monthly order amounts were \$486 in July 2010 and \$493 in July 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Figure 1 does not include NCPs who are employed outside of Maryland or in jobs not covered by unemployment insurance. The percentage of employed NCPs is thus almost certainly larger than half.

**Figure 4. Average Current Support Due in the Previous Year per NCP**



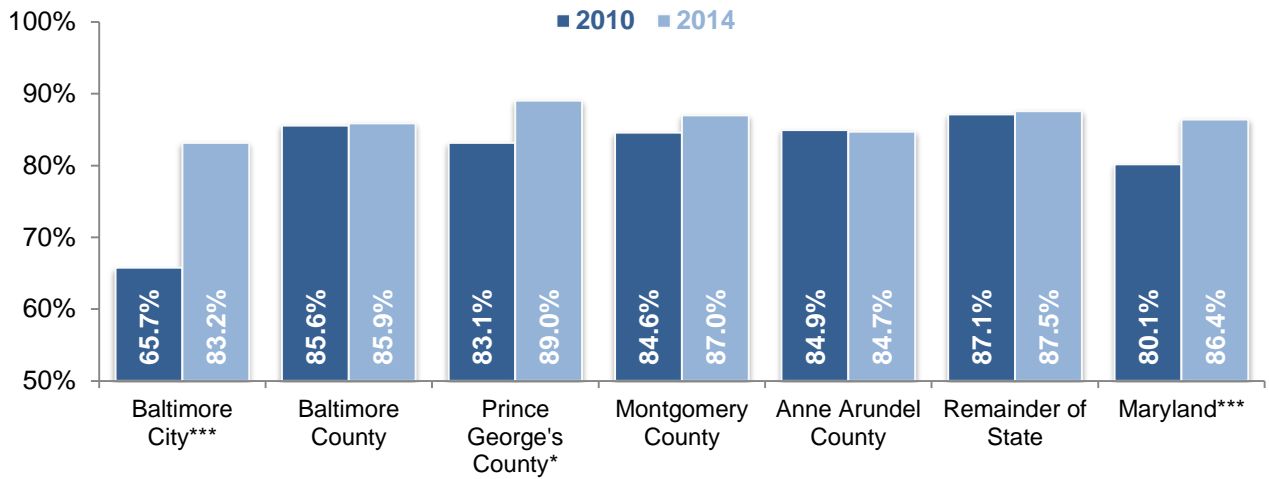
**Note:** The figure is based on the sample of NCPs with current support due in the 12 months before July 2010 or before July 2014. Dollar figures are standardized to 2014 dollars. \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Our earlier research has also shown that the majority of noncustodial parents who owe current support are fully or partially compliant with their child support orders (Hall, Passarella, & Born, 2014). Among NCPs who owed current support in 2010 and 2014, most made at least one payment towards current support in both years. As shown in Figure 5, at least eight of every 10 NCPs in every jurisdiction made a current support payment in 2014.

Additionally, the percentage of noncustodial parents in Maryland making current support payments increased between 2010 and 2014. Statewide, the percentage making payments increased from 80.1% to 86.4%. The only large jurisdiction that did not see an increase was Anne Arundel County, where the percentage of NCPs making payments remained stable, at about 85%.

The percentage of noncustodial parents making current support payments in Baltimore City increased by almost 20 percentage points, from 65.7% in 2010 to 83.2% in 2014. For comparison, the next largest increase was six percentage points in Prince George's County. However, even with considerable improvements in Baltimore City, it still had the lowest percentage of NCPs making a payment in 2014. The higher percentage of NCPs making current support payments in 2014 may be due, in part, to the decline in the size of the Baltimore City caseload between 2010 and 2014.

