

MARYLAND'S CHILD SUPPORT PASS-THROUGH POLICY: EXPLORING IMPACTS ON TCA FAMILIES

Haley Smith & Lauren A. Hall

The federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program provides families with children cash assistance to aid them through tough financial times (Schott et al., 2021). As a condition of receiving TANF, federal law originally mandated that families sign over their rights to child support to the state (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, 1996). States shared support collected on behalf of families with the federal government to help defray TANF's costs (Meyer et al., 2007). In 2005, however, Congress passed the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA), which allowed states to pass through up to \$100 of child support for one child and \$200 for two or more children to TANF families without owing the federal government its share of child support payments. Moreover, DRA (2005) gave states the ability to disregard pass-through income in calculations of TANF benefits and eligibility.

As of May 2020, 26 states and the District of Columbia (D.C.) had adopted some form of child support pass-through (National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL], 2020). States, however, vary widely in the amount of child support passed through to TANF families (Aspen Institute, 2020). For example, Colorado passes through *all* child support to TANF families while some states, such as Delaware, pass through smaller amounts (e.g., \$50). D.C., on the other hand, passes through \$150 regardless of family size and Wisconsin passes through a percentage of child support payments rather than a fixed amount (NCSL, 2020).

Given the potential benefits of child support pass-through, both legislators and advocates in Maryland supported the adoption of a pass-through policy that would put more money in the hands of low-income families. During the 2017 General Assembly session, Maryland enacted partial pass-through, allowing Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA, the state's version of TANF) families to receive up to \$100 in pass-through for one child and up to \$200 for two or more children (S.B.1009, 2017). In order to receive a pass-through payment, a family must have a child support order. At the time of passage, one in three (35%) TCA families

KEY FINDINGS

- ❖ The state passed through a total of **\$2.3 million** of child support to families in the first eight months of the policy.
- ❖ About 15% of TCA cases—and 40% of TCA cases with a support order—received a pass-through payment each month.
- ❖ Families receiving pass-through, on average, gained \$132 each month in child support income.
- ❖ Three in five (57%) families who received pass-through received the payments for 3 or more consecutive months.
- ❖ The implementation of pass-through did not increase the percentage of TCA families with an open child support case, order for current support, or the percentage that received a child support payment.
- ❖ Pass-through decreased SNAP benefit amounts for the majority of families who received pass-through for 3 or more consecutive months.

had a child support order (Maryland Department of Human Services [DHS], 2016).¹ Maryland's pass-through policy went into effect July 1, 2019 and families began to receive pass-through support in August 2019 (DHS, 2020b). As the state's pass-through policy matures, it is important to examine its impacts on some of Maryland's most financially vulnerable families. The purpose of this brief is to describe the immediate impact the policy had on TCA families and to evaluate its effect on child support outcomes, families' incomes, and families' Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. To that end, this report examines the population of 30,650 unique TCA families who received TCA between July 2018 and February 2020. Though the main focus of this brief is families who received pass-through payments from August 2019 forward, some analyses include pre-policy data to more clearly identify changes that *did* and *did not* occur as a result of the new policy.

The results of this brief deliver a broad overview of the initial impact of Maryland's pass-through policy and provides stakeholders with information about how policies such as pass-through can help support vulnerable families. Mainly, this report seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What percentage of TCA families received pass-through child support, did they receive it consistently, and how much did they receive?
2. How did Maryland's pass-through policy effect the percentage of TCA families with an open case, a current support order, or a child support payment?
3. How did the pass-through policy effect TCA families' overall household income and SNAP benefit amounts?

Potential Benefits of Pass-Through

Pass-through policies, particularly policies that pass through larger portions of child support, are associated with positive benefits for in-need families. Research on pass-through benefits largely focuses on states with more robust policies, such as Colorado and Wisconsin. General findings on pass-through benefits include:

Parents who owe support:

- Are more likely to make child support payments (Cancian et al., 2008; Zolot, et al., 2020, Lippold et al., 2010)
- Pay more in formal support (Cancian et al., 2008) and are less likely to make informal, in-kind payments (Gunter, 2013)

TANF Families:

- Have paternity established more quickly (Cancian et al., 2006)
- Receive more formal support (Cancian et al., 2008)
- Have a decreased risk of child maltreatment (Cancian et al., 2013)

¹ Maryland has also established a disregard of pass-through funds, meaning income from pass-through is not included in the state's calculation of a family's TCA eligibility as well as eligibility for Medical Assistance or the Child Care Scholarship program (DHS, 2020b). Pass-through funds are, however, considered unearned income for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and can affect the SNAP benefit amount (DHS, 2020a).

