

INCARCERATION & CHILD SUPPORT: A SNAPSHOT OF MARYLAND'S CASELOAD

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THE POLICY ISSUE:

RISING ARREARS, BUT FEW COLLECTIONS

- Despite steady improvements in current support collections, child support arrears remain large and continue to grow.
- Nationally, arrears totaled \$107 billion in 2005; in Maryland, \$1.45 billion.
- Even with strong enforcement tools in place, arrears collection rates remain low.



THE POLICY IMPLICATION: NEW APPROACHES ARE NEEDED

- Some have concluded that arrears may be the single biggest challenge facing the child support program.
- States are thinking creatively about how to reduce current arrears balances and prevent the build-up of additional arrears.
- In particular, there has been growing interest in arrears prevention and reduction strategies for incarcerated obligors, because:



THE PROBLEM:

PREVALENCE OF INCARCERATION

- The number of prisons in federal or state adult correctional facilities increased by 79% between 1990 and 2000.
- The vast majority of prisoners are male and at least three-fifths of them are parents.
- It is estimated that 7 million children have a parent in prison or jail or under parole or probation supervision.

THE PROBLEM:

INCARCERATION AND CHILD SUPPORT

- Recent cross-sectional studies assessed the overlap between child support caseloads and prison populations:
 - It is estimated that the majority of the prisoners are parents of minor children, and roughly half of incarcerated parents have an open child support case.
 - Typically, incarcerated obligors represent 4 to 6% of total state caseloads, and account for 3 to 5% of state unpaid child support arrears.
 - On average, prisoners owe \$15,933 in arrears and parolees have an average debt of \$13,472.

Sources: Thonennes, N. (2002). Child support profile: Massachusetts and paroled parents. *Fathers in the criminal justice system: A collaboration between child support enforcement and criminal justice agencies in Massachusetts*. Denver: Center for Policy Research.

Pearson, J. & Hardaway, C. (2000). *Designing programs for incarcerated and paroled obligors*. Washington, DC: Welfare Information Network. Retrieved January 31, 2005 from <http://welfare.org/expandedcasestudy.htm>.

Esther, G. & Pearson, J. (2003). Twelve reasons for collaboration between Departments of Correction and child-support enforcement. *Corrections Today*, 65(3), p.87.

INCARCERATION AND CHILD SUPPORT

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILD SUPPORT PROGRAMS

- While in prison, most parents will not be able to pay their child support obligations and will accumulate arrears.
- After release, ex-offenders face a number of challenges to securing employment.
- High current support obligations and/or large arrears balances may discourage obligors from participating in the formal economy and/or deteriorate already fragile family relationships.



POLICY OPTIONS:

SOME NEW APPROACHES

- Provide inmates with education and services related to child support issues.
- Suspend or reduce child support orders to a minimal amount when a non-custodial parent enters prison.
- Provide reintegration and employment services for ex-offenders.

PROGRAM OPTIONS:

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

- In order to address the issues for incarcerated non-custodial parents, administrators need information about how much of their caseload is affected by incarceration.
- Unfortunately, while anecdote abounds, there is very little “hard” data on the child support-incarceration issue.
- In order to fill this information gap, our study aims to understand the extent of this problem in Maryland.



OUR STUDY: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How many non-custodial parents are or were incarcerated?
- What are their characteristics?
- How much do they owe in arrears?
- To what extent do they pay after they are released from prison?

OUR STUDY:

METHODS

- Sample
 - Random sample of 2,375 individuals who were listed as a non-custodial parent in an active child support case in Maryland in September 2004.
 - 95% confidence interval and a $\pm 2\%$ error rate.

- Data Sources
 - Data on incarceration in Maryland prisons and the Baltimore City Detention Center –extract file developed by the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services specifically for this study.*

 - Underestimates because data does not include information on local jails in Maryland's 23 counties.

*Research Disclaimer: Data was supplied for this study by the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. Although the Department is unable to certify the accuracy and completeness of the data with regard to each subject of this Study, the researchers have nonetheless made every attempt to accurately and appropriately interpret the data supplied.

