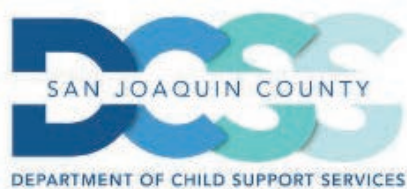


SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES

Here For The Whole Family



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CHILD SUPPORT BY THE NUMBERS



Currently, about 1 in 7 California children receive child support services, according to the San Joaquin County Department of Child Support Services.

Studies show that parents who pay child support are more likely to spend time with their children and their children are more likely to succeed in school.



74% The latest U.S. Census data shows that about 74% of custodial parents due child support received full or partial child support payments.

40% Child support accounts for nearly 40% of the income low-income families receive.

48% Among single-parent households with children under age 18 in San Joaquin County, 48.8% are due child support.

5% Approximately 5% of the San Joaquin County population is potentially eligible for but are not taking advantage of child support services.

Child Support: A Valuable Service to Children and Their Parents

Case workers endeavor to assist all parties in child support orders

BY GAIL ALLYN SHORT

Say the phrase “child support” and it probably conjures up images of a mother fighting her ex in court over money, or a resentful dad dodging payment and railing against “the system.”

But Lori A. Cruz, Director of the San Joaquin County Department of Child Support Services (SJC DCSS) says the biggest misconception about her agency is that it exists to advocate only on behalf of mothers.

“We’re really advocating for the child and their needs,” says Cruz, “and we go to great lengths to see each parent for the valuable role they play in raising their children.”

Cruz, a 30-year veteran in child support services, says SJC DCSS offers a range of resources to assist unmarried parents as well as legal guardians to ensure that children get the financial support they need for their living and medical expenses. Additionally, SJC DCSS helps locate parents, administer paternity tests, establish legal parentage, track and process payments and, if necessary, enforce compliance through enforcement measures.

And Cruz says SJC DCSS caseworkers strive to administer those services in a neutral manner. The agency has assisted mothers and fathers, same-sex couples, grandparents, older siblings and other relatives acting as legal guardians for children.

“What we’re interested in is making sure we’re providing support to that family so they can assist their children,” Cruz says.

Veronica Riley, SJC DCSS Assistant Director, says a home with consistent income is important for a child’s welfare. Child support gives children access to a parent’s health insurance, as well as Social Security or veterans’ benefits that they might otherwise go without.

“Children are also less likely to enter the juvenile justice system when they’re receiving

regular child support,” says Riley. “They also tend to have higher test scores and a higher likelihood of attending college.”

If a custodial parent in California is receiving CalWORKS public assistance, their case is automatically referred to SJC DCSS. Otherwise, custodial parents may apply for child support, which Cruz says is easy and free. One can ask for and complete an application in person or online by visiting www.childsupport.ca.gov. Completing an application takes about 30 minutes.

And if a noncustodial parent cannot pay due to a job loss, illness or disability, SJC DCSS will modify the child support order and even provide referrals to job training, job placement or other community resources.

“When children receive regular and reliable child support,” says Cruz, “it means both parents are a regular part of the child’s life. That means the child has the positive influences of parental role models, and that helps children live a more stable life.”



“What we’re interested in is making sure we’re providing support to that family so they can assist their children.”

LORI A. CRUZ
Director, SJC DCSS

PHOTO BY MELISSA UROFF



Delona Green helps families establish parentage.
PHOTO BY MELISSA UROFF

“We want people to know that we’re here and this is information that would be important for their child and also for them.”

DELONA GREEN
Supervisor, SJC DCSS

Establishing Parentage

Genetic testing brings children, parents together

BY GAIL ALLYN SHORT

When a child’s parents are not married, a series of actions may be necessary to establish parentage. In San Joaquin County, that is where the Department of Child Support Services can step in to help.

Establishing parentage is important for many reasons, says Delona Green, a child support supervisor at SJC DCSS.

“It allows the child to know who both parents are,” says Green. “The father’s name can then be added to the birth certificate. The child can also receive support from both parents and have access to family medical records and histories and obtain health insurance coverage. They may also have the right to receive a parent’s Social Security or veterans’ benefits and even the right to an inheritance.”

Green says there are different ways to establish parentage. One way is for an

unmarried couple to willingly visit the SJC DCSS office together and sign a voluntary declaration of parentage stating that they are the child’s parents. The documents would then be filed with the State.

Genetic testing is another way to establish parentage.

Once an alleged father is served with a legal document called a Summons and Complaint, he has 30 days from the day served to answer the complaint. If he answers by denying that he is the child’s father, he can ask SJC DCSS to perform genetic testing.

The agency can arrange for genetic testing to take place during normal business hours at the SJC DCSS office. The test is free of charge and is conducted without needles. Instead, testers take just a quick, painless swab inside the cheek to collect buccal cells.