**Figure 5. Percent of NCPs with a Current Support Payment in the Previous Year**

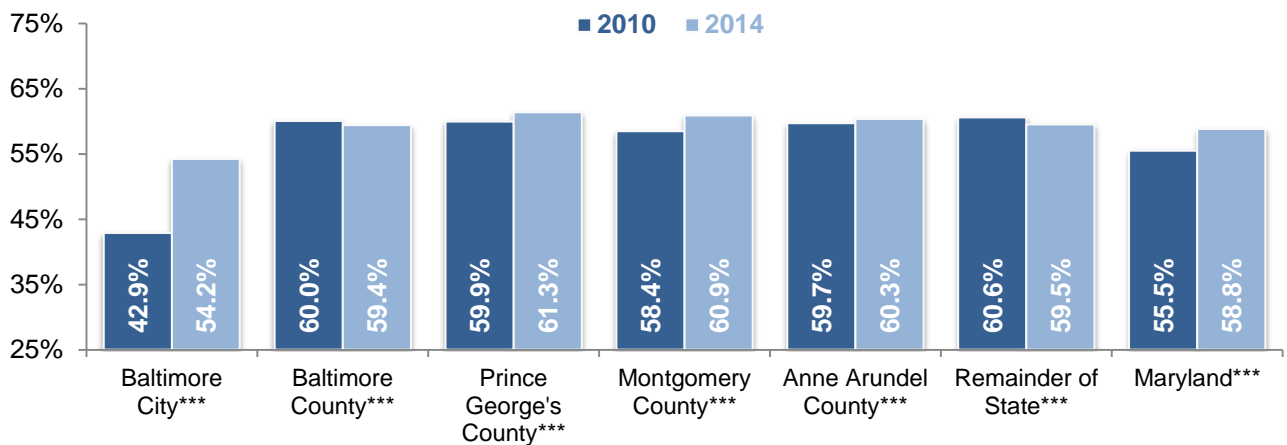


**Note:** The figure is based on the sample of NCPs with current support due in the 12 months before July 2010 or before July 2014. \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

While the majority of noncustodial parents pay at least some of their current support obligations, families naturally see a greater benefit when a noncustodial parent pays a larger percentage of their obligations. Figure 6 shows that, on average, NCPs paid more than half of their current support obligations. Statewide, 58.8% of noncustodial parents' obligations were met, increasing from 55.5% in 2010.

Outcomes for Baltimore City improved markedly from 2010, when NCPs paid an average of 42.9% of their obligations, to 2014, when they paid 54.2% of their obligations. The average percentage paid remained relatively stable in Baltimore and Anne Arundel Counties and increased in the other two large jurisdictions.

**Figure 6. Average Percentage Paid in the Previous Year per NCP**



**Note:** The figure is based on the sample of NCPs with current support due in the 12 months before July 2010 or before July 2014; the average includes NCPs with no payments during the year. \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

