

## A PROFILE OF PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY'S CHILD SUPPORT CASELOAD: 2010 TO 2012

LAUREN A. HALL · LETITIA PASSARELLA

A recent report within the *People & Payments* series provided a three-year analysis of the public child support caseload. The report documented improvement in the percent of current support and arrears cases with payments.<sup>i</sup> For example, more than two-thirds of all arrears cases had at least one payment in the year before July 2012, a significant increase over July 2010 (from 61% to 68%). Additionally, in federal fiscal year 2012, four out of every five cases had an order for support in place, and about two-thirds of current support that was owed was collected, as documented by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement.<sup>ii</sup>

Statewide findings can mask differences among Maryland's 24 jurisdictions. Hence, providing relevant caseload information at the local level is a key component of creating informed policies that support Maryland's diverse child support caseload. In this special installment of the *People & Payment* series, we examine the child support caseload for the five largest jurisdictions in Maryland—Baltimore City and the counties of Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Montgomery, and Prince George's. In this brief, we provide information on the public child support caseload in Prince George's County, including data on support orders and payments.

### Methods

Each July, a random sample of child support cases in the public system is selected for the annual *People & Payment* series. This brief utilizes random samples<sup>iii</sup> that were selected from July 2010, July 2011, and July 2012. The data provided in this brief were retrieved from the Child Support Enforcement System (CSES), a

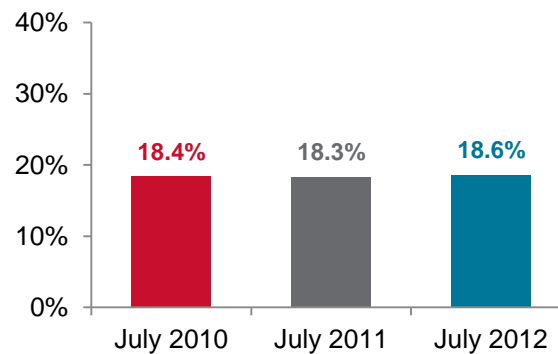
database maintained by the Department of Human Resources, State of Maryland.

### Prince George's County Characteristics<sup>iv</sup>

Prince George's County has about 890,000 residents, making up 15.0% of Maryland's population. Two-thirds of the residents are African American, a higher percentage than the statewide figure (65% vs. 30%). The county also has a larger percentage of Hispanic (16% vs. 9%) and foreign born (20% vs. 14%) residents. Similar to the statewide percentage, nearly 9 out of every 10 adults over the age of 25 in Prince George's County possess a high school diploma; fewer adults in Prince George's County have attained a bachelor's degree than the state percentage (30% vs. 36%). Median household income in Prince George's County is slightly higher than the state median (\$73,568 vs. \$72,999), and the poverty rate is slightly lower than the statewide poverty rate as well (8.7% vs. 9.4%).

Prince George's County has the second largest child support caseload in the state with just under 40,000 cases. The caseload in the county makes up 18% of all Maryland public child support cases, a proportion virtually unchanged in recent years (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Percent of Statewide Caseload\*\***  
2010 to 2012



**Note:** \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

## Cases with a Support Order

An order for child support is necessary before the Maryland Child Support Enforcement Administration (CSEA) can collect child support on behalf of families. Two types of orders exist: current support and arrears orders. A current support order is based on the income of both parents and represents the noncustodial parent's portion of the amount deemed necessary to care for a child. Current support orders are generally a monthly obligation, and when payments are collected, they are distributed to the custodial family's case. If a noncustodial parent does not pay current support, then the past due balance accumulates, and an order for arrears may be established.