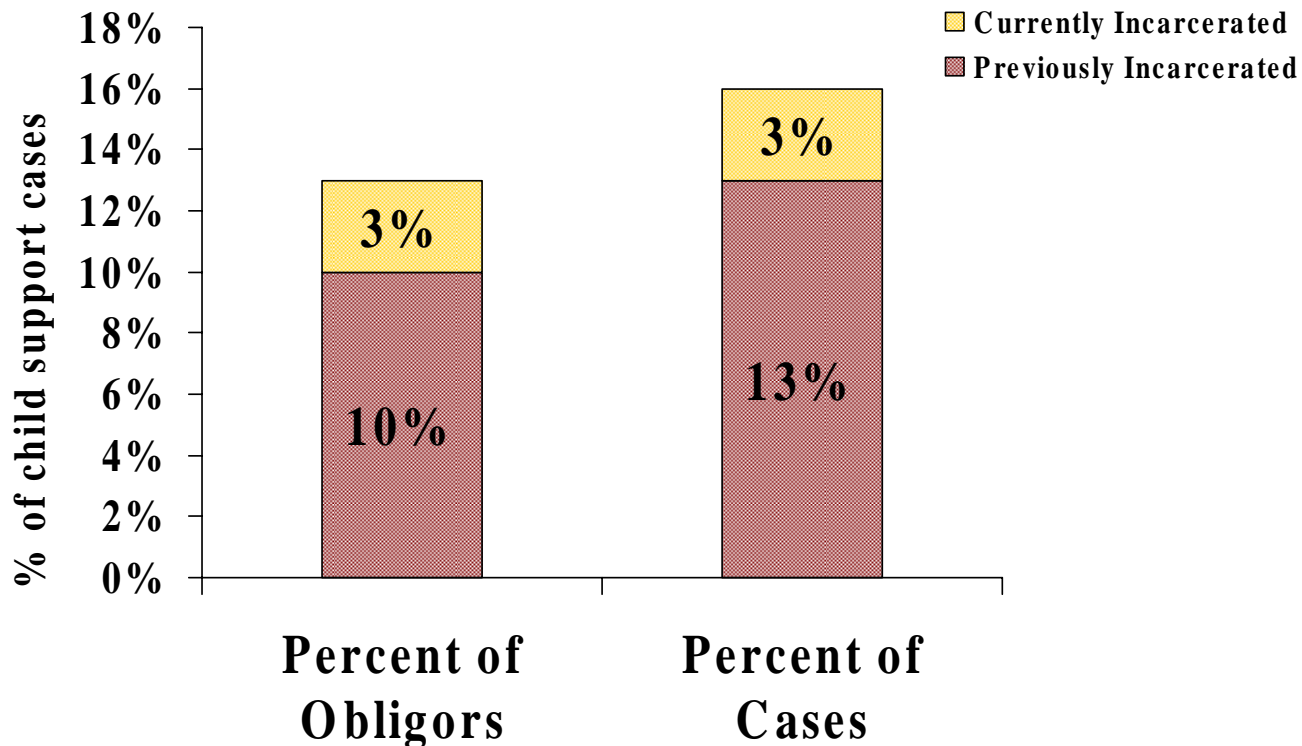


FINDINGS:

OBLIGOR AND CASE CHARACTERISTICS

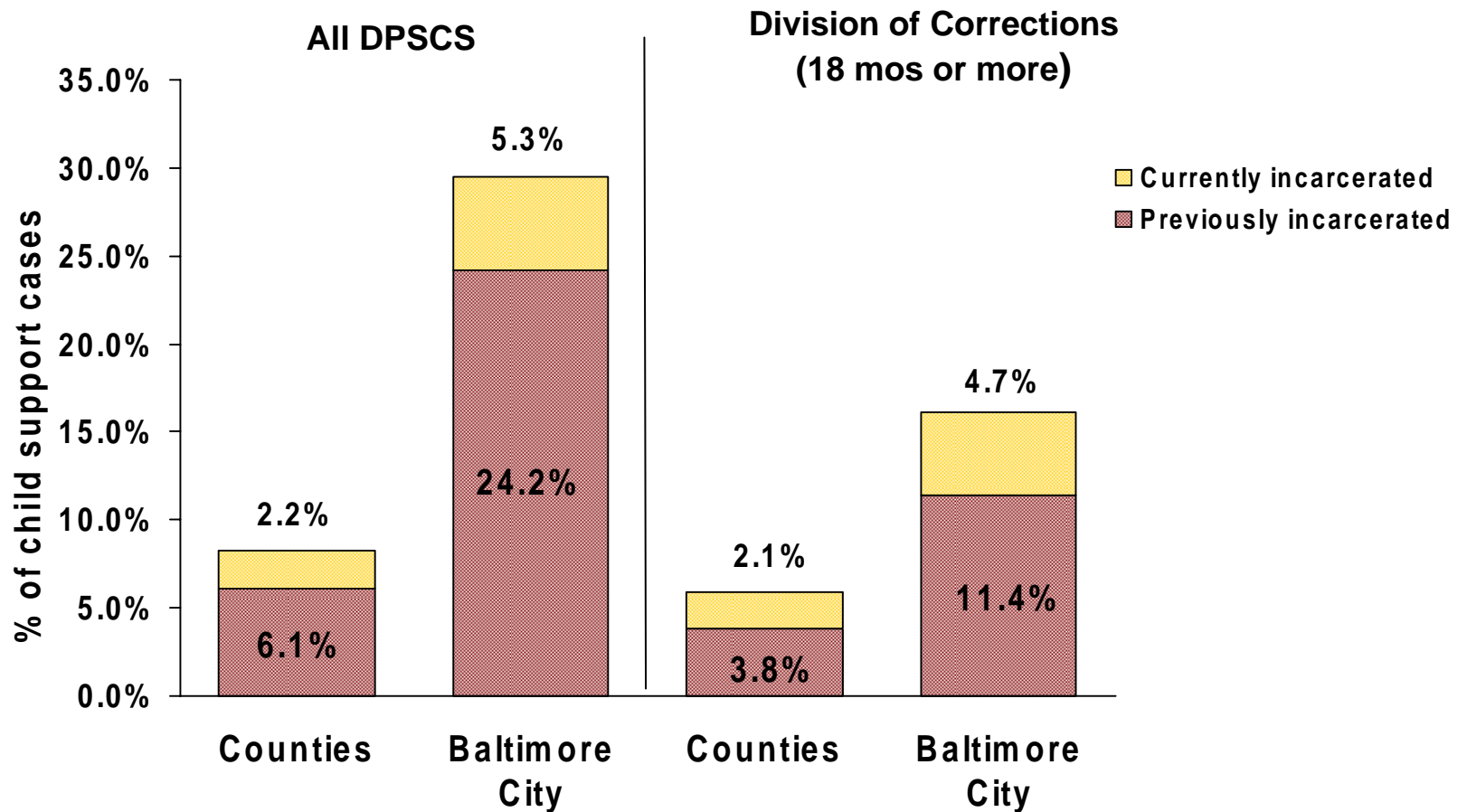
MARYLAND'S CASELOAD:

Currently & previously incarcerated individuals account for at least 13% of Maryland's child support obligors & 16% of its cases.