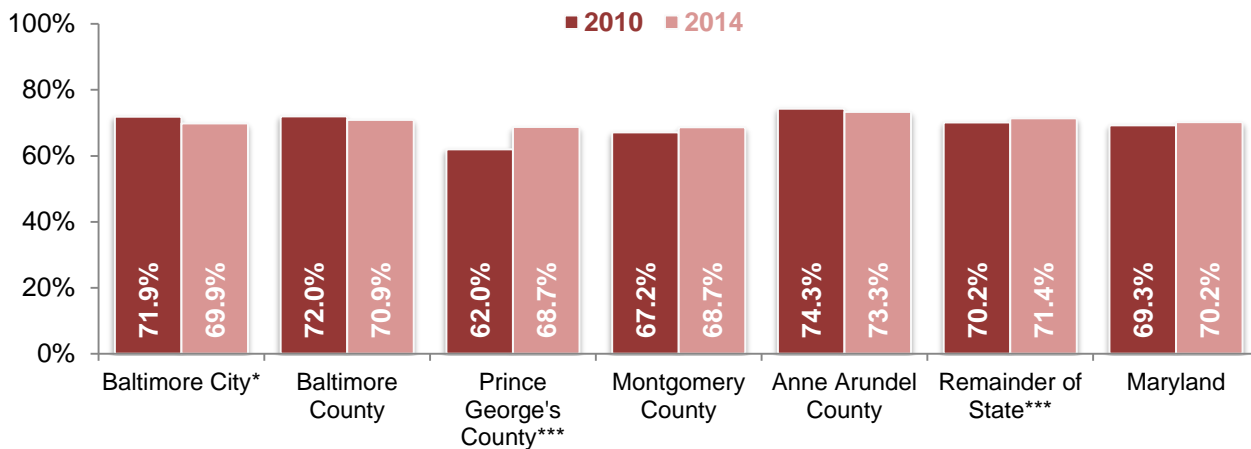


## Arrears Balances and Payments

Noncustodial parents accrue arrears from current support they have not paid. Arrears balances may also accrue when current support is ordered retroactively from the initial filing date of a current support order [Child Support Guidelines §12-101(a) (1)]. Figure 7 shows that the majority of NCPs, about 70%, have an arrears balance in 2010 and 2014. These percentages have changed very little over this time period. However, in Prince George’s County, the percent of noncustodial parents with an arrears balance increased from 62% to 69%.

This does not necessarily mean that fewer noncustodial parents are paying current support, as Prince George’s County also had the highest percentage of noncustodial parents paying current support of the five largest jurisdictions in 2014. Arrears balances do not just reflect current support not paid in the previous year. All unpaid support is included. If a noncustodial parent has unpaid child support from five years ago, for example, that amount is reflected in their arrears balance, even if the NCP has remained current with payments ever since.

**Figure 7. Percent of NCPs with an Arrears Balance**

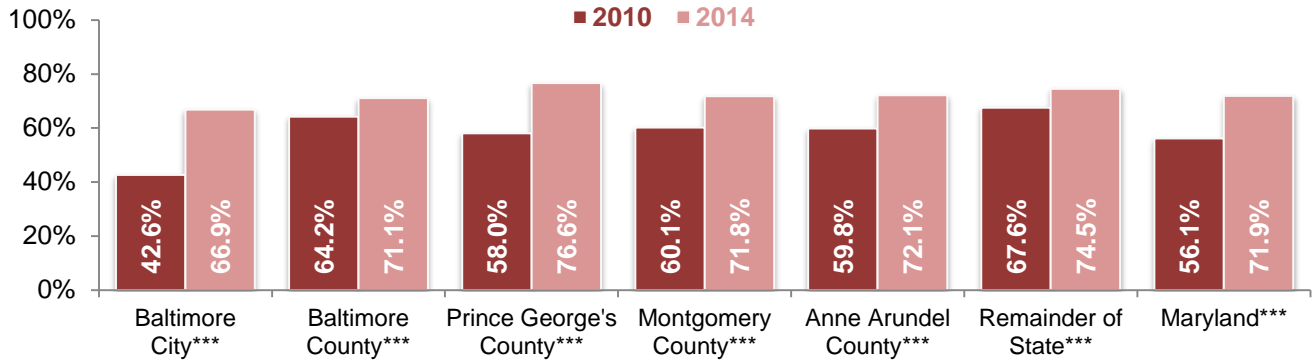


**Note:** NCPs may have an arrears balance but not have a court-ordered arrears order. This figure is based on the percentage of NCPs from the 2010 sample with an arrears balance in July 2010; for 2014, the figure is based on the percentage of NCPs from the 2014 sample with an arrears balance in July 2014. \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

While eight in 10 noncustodial parents made a payment toward their current support orders in 2014, Figure 8 shows that fewer—about seven in 10—made a payment toward their arrears balance. Statewide, the percentage of NCPs who made a payment towards their arrears balances increased from 56.1% in 2010 to 71.9% in 2014. Each of the largest jurisdictions also saw improvements. Baltimore County had the smallest increase, about seven percentage points, while Montgomery and Anne Arundel

Counties had 12 percentage point increases in payments toward arrears balances. In Prince George’s County, the percentage of NCPs making arrears payments increased from 58.0% in 2010 to 76.6% in 2014. Baltimore City saw the largest increase, from 42.6% to 66.9%. Even with this improvement, the percentage of noncustodial parents paying toward their arrears in Baltimore City was still lower than in the other large jurisdictions in 2014.