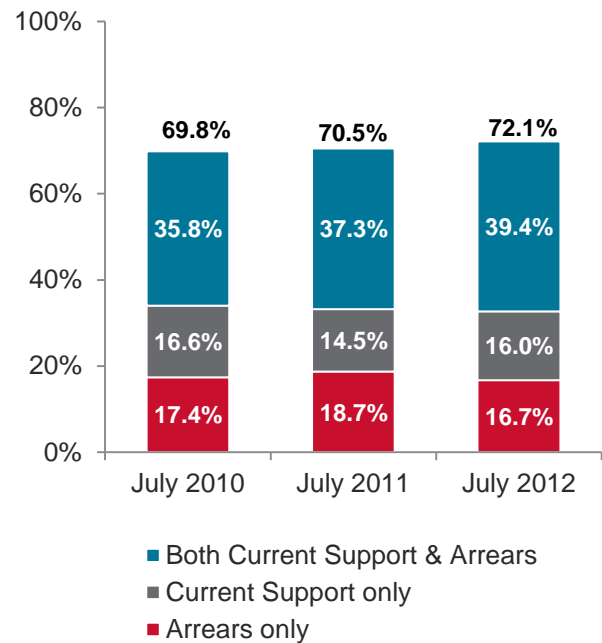
Among Maryland cases, about three in four (77.6%) had an order for support in July 2012. This figure increased by four percentage points between 2010 and 2012. According to Figure 2, about 7 out of 10 cases in Prince George's County had an established order for support. Although this is lower than the state average, there were small increases over time.

In July 2012, two-fifths (39.4%) of cases had orders for both current support and arrears, lower than the statewide average of 43.9%. Nonetheless, there were small increases each year, from 35.8% in July 2010 and 37.3% in July 2011.

Fewer than one in five cases had an arrears-only or current support-only order. The percentage of cases with an order for arrears only grew slightly between July 2010 and July 2011 (from 17.4% to 18.7%), but then decreased to 16.7% of cases in July 2012. The opposite was observed for cases with an order for only current support. There was a small decrease between July 2010 and July 2011 (from 16.6% to 14.5%) and an increase in July 2012 to 16.0% in July 2012.

Overall, Figure 2 shows there was incremental growth in the percentage of cases with an established order for support. For cases without a support order, it is likely paternity had not yet been established or that the case had an order for medical assistance only.

**Figure 2. Cases with a Support Order**  
2010 to 2012



## Percent of Current Support Paid

Current support payments are essential to the well-being of children. If received, child support can represent as much as 40 percent of a low-income custodial family's income.<sup>v</sup> Fortunately, the majority of Maryland cases with an order for current support receive payments. In fact, 8 in every 10 current support cases statewide receives a payment during a one year period. An average case in Prince George's County is owed about \$4,300 in current support, which is slightly lower than the state average (\$4,900).

Figure 3 shows the percentage of current support paid in the prior year for each study month. To clarify, for the July 2012 sample, this figure shows the percent of current support paid between July 2011 and June 2012. There are some very clear patterns of payment compliance in Prince George's County.

First, the percentage of cases receiving none of the current support owed to them decreased over time. For the July 2010 sample, nearly one out of every five (17%) cases with current support owed to them did not receive any current child support payments in the previous

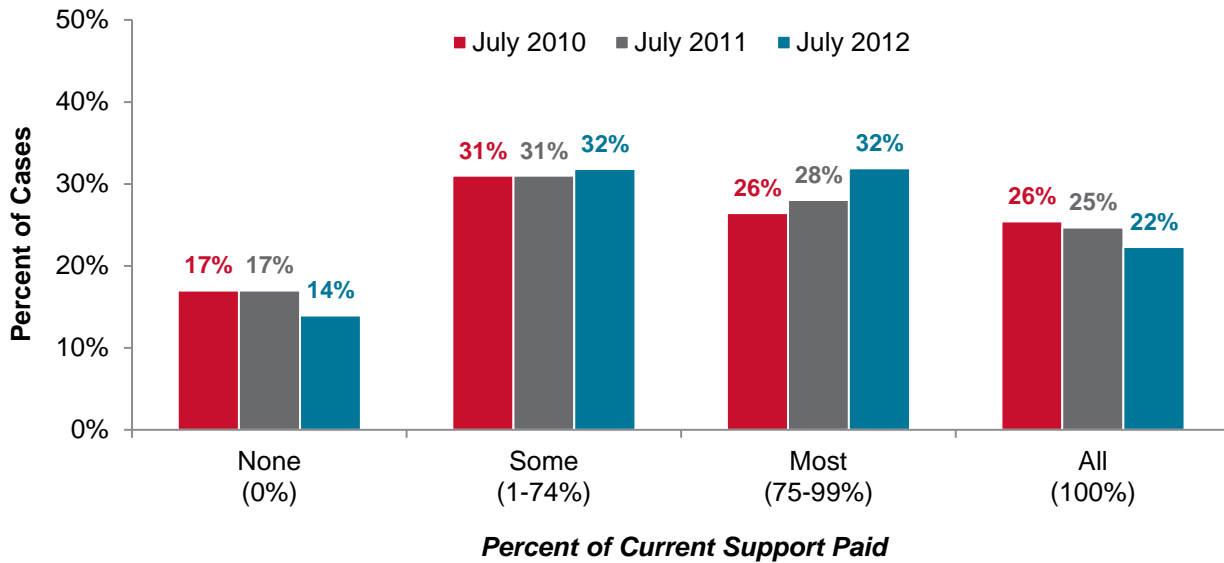
year. For our July 2012 sample, however, only one of every seven (14%) cases did not receive current support in the previous year.