Afterward, SJC DCSS will schedule a time for the mother and child to be tested as well. The final results are later mailed to both parties.

If paternity is established and the parties agree to the proposed child support amount in the Summons and Complaint, the two parties can sign an agreement called a “stipulation” without having to go to court for a hearing on the matter. Afterward, administering the child support order begins.

“Once the order comes back from the court, we then enter it into our system and begin the process of enforcing that order, obtaining payments and sending that money to the families,” she says.

“We want people to know that we’re here and this is information that would be important for their child and also for them.”

GENETIC TESTING

DNA testing is a procedure that can with great accuracy identify a child’s biological parent. If a man denies being the father of a child named in an order for child support, he has the right to request genetic testing to determine paternity.



Here are the steps:

1. Ask for a test

To request genetic testing, call 866-901-3212 to schedule an appointment.

2. Arrive for testing

Testing will be conducted at your local department of child support office. Be sure to bring a government-issued photo ID with you. If you must reschedule, do so as soon as possible to ensure that the test results are available before any court date.

3. Take the test

A technician will take a swab of the inside of your cheek to collect a DNA sample. The custodial parent and child will also submit to a cheek swab.

4. Wait for the results

The test results will be mailed to each party’s home. Allow for several weeks before arrival.

5. Call back

If you do not receive your results, call SJC DCSS at 866-901-3212 for assistance.

CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES: WHO ELSE BENEFITS?

The San Joaquin County Department of Child Support Services does much more than assist custodial parents and children.

"We're here to help," is SJC DCSS Program Manager Monica Moore's message. "It's important that your voice is heard in the child support process, as many factors are considered in determining parentage, support amounts, collection efforts and payment negotiations."

Noncustodial Parents

SJC DCSS helps noncustodial parents come to an agreement on how much child support they will pay without having to go to court. The office also administers genetic testing upon request, modifies child support orders in cases of financial hardship and makes referrals to job training and job placement resources in the community.

Legal Guardians

Just like with custodial parents, SJC DCSS helps legal guardians such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and older siblings access the services needed to collect child support.

Employers

SJC DCSS assists employers who are required to issue Income Withholding orders and National Medical Support Notices to employees under child support orders and withhold funds from their paychecks for child support. Employers with questions can contact SJC DCSS by phone, mail or in person. They can also attend an informational workshop hosted by SJC DCSS for employers to learn about what is required under the law.

Formerly resistant to paying child support, Joseph Mann had a paradigm shift after working with the department.

PHOTO BY MELISSA UROFF

Seeing Child Support in a Whole New Light

Father learns value of paying child support

BY GAIL ALLYN SHORT

Divorced dad Joseph Mann of Lodi admits that he used to call child support services "the enemy."

Years ago, Mann found himself under a court order to pay child support in another jurisdiction. He was not pleased.

"I used to think, 'They're just ripping money away from me and giving it to my ex-wife,'" he says.

Past experiences with a difficult child support caseworker years ago left him bitter, he says.

"We all create stereotypes in our head, and I had a negative stereotype of the child support caseworker," he says. "I had this image of a lazy government worker who made orders all day long and just beat up on men all day."

"I fought it for so long," he says. "I did everything I could to not pay child support. But when ignorance is destroyed by knowledge, you have a paradigm shift."

That is what happened when Mann landed a job as the information systems analyst at SJC DCSS.

"When I came on board, I had been out of work for a while, and I needed a job. I said, 'I'll take anything.'"

"At the time, I wasn't really liking life and here I was working for 'the enemy,'" he says. "But over the course of a year I found out what child support services actually did and how hard the people here work."

Mann says the longer he worked at SJC DCSS, the more he came to understand the

agency's mission and the services it provides.

"I had a paradigm shift," he says. "I realized that the child support system is actually a wonderful system. But, like with anything, you can get one or two bad apples. Well, I had a bad apple as a caseworker. It wasn't the system. It was the person."

"Caseworkers do what's best for the child," he says. "And we help not just women. The people here work hard not only for the custodial parent. They do everything they can to help the noncustodial parent."

Mann says he also discovered that it is not just men who pay child support.

"I was amazed at how many women pay and that was my No. 1 epiphany," he says. "It's more women paying child support than you would imagine."

Mann says that because of his new outlook, he started paying his back child support payments with a new attitude, realizing that he was making his daughter's life better. He finished paying a year and a half ago.



"I did everything I could to not pay child support. But when ignorance is destroyed by knowledge, you have a paradigm shift."

JOSEPH MANN

Father Paying Support

He says he now works hard on his job so the child support caseworkers can focus on helping families.

His advice to noncustodial parents paying child support: "It's not about you. It's about the child that you brought into this world. Even if you don't like your ex, suck up the ego and remember what's important."