**Figure 8. Percent of NCPs with a Payment toward the Arrears Balance in the Previous Year**

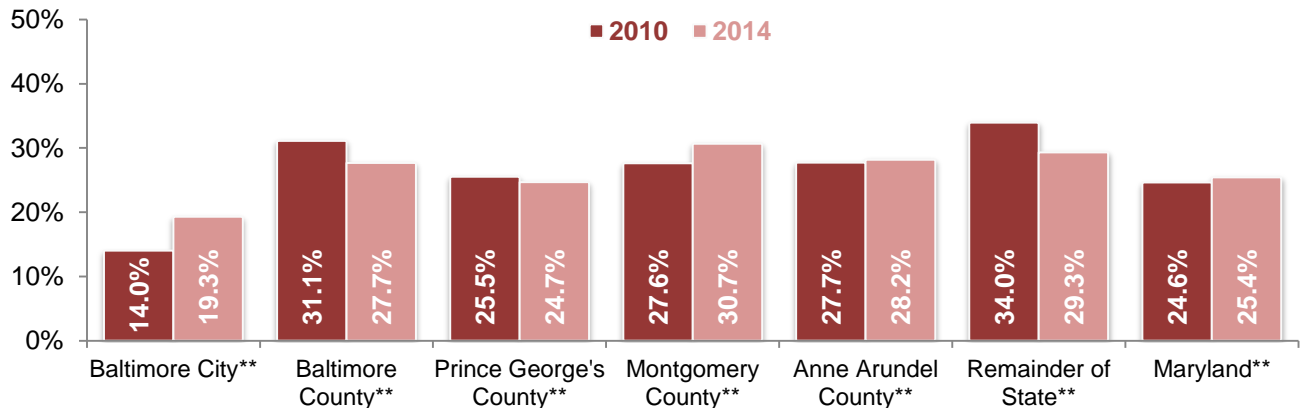


**Note:** Based on NCPs with an arrears balance in July 2010 and July 2014.

While the percentage of noncustodial parents making payments toward arrears has increased over time, the average percentage of the total arrears balance paid by noncustodial parents has not grown at the same rate. Figure 9 shows the average percent of arrears balances paid by noncustodial parents in 2010 and 2014. Statewide, noncustodial parents paid an average of about one quarter of their arrears balance in both years. In Prince George's and Anne Arundel Counties, the average percentage paid remained relatively stable from 2010 to 2014, at about 25% and 28%, respectively.

Both Baltimore City and Montgomery County had small increases in the average percentage of arrears balances paid, although the percent paid in these two jurisdictions was very different. In 2014, Baltimore City NCPs paid less than one fifth (19.3%) of their arrears balances, on average, and an average of 30.7% was paid by NCPs in Montgomery County, the highest percentage in the state. The average percentage of paid arrears balances fell slightly in Baltimore County and in the 19 counties represented by the *Remainder of State* category.

**Figure 9. Average Percent Paid toward the Arrears Balance per NCP**



**Note:** Based on NCPs with an arrears balance in July 2010 and July 2014.

Arrears can be owed to the custodial parents directly or to the state. Arrears are owed to the state when custodial parents receive Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) and their rights to child support payments are assigned to the state while they receive TCA; this is used to recoup costs paid for TCA. In Maryland, CSEA has created arrears forgiveness programs, such as the Payment Incentive Program or Project ROLE in Baltimore City, to address noncustodial parent debts, as seven in 10 NCPs have an arrears balance. However, these programs are only able to forgive arrears that are owed to the state.