While the percentage of cases receiving no current support payments declined, the percentage that received *most*—75% to 99%—of the current support owed in a one year period increased. Just about one-quarter (26%) of cases in July 2010 received *most* of the current support they were owed, but this increased by two percentage points in July 2011 (28%) and by another four percentage

points in July 2012. One-third (32%) of cases in the July 2012 sample received between 75% and 99% of the current support that was owed between July 2011 and June 2012.

The percentage that received *some* (1% to 75%) of the current support due remained about 30% of the cases with a current support obligation. On the other hand, the percent receiving *all* (100%) of the current support obligation declined from 26% of cases in July 2010 to 22% in July 2012.

**Figure 3. Percent of Current Support Paid in Previous Year**  
2010 to 2012



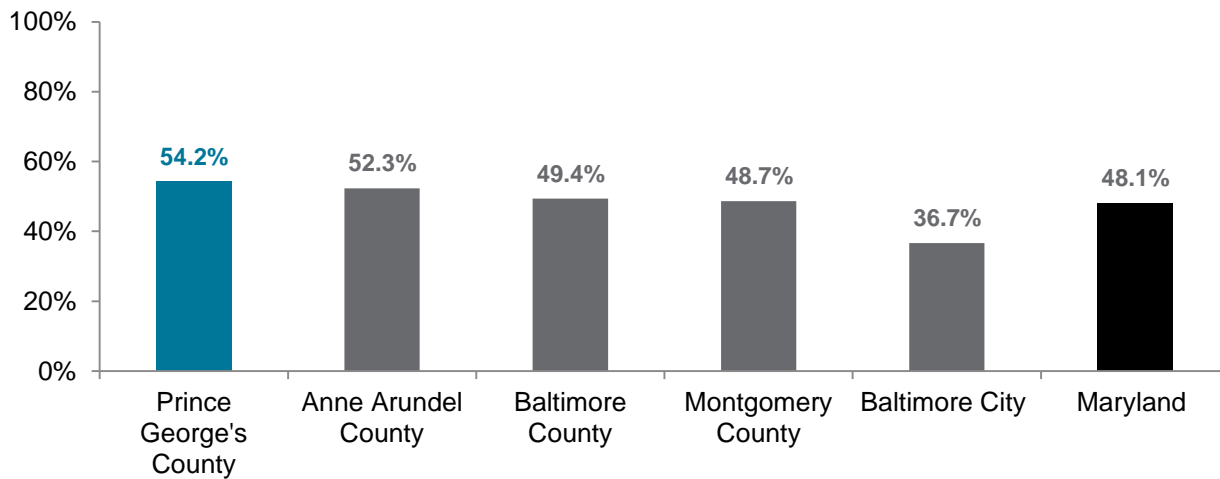
**Note:** Only cases with current support due in the previous year were included in this analysis. Payments made by noncustodial parents are distributed among their various child support accounts; represented in Figure 3 is the payment amount that was distributed to a current support account.

Many custodial families may rely on current support payments in order to provide for their children's needs. Ideally, that would mean that custodial families receive the majority, if not all, of the current support that is owed during the year. Therefore, Figure 4 presents the percentage of the July 2012 cases that received 75% or more of their current support obligations between July 2011 and June 2012.

