



# Help Yourself

## Child Support in D.C.

### Starting a Case

Starting a child support case is easy! There are four different ways you can begin a case. You may ask the D.C. Child Support Services Division to help you. You may apply for a free lawyer. You may be your own lawyer. Or you may hire a private lawyer.

### You may ask the D.C. Child Support Services Division to help you.

The Child Support Services Division (CSSD) is a D.C. agency that helps custodial parents *establish* and *enforce* paternity and child support orders. If you receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), CSSD will help you for free. If you are not on TANF, CSSD will help you for \$5 (money order or check only). Additional charges for some services may be applied or deducted from any child support collected.

- **How can I apply?** Call to schedule an appointment or request an application. Or go to the web site at <http://cspd.dc.gov> to download an application. Complete and sign the application. Enclose *copies* (not originals) of:

- ▲ Each child's birth certificate and social security card;
- ▲ Any separation agreements, divorce decrees, and custody orders;
- ▲ Any existing child support orders;
- ▲ Proof of your income;
- ▲ Proof of any health insurance and child care expenses for each child;
- ▲ Any other extra expenses for each child; and
- ▲ A photo of the other parent, if you have one.

Take or mail the application packet to:

Child Support Services Division  
Office of the Attorney General  
441 4th Street NW, Suite 550 North  
Washington, DC 20001  
202-442-9900

- **How else can CSSD help me?**

To find out more, you can call or visit the office. The hours are Monday through Friday, 8:15 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. (until 8 p.m. on Wednesdays).

### You may apply for a free lawyer.

There are several free legal services programs in D.C. that help people with low income with child support cases. Call first to get intake hours, or go to [www.lawhelp.org/dc](http://www.lawhelp.org/dc) for updated information.

- **American University  
Washington College of Law  
Clinical Program**  
4801 Massachusetts Ave. NW  
Suite 417  
202-274-4140
- **Legal Aid Society of the  
District of Columbia**  
666 11th Street NW, Suite 800  
202-628-1161
- **Ayuda** (immigrants and domestic violence-related cases only)  
1736 Columbia Road NW  
202-387-2870
- **Neighborhood Legal Services Program**  
(divorce-related cases only)  
701 4th Street NW  
(serves NE and NW)  
202-682-2700
- **Bread for the City  
(Northwest)**  
1525 7th Street NW  
202-265-2400
- **Neighborhood Legal Services Program**  
(divorce-related cases only)  
1213 Good Hope Road SE  
(serves SE and SW)  
202-678-2000
- **Bread for the City  
(Southeast)**  
1640 Good Hope Road SE  
202-561-8587
- **WEAVE** (domestic violence-related cases only)  
1111 16th Street NW  
Suite 410  
202-452-9550
- **Columbus Community  
Legal Services  
The Catholic University  
of America**  
3602 John McCormack Rd. NE  
202-319-6788



## You may be your own lawyer.

You do not need a lawyer to start a child support case. You can get the necessary court *pleadings* (legal documents) at [www.dcbbar.org/pleadings](http://www.dcbbar.org/pleadings), or at the D.C. Superior Court Family Court Self-Help Center (500 Indiana Avenue NW, room JM-570), open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. (202-879-1471). The Self-Help Center staff can explain the process and help you fill out the pleadings. For more information, see “Help Yourself: Child Support in D.C.,” which explains how child support is decided and how orders can be changed.

- **First, File the Pleadings.** Fill out a Petition to Establish Paternity and/or for Support. Take your papers to the D.C. Family Court Central Intake Center (500 Indiana Avenue NW), open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. (202-879-4856). You will need to pay an \$80 filing fee (cash or money order). If you cannot afford the fee, read the information sheet “Fee Waivers in D.C.” which explains how to ask the court to let you file without paying court fees and costs. On the same day that you file your case, you will get a hearing date, which will be within 45 days. The Central Intake Center will give you a Notice of Hearing and Order Directing Appearance (NOHODA), which will show your hearing date.
- **Next, Serve the Pleadings.** You must serve the other parent with copies of the petition and NOHODA. There are four different ways you could do this:
  - ▲ **Personal Service:** Ask an adult who is not involved in the case to hand the petition and NOHODA personally to the other parent. You cannot do this yourself. You can ask a friend, a relative, or a professional process server to serve the papers.
  - ▲ **Substitute Service at Home:** Ask an adult who is not involved in the case to hand the petition and NOHODA personally to another adult who actually lives in the same home as the other parent. You cannot do this yourself. You can ask a friend, a relative, or a professional process server to serve the papers.
  - ▲ **Substitute Service at Work:** Ask an adult who is not involved in the case to hand the petition and NOHODA personally to another adult who works at the other parent’s place of employment. You cannot do this yourself. You can ask a friend, a relative, or a professional process server to serve the papers.
- ▲ **Certified Mail and First-Class Mail:** Mail the petition and NOHODA by certified mail, return receipt requested, to the other parent. You can do this yourself at the post office. The post office will mail the return receipt (sometimes called the “green card”) back to you after the letter is delivered. On the same day, mail a second copy of the petition and NOHODA by first-class mail to the other parent. If you serve by mail, make sure you have proof that the service is “good.” The court will consider service good in your case if (1) the other parent signs the return receipt; (2) another adult who actually lives in the same home as the other parent signs the return receipt; or (3) no one signs the return receipt, but the copy sent by first-class mail is not returned to you.
- **Then, File an Affidavit of Service.** An Affidavit of Service is a sworn statement about how the other parent was served. You must file your affidavit at the Family Court Central Intake Center. If the other parent was served by personal or substitute service, the adult who served the other parent must complete the affidavit. If you served the other parent by certified and first-class mail, you must complete the affidavit.
- **Attend Your Hearing.** If you have it, bring proof of *paternity*, such as hospital forms, birth certificates, or DNA test results. Also bring proof of your income, health insurance expenses for the child, child care expenses, any extra expenses for the child, and information about the other parent’s income.

## You may hire a private lawyer.

For a list of private lawyers who handle child support cases, call the Bar Association of the District of Columbia’s Lawyer Referral Line at 202-296-7845. The referral charge is \$39.95. This includes the first 30 minutes with the lawyer. You can also check the Yellow Pages or get referrals from family and friends.

**For more information**, you can go to [www.lawhelp.org/dc](http://www.lawhelp.org/dc) or listen to recorded messages about child support by calling the D.C. Bar Legal Information HelpLine at 202-626-3499.

*The D.C. Bar Pro Bono Program provides general information only. This is not legal advice. You can only obtain legal advice from a lawyer. If you need legal advice for a specific situation, contact an attorney. We make every effort to keep the legal education materials up-to-date, but laws change frequently. Therefore the D.C. Bar Pro Bono Program does not guarantee the accuracy of this information.*