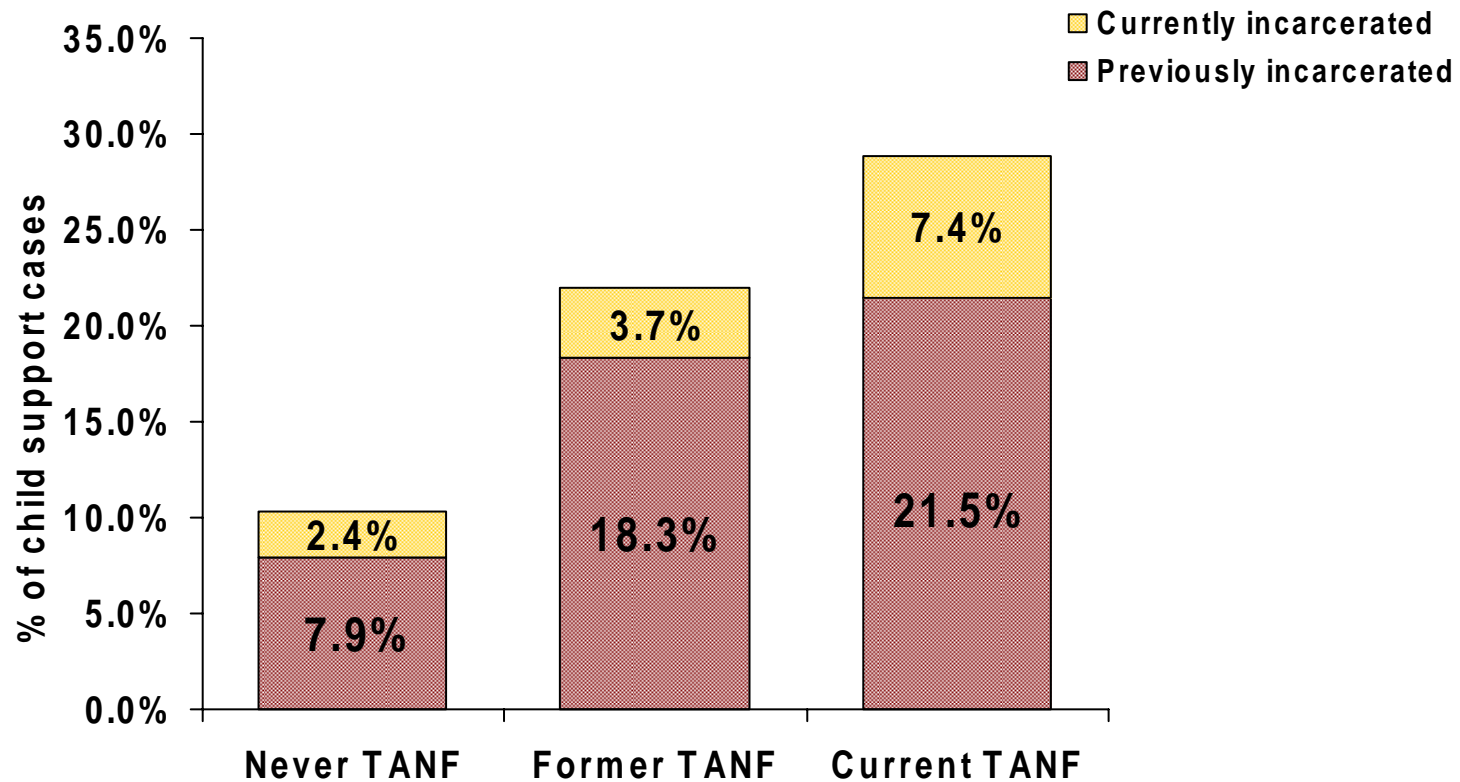
MARYLAND'S CASELOAD

Incarceration is more common among Baltimore City cases.



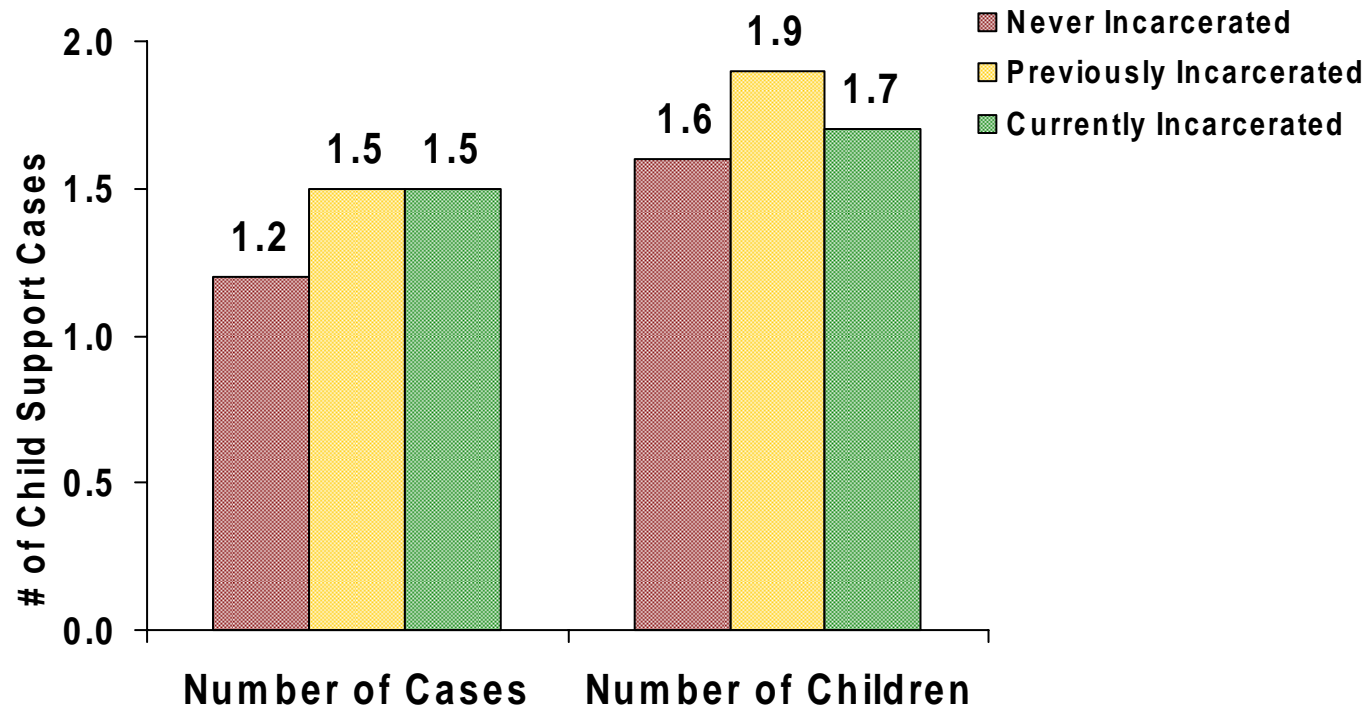
MARYLAND'S CASELOAD

Incarceration is twice as common among current and former TANF cases.