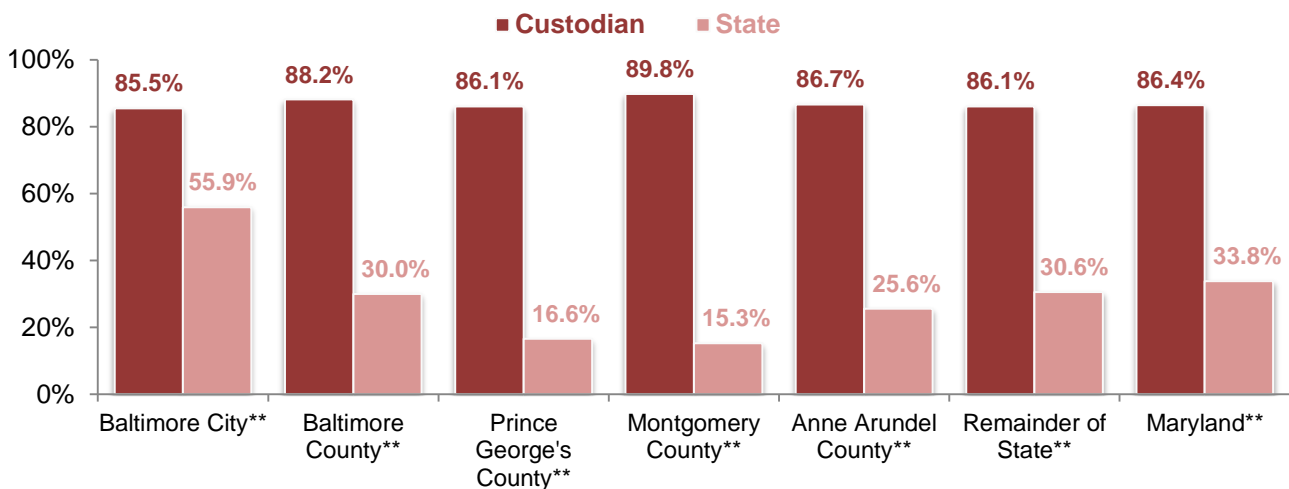
According to Figure 10, most noncustodial parents owe arrears to the custodian rather than the state. Among those who have an arrears balance, nearly nine in 10 (86.4%) owe to the custodian, and one third (33.8%) owe to the state.<sup>5</sup> Across jurisdictions, the percent who owe any arrears to the custodial family is fairly consistent, from 85.5% in Baltimore City to 89.8% in Montgomery County.

As Baltimore City has the largest TCA caseload in the state (Nicoli & O'Donnell, 2015), it is not surprising that more than half (55.9%) of noncustodial parents in Baltimore City owe arrears to the state. Among the other four large jurisdictions, the percent of NCPs owing arrears to the state ranges from 15.3% in Montgomery County to 30.0% in Baltimore County.

The average amounts that noncustodial parents owe to custodial parents are typically higher than those owed to the state. Figure 11 shows that the average amount owed to custodians statewide is \$13,353 and ranges from \$10,047 to \$16,319 among the jurisdictions. The average amount owed to the state ranges from \$3,506 in Montgomery County to \$9,030 in Baltimore City with a state average of about \$7,300. When programs aimed at reducing arrears balances are successful, they are only able to tackle the smaller balances owed to the state. As Figures 10 and 11 show, the large majority of arrears owed cannot be forgiven by these programs.