Prince George's County had the highest percentage of cases that received 75% or more of current support due compared to the state as a whole and to the large jurisdictions.

Specifically, more than half (54.2%) of all cases that were owed current support received 75% or more of what was owed in Prince George's County, while just under half (48.1%) of cases statewide received most or all of what was owed. Anne Arundel County was the only other large jurisdiction where more than half (52.3%) of the current support cases received 75% or more of the obligation. With the exception of Baltimore City, approximately half of cases in the other two large jurisdictions received 75% or more of current support owed in the year.

**Figure 4. Cases that Received 75% or more of Current Support Owed: Largest Jurisdictions\*\*\***  
*July 2012 Sample: Payments between July 2011 and June 2012*



**Note:** Only cases with current support due in the year prior to July 2012 were included in this analysis. \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$

### Arrears Cases with a Payment

Past-due current support is fairly common in the child support caseload. Two-thirds of all cases have an arrears balance from unpaid support. It can be difficult for a noncustodial parent to make payments toward current support and arrears concurrently, especially if those payments exceed the noncustodial parent's ability to pay. Although not shown, the average arrears balance for Prince George's was more than \$1,000 higher than the average arrears balance for the state in July 2012 (\$11,700 vs. \$10,300).

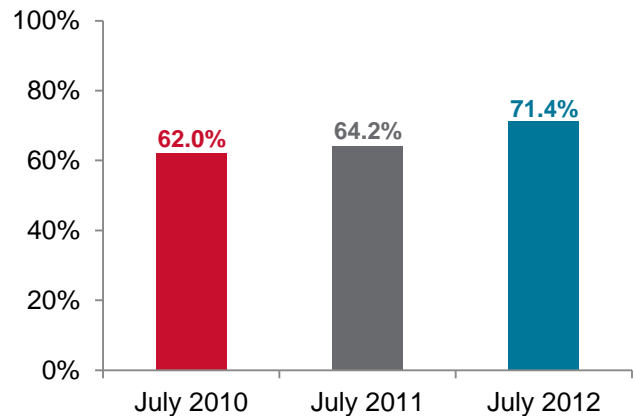
At the federal level, states' performance on arrears collections is measured by the percent of arrears cases with any payment, rather than the percentage of arrears that was paid. Therefore, Figure 5 shows the percent of arrears cases in Prince George's County that had at least one payment in the year prior to the study month.

There has been a steady increase in the percentage of arrears cases with a payment. Three-fifths (62.0%) of cases with an arrears balance in the July 2010 sample had at least one payment in the prior year. For the July 2012 sample, 7 in every 10 (71.4%) arrears cases in the sample had at least one payment in the previous year. Statewide, there was a similar increase in the percent of arrears cases

with a payment, although the increase was larger in Prince George's County.

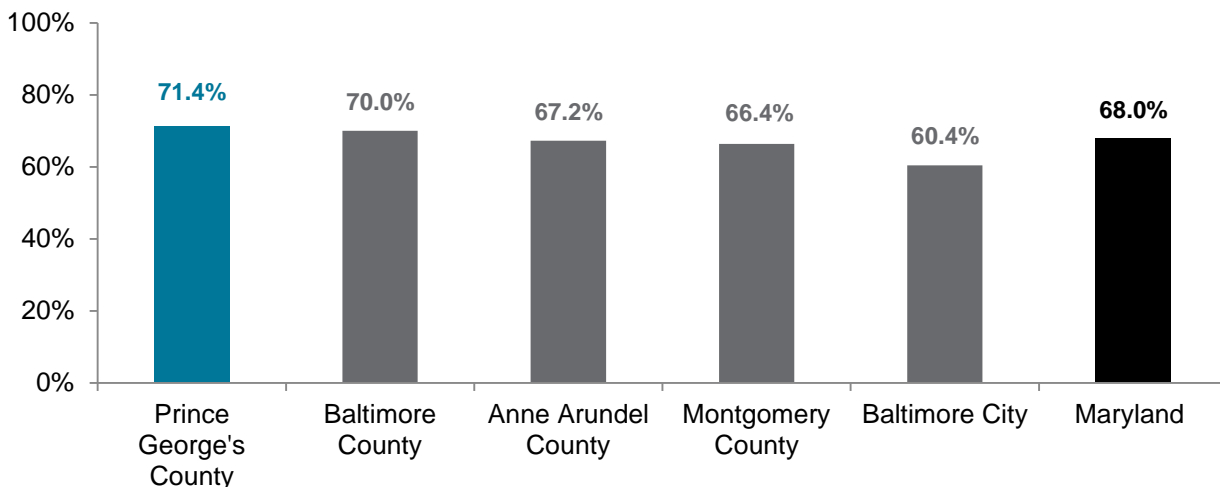
Compared to other large jurisdictions in the state, Prince George's County had the highest percentage of arrears cases with a payment in July 2012 (Figure 6). With the exception of Baltimore City, which was not far behind, approximately two-thirds of arrears cases in the largest jurisdictions had at least one payment in the year prior to July 2012.