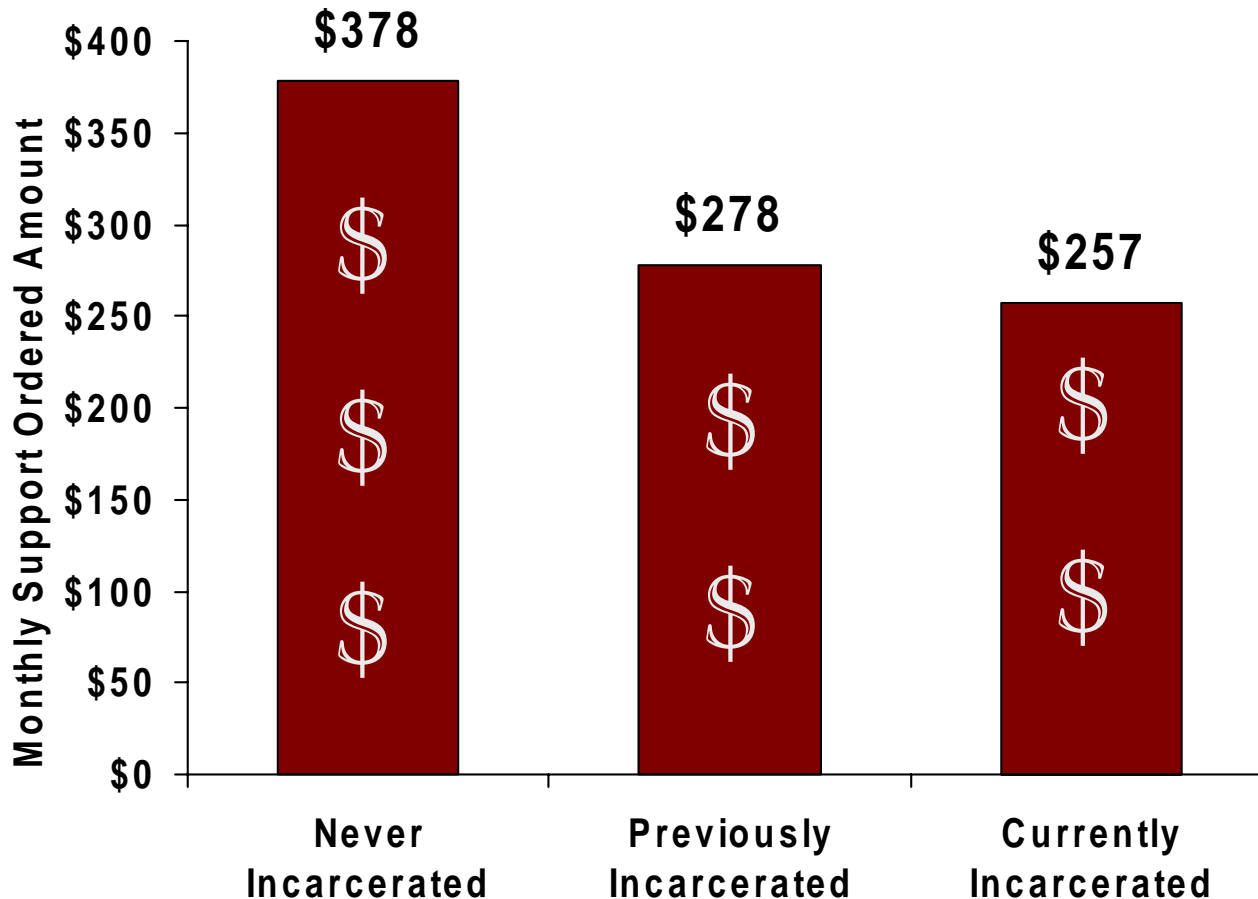
MARYLAND'S CASELOAD

On average, incarcerated obligors have more cases and more children on those cases than never-incarcerated obligors.