Positive Changes in Child Support

One father finds tremendous help from a child support caseworker

BY ANNE STOKES

After their relationship ended, Rob Luna and his ex-wife kept things amicable and agreed on an informal child support arrangement. A few years later, however, the IRS intercepted his tax refund.

Unbeknownst to him, his ex-wife had filed for public assistance and the funds were held on behalf of the case. Luna was able to prove he had been making support payments and worked with the department to set up payments for support and arrears, but it wasn't a pleasant experience.

"Every time I dealt with them, I got a different answer," he says. "I had to keep proving my innocence and I fought with these guys over and over."

After several years, Luna thought his child support obligations had been met, but according to SJC DCSS records, he owed approximately \$8,000 in interest and arrears. His driver's license was revoked and his car impounded because of it. Not paying child support can have serious consequences:

negative credit reporting, bank levies, property liens and, in extreme cases, jail time. He was not optimistic about dealing with SJC DCSS again. Recently, he met with Child Support Officer II Shirley Gonzalez.

"Working with Mr. Luna, in the beginning, was kind of difficult because he didn't feel like he would get the kind of service that he needed," she says. "But I reassured him that I was here to help him and that's what I do with all my customers — I'm here to help them and I'm here to listen."

She admits that in the past, dealing with SJC DCSS was a frustrating experience. Today, the department's priority is customer service for all parties.

Luna says Gonzalez's guidance was crucial in helping him navigate the complicated child support and court systems.

"She wasn't just interested in sticking me with a bill like they were before," he says. "She went back and reviewed the case ... and then she told me where to go, what papers to get and who to talk to."

Gonzalez informed Luna that he had the option to address his case in court. She connected him with the county Pro Per Clinic, helped him file a motion to resolve his child support issues and released his driver's license suspension.

"Legal documents are scary for people who are not familiar with them. Even for myself, if I was on the other side, I'd be nervous," Gonzalez says. "If they have someone who's

going to guide them and reassure them ... that makes such a big difference."

In the end, the court confirmed Luna had fulfilled his financial obligation and exonerated him from all arrears and interest. He says without Gonzalez's help, he would never have been able to clear his case.

"I didn't know how to do any of this," he says. "I couldn't have done it without her."

"She wasn't just interested in sticking me with a bill like they were before."

ROB LUNA
Father Paying Support

WAGE WITHHOLDING

Wage garnishments have a negative connotation, but it's often the easiest and most reliable way to ensure payments are made on time and in full. And with any court order of support, they're required, even if you're not falling behind in payments.

"A majority of [non-custodial parents] prefer wage garnishments because they say they don't see the money and it's taken care of," says Shirley Gonzalez, child support officer II with the San Joaquin County Department of Child Support Services. "If you're paying every month, that child is having a more comfortable life because the custodial parent is receiving help in providing for that child — that's the main benefit."

Non-custodial parents are responsible for making those payments until wage garnishments are received through the employer.

Payments can be made:

-  **Online**
-  **Through a bank account**
-  **At Western Union locations**
-  **By mail**
-  **Over the phone**
-  **In person at any Child Support Services Department office, Walmart or 7-11 statewide**

Family Services

Find out what San Joaquin County DCSS offers parents

BY COREY RODDA



GENETIC TESTING

In order to establish a court order for child support, paternity must be determined.

"Sometimes men will say, 'Hey, I don't know if that is my child, we weren't seriously dating,'" says Veronica Riley, the Assistant Director of San Joaquin County Department of Child Support Services. "We have to figure out who the parent is so we can establish legal parentage."

San Joaquin County DCSS offers **free genetic testing on a walk-in basis**. The tests are conducted with a cheek swab and the benefits of legal parentage can grant children disability and medical benefits from their father in addition to child support.



WORKNET REFERRAL PROGRAM

San Joaquin County DCSS refers **parents in need of employment to WorkNet**, San Joaquin County's employment agency, which boasts training, resume writing services and educational opportunities.

"A lot of parents aren't paying child support and it's not that they don't want to pay, it's just that they don't have a job," says Riley.

San Joaquin County DCSS strives to provide holistic services to its clients and will refer to other community services if they are dealing with food insecurity or domestic violence. Representatives from the agency also visit local jails on a monthly basis to help people who are incarcerated modify their child support payments.



PROCESSING CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENTS

San Joaquin County DCSS **processes child support payments and facilitates the exchange of money between parents**.

"Often when parents are exchanging child support, the amount paid is rarely estimated to be the same by either party," says DJ Andriessen, program manager and ombudsperson at SJC DCSS. "When parents pay child support through SJC DCSS, we keep the accounting and parents can go online any time to see what payments have been made."

When parties have disputes over what is owed, the accounting provided by at SJC DCSS can be used for legal records.



GARNISHING CHILD SUPPORT FROM INDIVIDUALS WHO DON'T PAY

When someone is not paying child support, SJC DCSS has a variety of remedies at its disposal. The agency can garnish wages directly from a child support payer's paycheck.