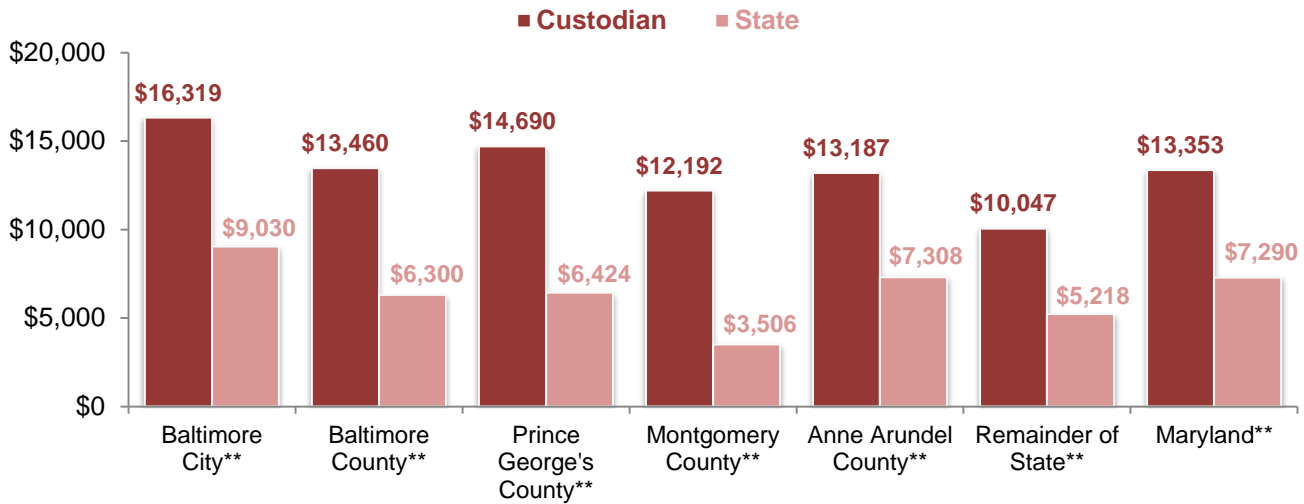
<sup>5</sup> Noncustodial parents can owe arrears to both the custodial parent and the state at the same time.

**Figure 10. Percent of NCPs Owing Arrears to the Custodian vs. State, 2014**



**Note:** Based on NCPs with an arrears balance in July 2014.

**Figure 11. Average Amount of Arrears Owed to the Custodian vs. State, 2014**



**Note:** Based on NCPs with an arrears balance in July 2014.


## CONCLUSIONS

Receiving child support is important for custodial parents and families, but it also affects the lives of noncustodial parents, some of whom have current support orders involving multiple custodians and children. While it may be difficult for some noncustodial parents to maintain their obligations, their children require this support for basic needs. Because the child support program affects noncustodial parents and custodial families differently, it is important to examine child support data from the perspective of each group. This report focused specifically on noncustodial parents and their employment, support orders, and payments to their obligations.

A considerable caseload decline in Maryland between 2010 and 2014 resulted in fewer noncustodial parents in the child support caseload, but the demographic profile of noncustodial parents remained stable. One of

the most consequential findings is that many noncustodial parents are poor. Only about half of noncustodial parents are employed in Maryland, although others may be employed in other states or as independent contractors. Among employed noncustodial parents, annual median earnings are \$21,000, about half of what other Maryland residents earn. Even though many noncustodial parents have low earnings, the majority make payments toward their support orders. In 2014, noncustodial parents paid, on average, about 60% of the current support they owed. Baltimore City in particular saw a substantial increase in support paid, from 43% to 54% between 2010 and 2014, bringing the average percentage paid in Baltimore City much closer to that of other jurisdictions.

Seven in 10 noncustodial parents have a past-due current support balance, which emphasizes the difficulty that some have in complying with



their current support orders. The percentage of noncustodial parents making a payment toward their arrears balance increased from 56% in 2010 to 72% in 2014. However, the amount of the balance that noncustodial parents pay remained stable, about 25% of the balance in each year.

Ensuring that child support orders are proportionate to the incomes of noncustodial parents can encourage current support payments and prevent arrears balances from accumulating. This can be achieved through

policies like right-sizing order amounts and curbing the use of imputed income for unemployed parents. Assisting noncustodial parents, especially those with limited education or those with a criminal record, with finding employment can also promote child support compliance. The ultimate goal of the child support program is to ensure that children are supported by both of their parents, and through these policies and programs, the Maryland Child Support Enforcement Administration continues to make strides in helping noncustodial parents support their children.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Jamie Haskel and Somlak Suvanasorn for their assistance in the collection and processing of data for this research brief, and Lisa Nicoli for her assistance with editing. This brief was prepared by the Ruth Young Center for Families & Children at the University of Maryland School of Social Work with support from its long time research partner, the Maryland Department of Human Resources.

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