Methods

Data Sources

Data come from the Client Automated Resource and Eligibility System (CARES) and the Maryland Automated Benefits System (MABS), which are the administrative data systems for TCA and Unemployment Insurance (UI), respectively. CARES provides individual- and case-level data on demographics and program participation for TCA families. MABS includes data from all employers covered by the state's UI law and the Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees (UCFE) program. Together, these account for approximately 91% of all Maryland civilian employment.

There are a variety of limitations to MABS data. MABS only reports data on a quarterly basis, which means that it is not possible to calculate weekly or monthly employment and earnings. Another limitation is that MABS does not contain data on certain types of employment, such as self-employment, independent contractors, and informal employment; consequently, earnings from under-the-table jobs are not included. Finally, MABS has no information on employment outside of Maryland. Because out-of-state employment is common in Maryland, we are likely understating employment and may be missing some earnings.²

Study Population

This report examines families who participated in the TCA program before and after the implementation of the state's pass-through policy. The study population for this report includes every household with a child recipient that received TCA for at least one month from

July 2018—a year before the pass-through policy went into effect—through February 2020. The population ends with February 2020 to ensure impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic did not bias results. There were 30,650 unique families with a child recipient that received at least one month of TCA during the study period and 21,096 families who received TCA during the pass-through period (August 2019 to March 2020).

Case Numbers

30,650 cases received TCA between **July 2018** and **February 2020**

21,096 cases received TCA from **July 2019** to **February 2020** for pass-through analysis

Data Analysis

This report uses descriptive statistics, such as percentages and averages, to describe families within the study period. In addition to descriptive statistics, this report also uses an interrupted time series analysis to analyze the effect of Maryland's pass-through policy on the percentage of TCA cases that had an open support case, the percentage of cases with a payment, SNAP benefits, and the percentage of TCA cases that had a distribution to the custodial parent. This type of analysis measures the impact of a specific intervention, such as the introduction of a new policy, on outcomes while controlling for trends prior to the intervention (Linden, 2015).

² One in six (16.8%) Maryland residents work out of state, which is over four times greater than the national average (3.5%) (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

Families who Received Pass-Through Support

Pass-Through Receipt

In order to receive pass-through child support payments, families must: (a) have an active TCA case; (b) have an open child support case in their TCA month; (c) have a current order for child support; and (d) have a payment made by the obligor directly to the Child Support Administration (CSA) (DHS, 2019; DHS, 2020b). Child support payments are only passed through on current support payments (DHS, n.d.-a.). This means any payments made towards arrears is not passed through.

In practice, pass-through payments are sent to the family in the month following TCA receipt (DHS, 2020b). In the first eight months of pass-through, many of Maryland's neediest families received a child support payment (August 2019 to March 2020). As Figure 1 demonstrates, one in five (20%) TCA families received a pass-through payment during the first eight months of the policy and nearly three in five (57%) families with a current support order received at least one pass-through payment.

Maryland is a diverse state that includes 24 jurisdictions across rural, urban, and suburban areas. Previous research has shown that child support payments, including the amount owed, the percentage of families who receive a payment, and past-due support varies by jurisdiction (Passarella, 2020). Expectedly,

jurisdictions' pass-through rates varied. Dorchester County, on Maryland's Eastern shore, had the overall highest pass-through rate among TCA families with a support order, with 74% of TCA families receiving a pass-through payment. Carroll County had the second-highest rate (73%) of pass-through payments. However, these two rural counties have relatively small numbers of TCA cases, especially when compared to more populous jurisdictions. In Maryland's five most populous jurisdictions, roughly 50% to 60% of all families with a support order received pass-through during the first eight months of the policy.³

Characteristics of Recipients and Cases

Adult recipients who did and did not receive pass-through were similar.

Recipients were

- Most likely to be female (93%), Black (70%) and have a high school education (75%)
- 31 years old, on average

Pass-through cases differed from non-pass-through cases in a few ways.

