

## Child Support in D.C.: Starting a Case

There are four different ways you can begin a child support case.

### **1. Ask the D.C. Child Support Services Division to file a case.**

The Child Support Services Division (CSSD) is a D.C. agency whose attorneys work to establish and enforce paternity and child support orders. If you receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Medicaid, CSSD will provide services for free. If you are not on TANF or Medicaid, CSSD may require a \$5 fee (money order or check only, payable to the D.C. Treasurer). Additional charges for some services may be applied or deducted from any child support collected. Please note that CSSD represents the interests of the District of Columbia in paternity and child support matters. CSSD does not represent individual parents or custodians.

#### **How can I apply?**

Call 202-442-9900 to schedule an appointment or request an application. Or go to the website at <http://www.cssd.dc.gov> to download an application. Complete and sign the application. Enclose copies (not originals) of:

- Each child's birth certificate
- Any separation agreements, divorce decrees, custody orders, or acknowledgments of paternity;
- Any existing child support orders (certified);
- Proof of your income;
- Proof of D.C. residency;
- Proof of identification (government-issued photo I.D.)

#### **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

#### **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.

### **2. Apply for a free lawyer**

There are several free legal assistance organizations in D.C. that help people with low income with child support cases. Check [www.lawhelp.org/dc](http://www.lawhelp.org/dc) or the Family Court Self-Help Center (see end of this sheet) for updated information on programs handling child support matters.

### **3. Be your own lawyer**

You do not need a lawyer to start a child support case. You can get the legal papers (pleadings) you will need at [www.dcbbar.org/for-the-public/legal-resources/prose-pleadings.cfm](http://www.dcbbar.org/for-the-public/legal-resources/prose-pleadings.cfm), or at the D.C. Superior Court Family Court Central Intake Center (500 Indiana Avenue NW, room JM-540), open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. For more information, see the information sheet "Child Support in D.C.," which explains how child support is decided.

#### **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. You will need to pay an \$80 filing fee (major credit cards, 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 get the other parent served with copies of the petition and NOHODA. There are four different ways you can do this:

1. *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.
2. *Substitute Service at Home*: Ask an adult who is not involved in the case to go to the home of the other parent and hand the petition and NOHODA personally to another adult who actually lives there. You cannot do this yourself. You can ask a friend, a relative, or a professional process server to serve the papers.
3. *Substitute Service at Work*: Ask an adult who is not involved in the case to go the other parent's place of employment and hand the petition and NOHODA personally to another adult who works there. You cannot do this yourself. You can ask a friend, a relative, or a professional process server to serve the papers.
4. *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 ("green card") back to you after the letter is delivered. On the same day that you mail the petition and NOHODA by certified mail, mail a second copy of NOHODA by first-class mail to the other parent. The court will consider service "good" if (1) the other parent signs the return receipt; or (2) another adult who actually lives in the same home or works at the same place of employment as the other parent signs the return receipt. If no one signs the return

receipt, but the copy sent by first-class mail is not returned to you, service will be considered "good" in a case involving child support, but not in a case involving paternity.

## **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 them must complete the affidavit. If you served the other parent by certified and first-class mail, you must complete the affidavit.

## **Attend your hearing.**

Bring proof of your income, health insurance expenses for the child, child care expenses, any extra expenses for the child, and any information about the other parent's income that you have.

## **4. Hire a private lawyer**

For a list of private lawyers who handle child support cases, complete the online survey for the Bar Association of the District of Columbia's Lawyer Referral Service at <https://badc.barlrs.com>. The referral charge is \$39.95. You can also get referrals from family and friends or search online.

## **For More Information**

You can visit the Family Court Self-Help Center, a free walk-in clinic located in the DC Superior Court, 500 Indiana Avenue, NW, in Room JM-570. The Center is open Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. The Center can explain the process to you, help you complete the proper legal papers, and direct you to other free legal resources. Visit [www.lawhelp.org/dc](http://www.lawhelp.org/dc) for more information, including how to contact free legal assistance organizations, or call the D.C. Bar Legal Information Helpline at 202-626-3499 to listen to recorded messages about this issue.

*This document 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 a lawyer. We make every effort to keep the legal education materials up-to-date, but laws change frequently. Therefore the D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center does not guarantee the accuracy of this information.*