**Figure 5. Arrears Cases with a Payment\*\*\***  
2010 to 2012



**Note:** Only cases with an arrears balance were included in this analysis. \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

**Figure 6. Arrears Cases with a Payment: Largest Jurisdictions\*\*\***  
July 2012 Sample: Payments between July 2011 and June 2012



**Note:** Only cases with an arrears balance were included in this analysis. \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

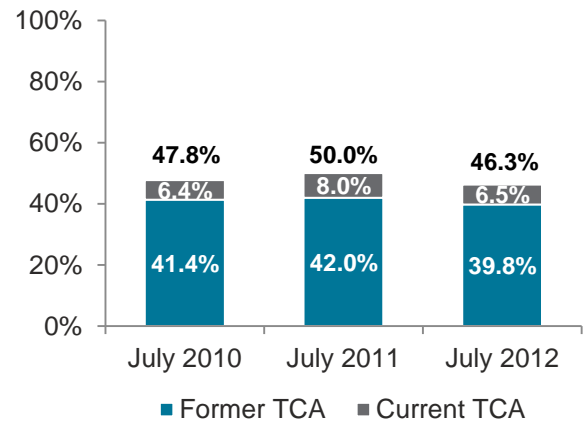
## Welfare Participation

Some custodial families may require additional assistance to maintain self-sufficiency, especially if they are not receiving any child support payments. To receive benefits through Maryland's welfare program, Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA), most applicants must pursue child support through the public child support system, if they have not already done so. Establishing a child support order for these poor families is beneficial for both the state and the families. For the state, it allows them to recoup some of the costs associated with benefits paid through the TCA program. In Maryland, families are not able to receive TCA and child support concurrently; rather, the state retains child support collected while the family is receiving public welfare benefits. For the families, it ensures that an order is in place when they leave TCA, and it may increase the likelihood that they receive child support at that point. Receipt of child support may also reduce a family's need to return to TCA.

Although there is a requirement to participate in the child support program, not all cases are in the public child support system due to TCA receipt. However, many custodial families in the child support caseload are former or current TCA recipients. Figure 7 presents the percent of Prince George's County's custodial families that received TCA. As shown, the percentage that received TCA increased between July 2010 and July 2011, but then decreased between July 2011 and July 2012. In July 2010, 41.4% of child support cases previously received TCA, and 6.4% received TCA in the study month. In July 2011, these percentages had increased, and 42.0% of all cases previously received TCA, and 8.0% received TCA in the study month. By July 2012, the percentage of cases decreased to 39.8% and 6.5%, for former and current recipients, respectively.