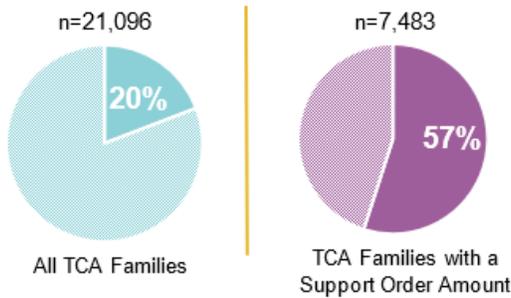
Pass-through cases were:

- Slightly more likely to have two or more child recipients (63% vs. 48%)
- More likely to be experiencing their first TCA spell (81% vs. 65%)

³ Maryland's five most populous jurisdictions and their respective pass-through rates between August 2019 and March 2020 among TCA families with a support order are: Anne Arundel County (49%), Baltimore City (49%), Baltimore County (57%), Montgomery County (60%), and

Prince George's County (52%). These five jurisdictions comprise 70% of the state's TCA caseload (Passarella & Smith, 2021).

Figure 1. Percentage of Families who Received a Pass-Through Payment August 2019-March 2020



Monthly Payments

Since pass-through eligibility is on a month-to-month basis (because a parent who owes support may not make a payment in each month), it is also important to examine monthly

payments. Figure 2 shows the percentage of families each month that received a pass-through payment. In the first several months of pass-through, between 14% and 15%—or one in seven TCA families—received a pass-through payment in the month following their TCA receipt. As mentioned previously, however, not all TCA families are eligible to receive pass-through. Families must not only be receiving TCA but also have a current child support order. Figure 3 examines the percentage of families with a child support order who received TCA each month. Of families eligible to receive pass-through (i.e., had a support order), roughly two in five (40%) received a pass-through payment each month during the study period. The percentage of pass-through eligible families who received a pass-through payment each month was also consistent throughout the study period.

Figures 2 and 3. Monthly Percentage of TCA Families who Received Pass-Through

Figure 2: All TCA Cases

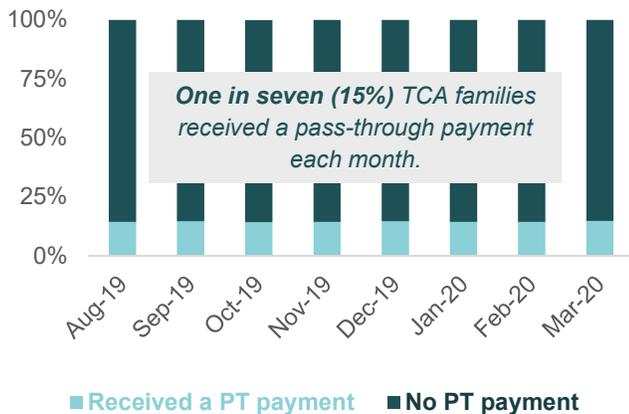
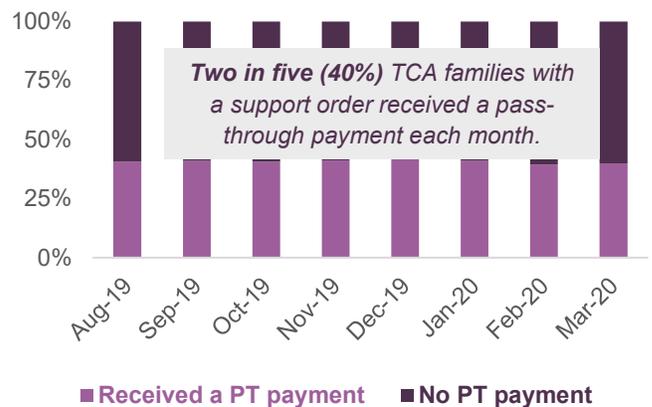


Figure 3: TCA Cases with a Support Order



Note: The first analysis (Figure 2) examines the percentage of TCA families each month that received a pass-through payment among all cases that received TCA in the previous month. For example, 14% of families who received TCA in July 2019 received a pass-through payment in August 2019. The second analysis (Figure 3) examines the percentage of TCA families with a current child support order that received a pass-through payment among all cases that received TCA in the previous month. For example, 40% of families who received TCA in July 2019 and had a current child support order received a pass-through payment in August 2019.

Number of Months of Receipt

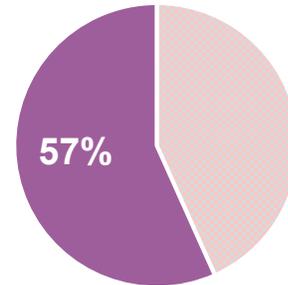
It is well established in the literature that child support is a crucial income source for families and has a positive impact on child poverty.⁴ Consistent child support payments offer the benefit of regular, additional income that helps families with ongoing expenses such as housing, food, and clothing. Moreover, regular child support payments decrease cash assistance utilization (Cancian et al., 2001; Hall & Passarella, 2015; Huang et al., 2002) and also contribute to housing stability (Curtis & Warren, 2015a; Curtis & Warren, 2015b).