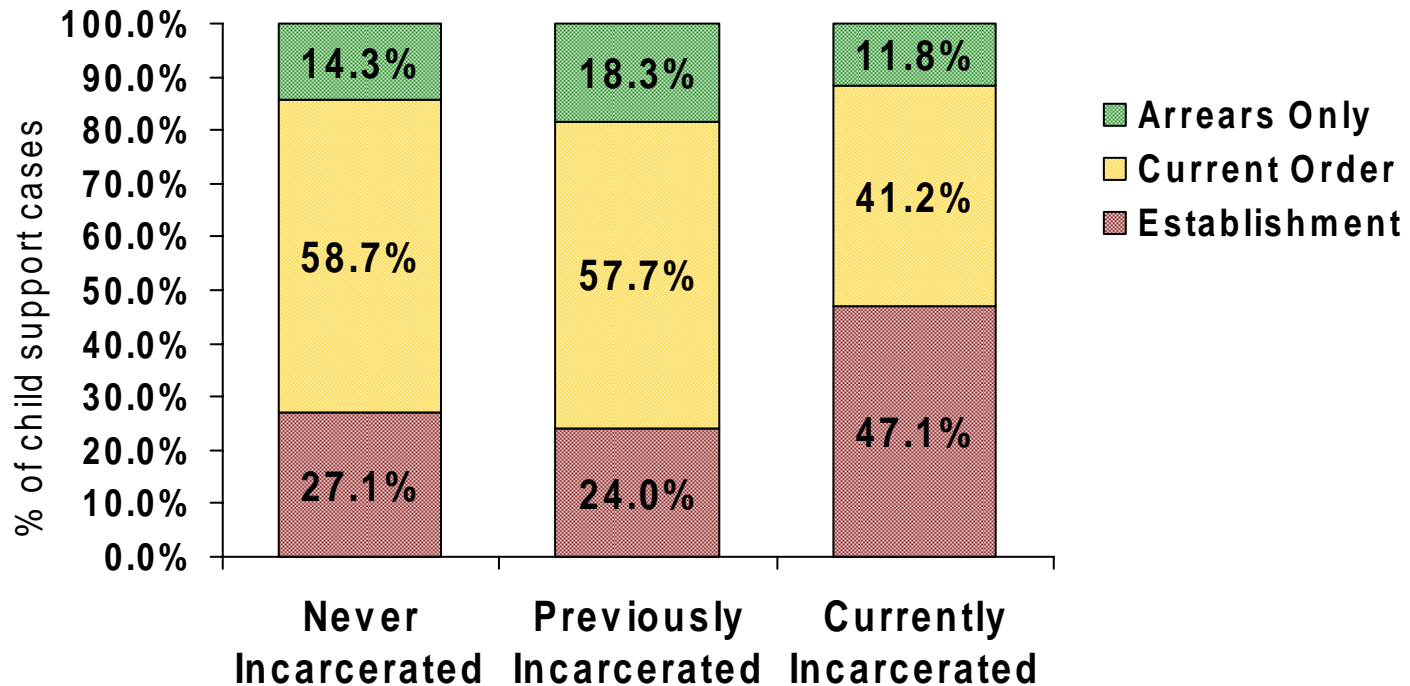
MARYLAND'S CASELOAD

Currently & previously incarcerated obligors have lower orders for current support than never incarcerated obligors.



MARYLAND'S CASELOAD

Cases with a currently incarcerated obligor are more likely to require establishment.



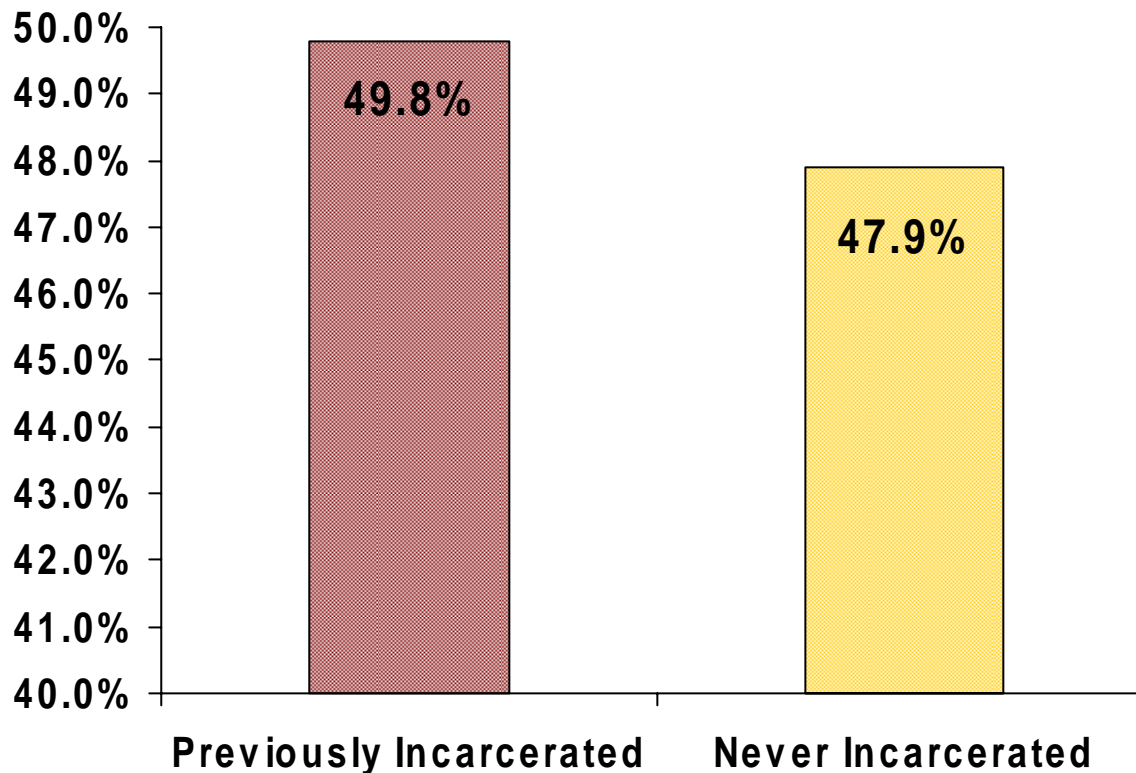


FINDINGS:

EMPLOYMENT, PAYMENTS, AND ARREARS

EMPLOYMENT

Non-custodial parents who have been previously incarcerated are just as likely to be employed in a MD-UI covered job as those never incarcerated.