"It sounds bad, but it really is an asset for the non-custodial parent because they don't have to deal with it," Andriessen says.

The agency also has a host of tools to track down individuals, using their name, address and Social Security number.

"We have a lot of interfaces with the DMV, the state of California for taxes, the banks and with real estate," Andriessen says. "If you own a home and your case is in our office, we place a lien on any property. If you have arrears in our office, you may have to pay them off before you can sell your home."



FAQ

Get answers to your questions from a child support officer

BY COREY RODDA

Luis Rios, a Child Support Officer III, discusses some of the most pressing questions that he fields about the services offered through San Joaquin County Department of Child Support Services.

Who can access the services offered at San Joaquin County DCSS?

Anyone who needs our services — whether it be a person seeking support or a person wanting to pay support. Our services are available to anyone regardless of income.



Luis Rios answers questions on child support.

PHOTO BY MELISSA UROFF

What are the benefits of using SJC DCSS to establish child support payments?

All of our services are low to no cost. We try to establish an appropriate child support payment based on the income and custodial agreement of each individual case. In some cases, some individuals just find it easier to have a middle agency to deal with the situation instead of dealing with the other party directly.

We are also able to collect child support if the paying party doesn't want to be bothered with a monthly payment or isn't willing to pay. For San Joaquin County DCSS, it is really simple to generate an Income Withholding order — or garnish the wages of a child support paying parent. We also have more power to enforce a child support order and can take actions like suspending the license, passport or garnishing tax refunds from any non-paying participants.

How can I start the child support payment process through SJC DCSS?

You can begin by going to the local San Joaquin County DCSS website and apply using the application for child support services, or contact our office and request that an application be mailed to you. A case will be opened once the submission of the case packet has been received.

What is the process for establishing an order of child support?

Once a case is opened, we establish the summons and complaint. After the summons has been issued, we send it out for filing and then we send it to service for the parent who would be paying for the child support. Once they have been served the complaint, they have 30 days to respond. It is important to note that summons and complaint is initially a recommendation for child support. It doesn't establish or set an order.

What should I do if I get a child support payment summons in the mail?

Definitely read it over. Make sure that you understand what you have received. If not, contact us or come into our office so we can explain the summons to you. You have 30 business days to respond to the summons before the child support payment falls into a default order and you must comply with the order in the summons. If you are able to respond in 30 days and complete an answer — which is a form included in the summons — you can state that you are not in agreement with the recommendation and work through SJC DCSS to reach a new mutual agreement about child support called a "stipulation," or set up a court date to litigate the payment in court.

How can a non-custodial parent receive help through SJC DCSS?

We can explain the payments and if the child support order is too high or too low, we can explain the process to modify the child support payment amount. Sometimes payments need to be modified if the child support-paying parent has been laid off, working fewer hours or has received a raise. We encourage parents to tell us if they are going to be in jail for more than 30 days so that we can modify the child support amount as well. The parent paying child support often doesn't see us as a resource. But we are here to help them.

How is child support calculated?

There really isn't a set number — it's a case by case matter — everyone's income is different as well as their visitation time. Once the information is obtained, the child support is determined using a statewide formula.

How can I receive child support?

There are three methods of getting your payment issued to you — through check, direct deposit or an electronic payment card, which is similar to an ATM debit card.



**Contact us in person,
by phone or online.
We're here to help!**

**409 E Market St,
Stockton, CA 95202**

**8am - 5pm
(Monday - Friday)**

866-901-3212

[www.sjgov.org/departments/
dcsc/](http://www.sjgov.org/departments/dcsc/)



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Reach out today and find out how San Joaquin County Department of Child Support Services staff can help you

California's Child Support Services program works with parents — custodial and noncustodial — and legally-acknowledged guardians to ensure children and families receive court-ordered financial and medical support. Child support services are available to the general public through a network of 48 county and regional child support agencies.

SERVICES OFFERED BY THE CHILD SUPPORT PROGRAM:

- Opening a Case
- Locating Absent Parents
- Establishing Legal Parentage
- Genetic Testing
- Obtaining a Court Order
- Enforcing Support Orders
- Enforcing Medical Support
- Modifying Child Support Orders
- Incarcerated Parent

***San Joaquin County
Department of Child
Support Services Mission:***

*Partnering with parents to develop cooperative family
relationships and shared responsibilities*

Customer Connect Now Offers eDocuments — Enroll Now!

Parents and caretakers now have the option to **view, save and print documents** through Customer Connect. By enrolling to receive eDocuments, you will no longer receive statements by mail. Instead, you will receive an email when a statement is available to view. Once you submit your request for enrollment, a verification email will be sent to you to complete the enrollment process. Contact our office to enroll now 1 866-901-3212.



childsupport.ca.gov/customer-connect/