Figure 4 shows the consistency of pass-through child support payments for TCA families in the first eight months the policy was in effect. Among families receiving pass-through payments, nearly three in five (57%) families received pass-through for three or more consecutive months. On average, families received about four months of pass-through payments, and comparatively, received an average of six months of TCA during this same period. Previous research shows that less than half of mothers with support orders receive regular child support payments (Ha et al., 2011), and custodians receiving TCA are less likely to receive the full amount of support owed to their children (Demyan & Passarella, 2019). In light of these findings, it is encouraging to see that a large share of TCA families who received pass-through support received it consistently.

Pass-Through Amounts

When Maryland adopted its pass-through policy, it adopted a partial pass-through, which allows up to \$200 of current support to be passed

Figure 4. Percentage that Received 3+ Consecutive Months of Pass-Through



Families received pass-through for an average of four months

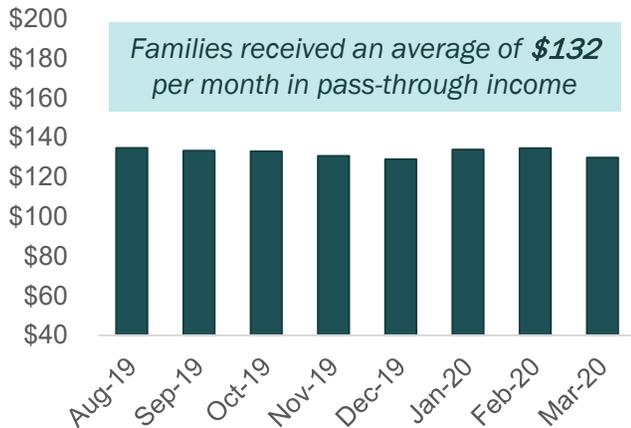
Note: This figure only includes cases that received at least one month of pass-through ($n=4,270$).

through each month depending on the number of children in the TCA household (DHS, 2019). Specifically, TCA families with one child recipient can receive up to \$100 in pass-through funds, and families with two or more children can receive up to \$200. In each month after implementation, about half of pass-through recipients received up to \$100 in pass-through payments and the other half received between \$100 and \$200 per month in pass-through. Between August 2019 and March 2020, pass-through provided families an average of \$132 each month in child support income (Figure 5), with an average total of \$539 over the course of the first eight months of the policy. The total amount of support gained by each family is not only contingent on the number of child recipients on the TCA case but also depends on the child support order amount and the amount paid on the order. For example, if a family's child support order amount was for \$70 in July 2019 and that amount was fully paid, then the family would receive \$70 in pass-through in August 2019.

Families received an average total of \$539 in pass-through in the first eight months the pass-through policy was in effect.

⁴ See Sorensen (2016) for a comprehensive overview.

Figure 5. Average Pass-Through Amounts



Note: Pass-through payments are for the month following TCA receipt. For example, cases with TCA benefits in July 2019 received an average of \$135 in pass-through in August 2019.

While it is important to understand how much each family received on average as a result of pass-through, it is also important to understand the aggregate total amount of child support TCA families received. In each month, between \$278,000 and \$295,000 was passed through to TCA families. In total, these families received over **\$2.3 million** in child support during the first eight months of the policy. This money likely helped families pay for some of their largest expenses, including housing, food, and childcare (Ha et al., 2011; Lino et al., 2017).