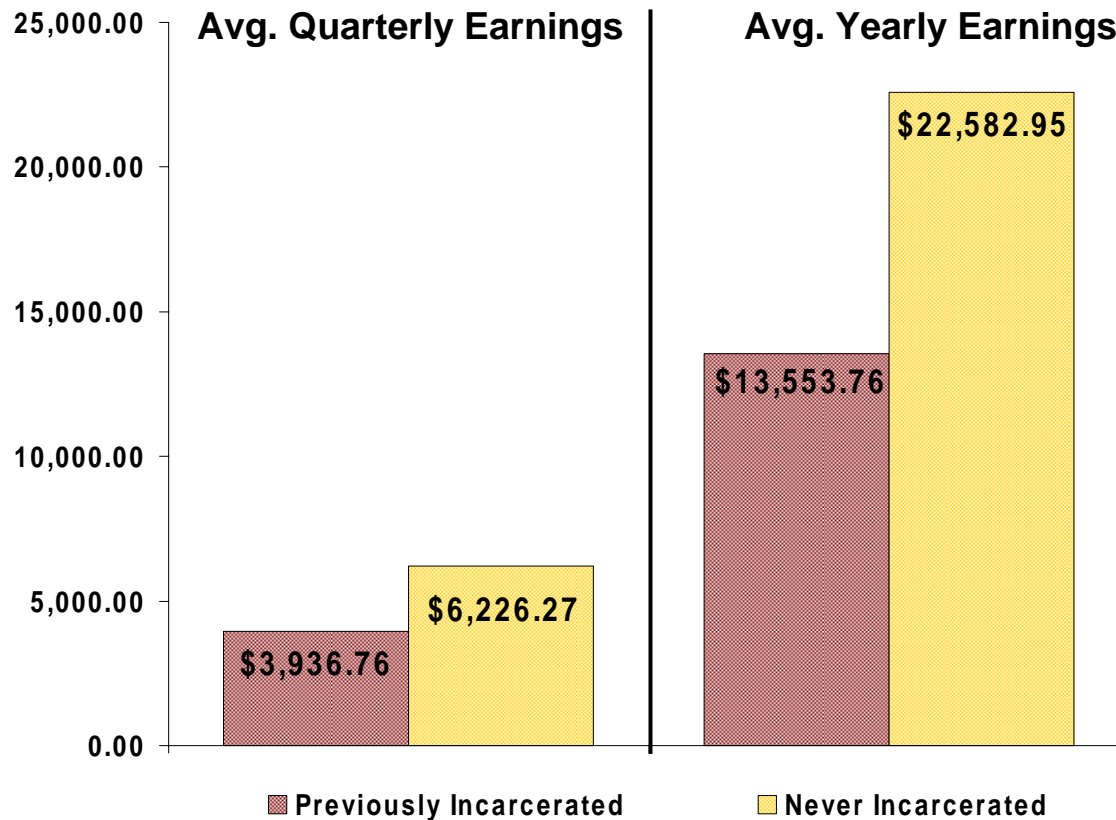


** Percent employed in 2004.

*** Previously incarcerated includes only those who were released before October 1, 2003.

EARNINGS

On average, previously incarcerated non-custodial parents earn about half of what never incarcerated non-custodial parents earn.



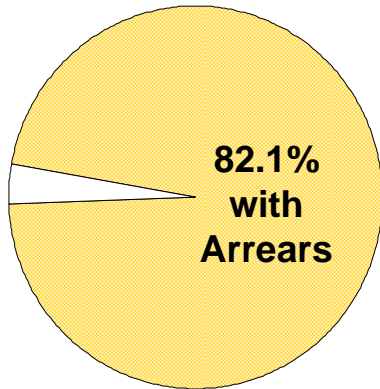
* Includes only those with quarterly employment in the time period.

** Previously incarcerated includes only those who were released before October 1, 2003.

ARREARS OWED:

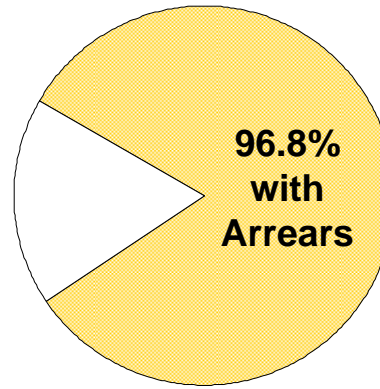
Previously & currently incarcerated obligors are more likely to owe arrears and have higher average child support debts.