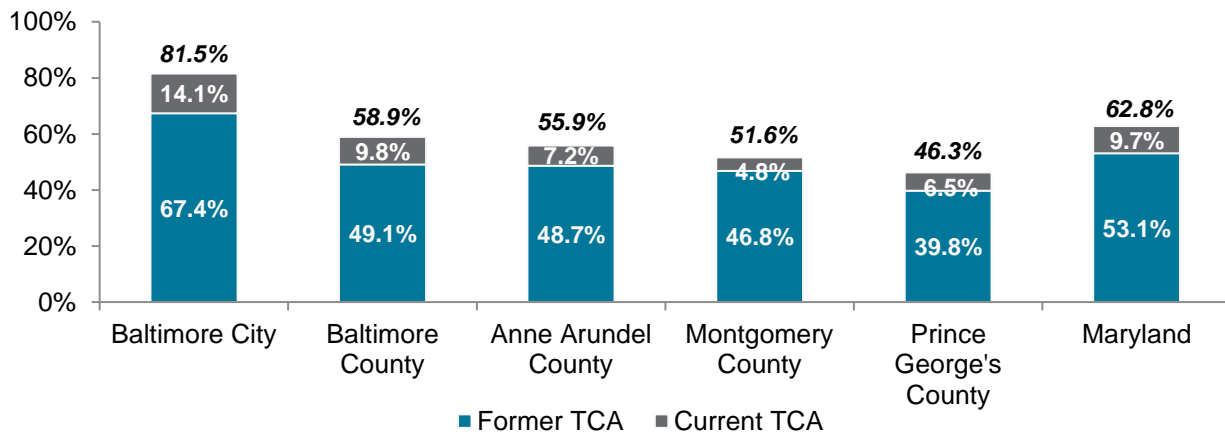
For comparison, Figure 8 shows the percentage of the July 2012 custodial families that were currently or had formerly received TCA in each of the large jurisdictions as well as for the state. At just under half (46.3%) of the caseload, Prince George's County, among the other large jurisdictions, had the lowest percent of cases that formerly or currently received TCA. In the other jurisdictions, more than half of custodial families received TCA at some point. Just over three in five (62.8%) of all sampled Maryland child support cases were receiving TCA in July 2012 or previously received benefits.

**Figure 7. TCA Receipt**  
2010 to 2012





**Figure 8. TCA Receipt: Large Jurisdictions\*\*\***  
July 2012 Sample



Note: \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

### Summary

Prince George's County has a thriving child support program. It has the second largest child support caseload in the state of Maryland, representing approximately 18% of all public child support cases. Between July 2010 and July 2012, the county increased the percentage of cases with an established support order, one of the first steps to ensuring that custodial families receive child support. To that end, fewer cases received no payments over this time period, resulting in a higher percentage of cases with child support payments.

Among the five large jurisdictions in July 2012, Prince George's County had the highest percentage (54.2%) of cases that received 75% or more of ordered current support as well as the highest percentage (71.4%) of arrears cases with at least one payment. Additionally, custodial families were less likely to receive TCA compared to other large jurisdictions and the state. Prince George's County has a child support program whose efforts have resulted in some successful outcomes.

### Sources:

- <sup>i</sup> Passarella, L. & Born, C.E. (2014). *People & Payments: A profile of Maryland's child support caseload in July 2012*. University of Maryland, Family Welfare Research & Training Group.
- <sup>ii</sup> Office of Child Support Enforcement, Administration for Children & Families. (2013). *FY2012 Preliminary report*. Retrieved from: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css/resource/fy2012-preliminary-report>
- <sup>iii</sup> In July 2010 (n=12,545) and July 2012 (n=10,952), a five percent random sample was drawn. In July 2011 (n=7,270), a three percent random sample was drawn.
- <sup>iv</sup> Data retrieved from the United States Census Bureau: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/24/24033.html>
- <sup>v</sup> Sorensen, E. (2010). Child support plays an increasingly important role for poor custodial families. Retrieved from the Urban Institute website: <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412272-child-support-plays-important-role.pdf>

### **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank Jamie Haskel and Mike Funk for their assistance in the collection and processing of data for this research brief as well as Lisa Nicoli for her assistance with editing. This brief was prepared by the Family Welfare Research and Training Group with support from its long-time research partner, the Maryland Department of Human Resources.

For additional information about this research brief, please contact Letitia Logan Passarella from the School of Social Work at 410-706-2679 or [llogan@ssw.umaryland.edu](mailto:llogan@ssw.umaryland.edu).

Please visit our website, [www.familywelfare.umaryland.edu](http://www.familywelfare.umaryland.edu), for additional copies of this brief and other reports.