**Never
Incarcerated**



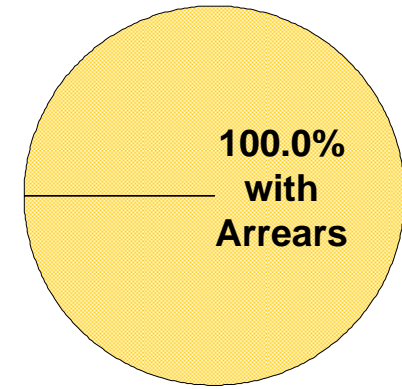
Mean: \$9,392.05

**Previously
Incarcerated**



Mean: \$17,254.71

**Currently
Incarcerated**

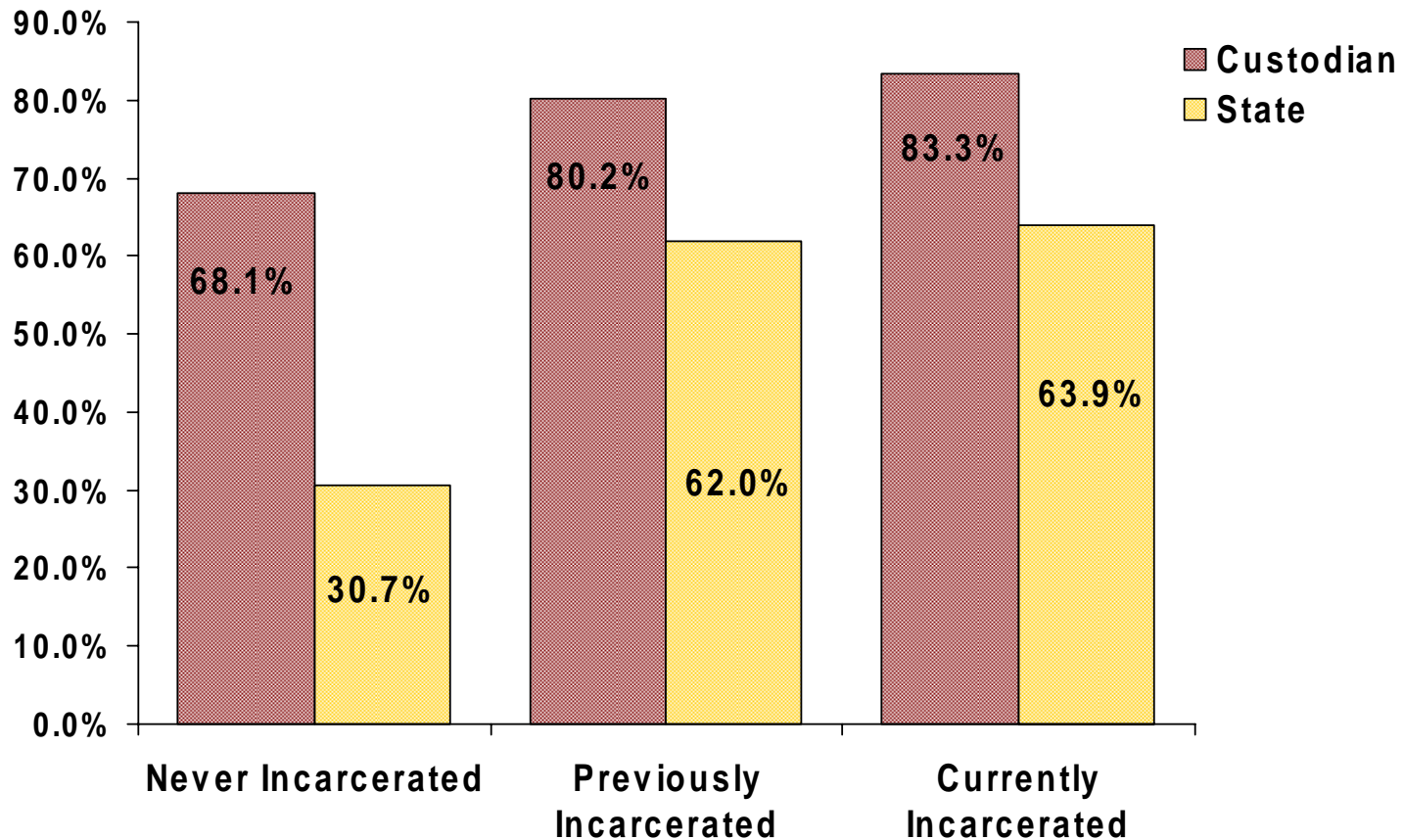


Mean: \$22,047.68

*Excludes cases needing establishment.

ARREARS OWED: CUSTODIAN VS. STATE-OWED ARREARS

Previously & currently incarcerated obligors are two times more likely to owe arrears to the state than those who've never been incarcerated.



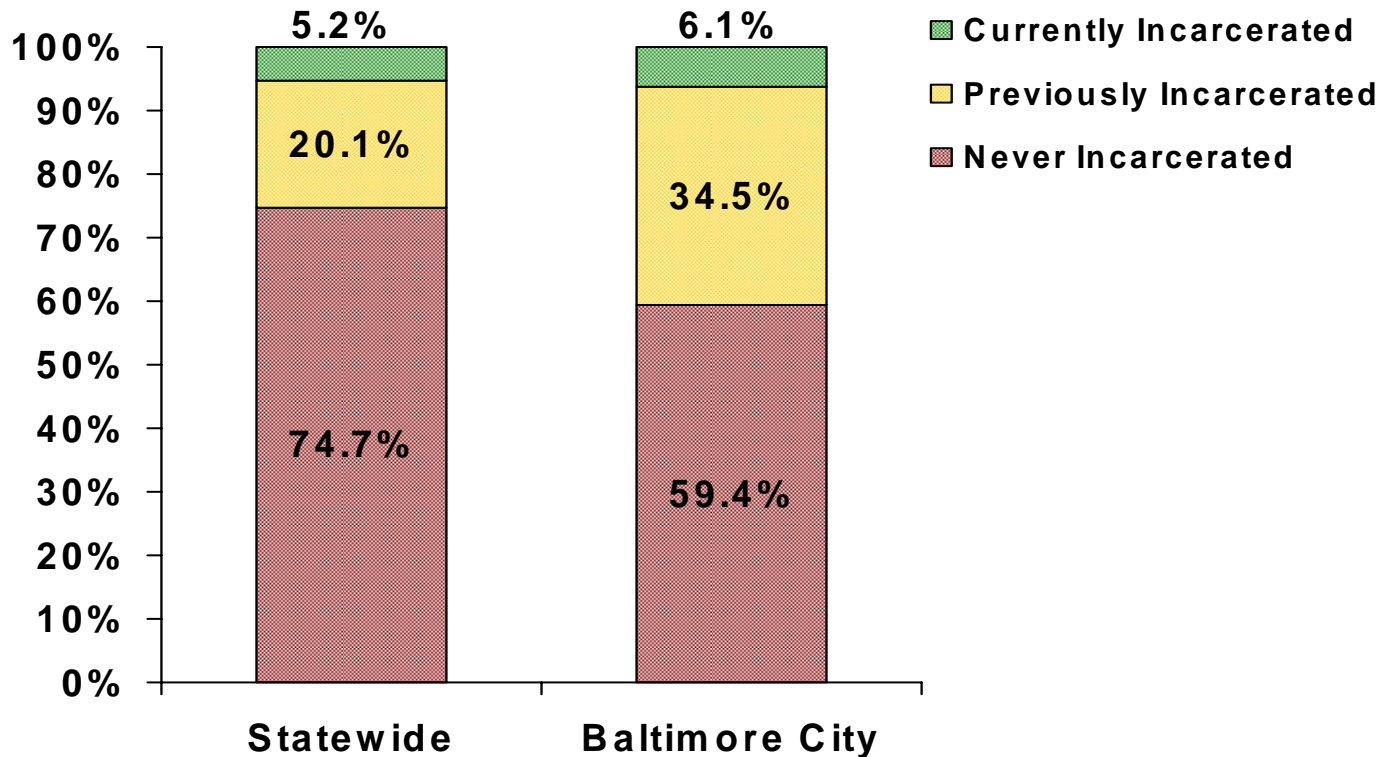
ARREARS OWED:

On average, previously & currently incarcerated obligors owe more to both the state and the custodian than those who've never been incarcerated.

	Never Incarcerated	Previously Incarcerated	Currently Incarcerated
Avg. Amount Owed to the Custodian	\$7,815.90	\$12,868.72	\$17,370.30
Avg. Amount Owed to the State	\$7,795.64	\$10,281.94	\$11,851.74

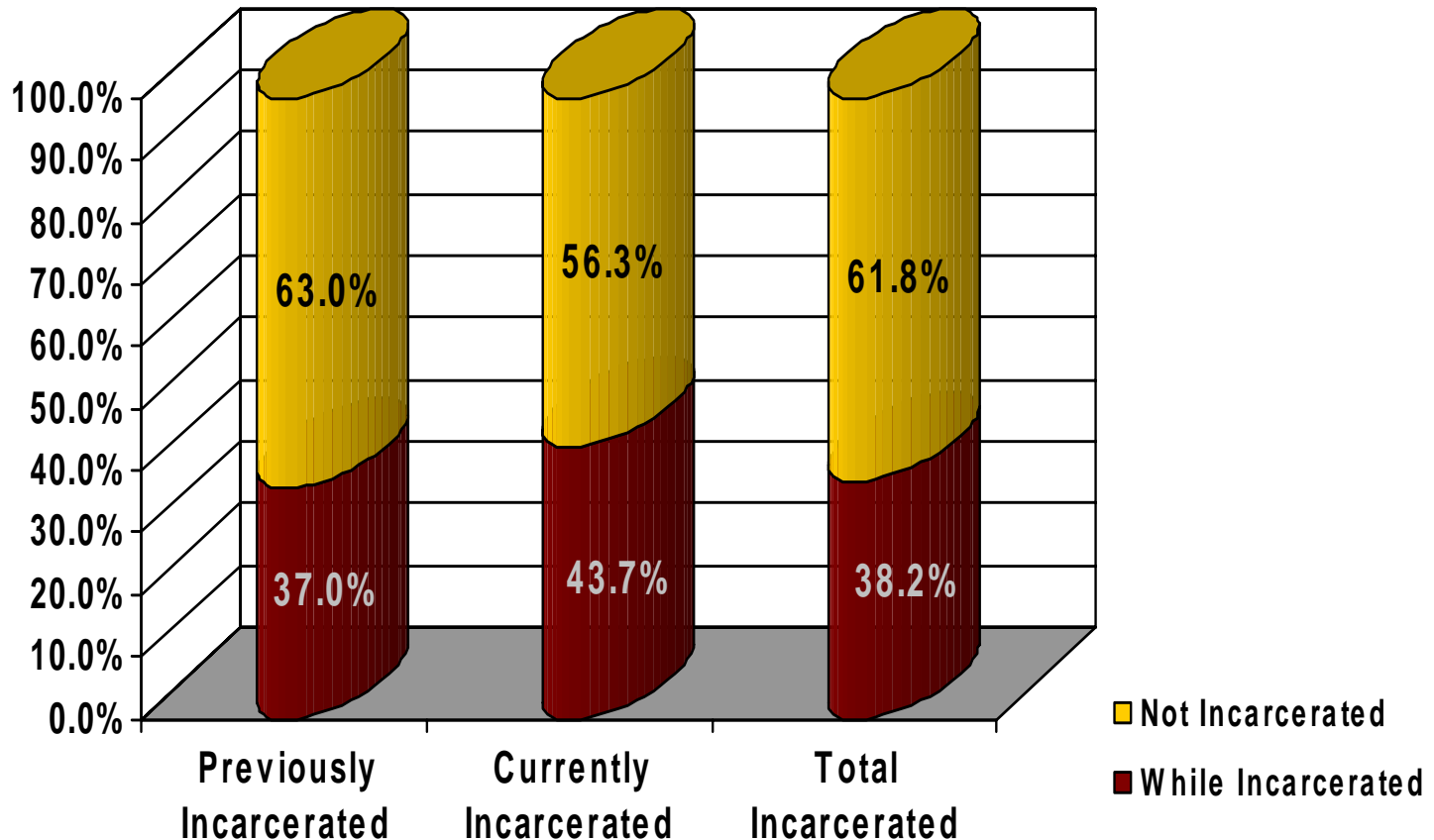
INCARCERATION AND TOTAL ARREARS

At least one-quarter of arrears owed on Maryland cases are owed by previously & currently incarcerated obligors. Two-fifths of Baltimore City arrears are owed by obligors who are or have been incarcerated.



ARREARS ACCUMULATION

On average, an estimated two-fifths of previously & currently incarcerated obligors' arrears accumulated while they were in prison.



CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENT

Previously incarcerated obligors are less likely to pay support & pay less than never incarcerated obligors. However, most still pay something.

Support Paid 10/03-9/04	Previously Incarcerated	Never Incarcerated
% paying any support***	61.0%	79.1%
Total amount paid (mean)***	\$2,210.78	\$3,918.93
% of current support paid (mean)***	53.5%	75.1%

*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

** Previously incarcerated obligors are only included if they were released before October 1, 2003.

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

- There is significant overlap among incarceration, child support, & welfare programs.
- Child support cases for children currently receiving TANF are twice as likely to have a non-custodial parent with an incarceration history than cases for children who have never received TANF.

IMPLICATION:

Policy, program, research, and inter-agency attention should continue to be paid to the intersection of incarceration, child support, and welfare programs.

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

Obligors with current or previous imprisonment:

- Have more child support cases per obligor, and more children per case;
- Are less likely to have an order in place; and
- Almost certainly owe support arrears.

IMPLICATION:

Collaborative efforts between the child support & public safety programs should be undertaken to educate & engage incarcerated non-custodial parents in providing financial support for their children.

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

Arrears are correlated with non-custodial parent incarceration:

- The average amount owed is roughly twice the average amount owed by those with no history of incarceration.
- Obligor with past and present incarceration account for a disproportionate share of total arrears, state-owed arrears, and arrears owed to the custodian.
- One-quarter of Maryland arrears & just over two-fifths of arrears on Baltimore City cases are owed by persons who are or were incarcerated.

IMPLICATION:

Agencies should partner to identify currently incarcerated non-custodial parents and possibly modify their orders. Outreach to custodial parents may also be needed.

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

- The effects of incarceration on child support payments linger after an obligor is released from prison.
- Obligor with an incarceration history are significantly less likely to pay support.
- When payments are made, they are significantly lower, and represent a smaller percentage of current support obligations.

IMPLICATION:

Develop or expand programs for non-custodial parents who are about to be released or have recently been released from prison.



THANK YOU!

To obtain a copy of the full
*The Intersection of Incarceration and Child Support: A Snapshot
of Maryland's Caseload* report visit our website:

<http://www.familywelfare.umaryland.edu>

For more information on this study, please e-mail:

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