Between August 2019 and March 2020, TCA families received

\$2,302,402

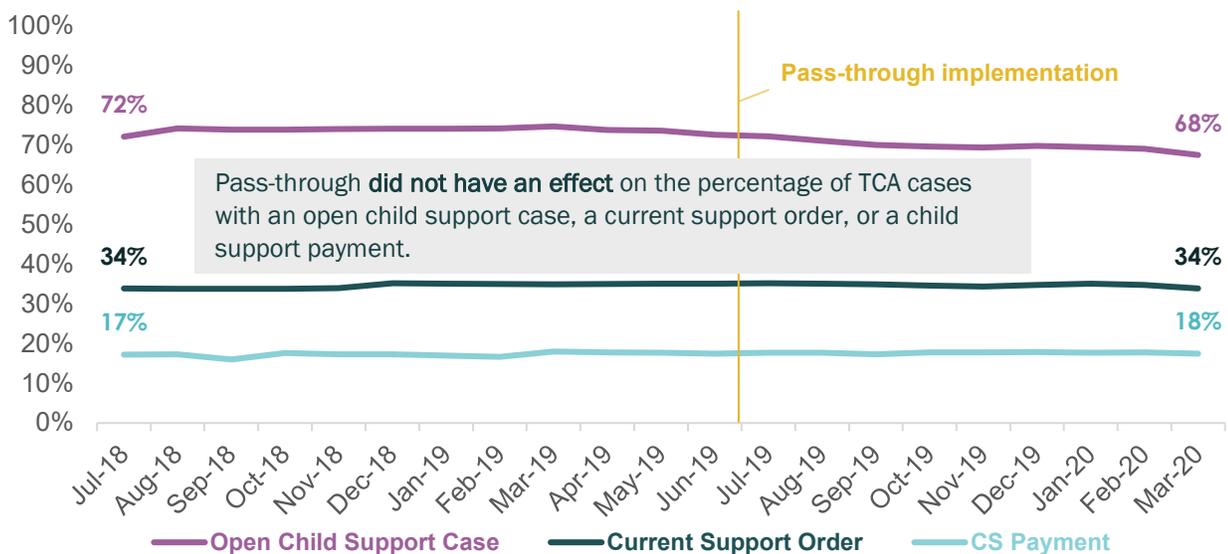
in pass-through support.

Impact on Child Support Outcomes

As well as providing additional income to families, previous research has shown that pass-through policies are linked to quicker paternity establishment (Cancian et al., 2008) and provide incentives for obligors to agree to a formal child support order. Rather than providing informal, in-kind support, parents who owe support are more likely to participate in the formal child support program and make payments where pass-through policies are in effect, since money goes directly to their child(ren) instead of the state (Gunter, 2013; Vogel, 2020). In D.C., for instance, parents whose support orders were established after implementation of the pass-through policy were 7.4 percentage points more likely to pay child support (Lippold et al., 2010).

As shown in Figure 6, Maryland did not experience a change in the percentage of TCA families with an open child support case, a current child support order, or the percentage of families who had a child support payment made on their behalf in the first several months of the pass-through policy. In July 2018, one year prior to implementation, roughly seven in 10 (72%) TCA families had an open child support case, one in three (34%) had a current child support order, and one in eight (17%) TCA families had a payment on their case. Child support trends for TCA families remained relatively flat over the study period, including after implementation. These findings were confirmed by an interrupted time series analysis which found that Maryland's pass-through policy had no effect on the aforementioned outcomes.

Figure 6. Percentage of TCA Cases with an Open Child Support Case, Current Support Order or a Child Support Payment



Note: This figure looks at the percentage of active TCA cases that had an open child support case, a current child support payment order or a child support payment made on their behalf in the same month as a family's TCA receipt.

Similarly, the percentage of TCA cases with a current support order that received a payment on their case did not change after the implementation of pass-through; these findings were also confirmed by an interrupted time series analysis. For instance, Figure 7 shows that 51% of cases in July 2018 had a payment made on the case. This is the same percentage as February 2020, eight months after the policy went into effect.

Maryland's pass-through policy, however, did impact *to whom* child support payments went. As Figure 7 shows, pass-through implementation caused an immediate and significant⁵ increase (39 percentage points) in the percentage of *families who* received a child support payment, coupled with a large decrease in the percentage of payments retained by the

state. For instance, in June 2019 (the month before pass-through began), only one in 10 (10%) families received any of the child support paid on their case.⁶ Most of the support was retained for reimbursement to the state and federal governments. In July 2019, the month in which pass-through was implemented, the percentage of TCA families who received current support increased to five in 10 (49%) families. In addition to an increase in the percentage custodians who received support, the percentage of families who had some of their support retained by the state decreased from 42% in June 2019 to 27% in July 2019 after the implementation of pass-through. Because Maryland implemented a *partial* pass-through policy (rather than a *full* pass-through policy), the decrease in support that went to the state was not as substantial as the increase to

⁵ In an interrupted time series analysis, the immediate effect was statistically significant ($p=.000$) and the lagged effect approached statistical significance ($p=.06$).

⁶ Prior to pass-through, TCA families would also receive a child support payment if the family was not receiving TCA

in the month for which the payment was issued. For example, if a family had a child support order that was paid in June 2018 and started to receive TCA in July 2018, the family would receive both payments in July and would be counted as receiving TCA and child support in the same month.

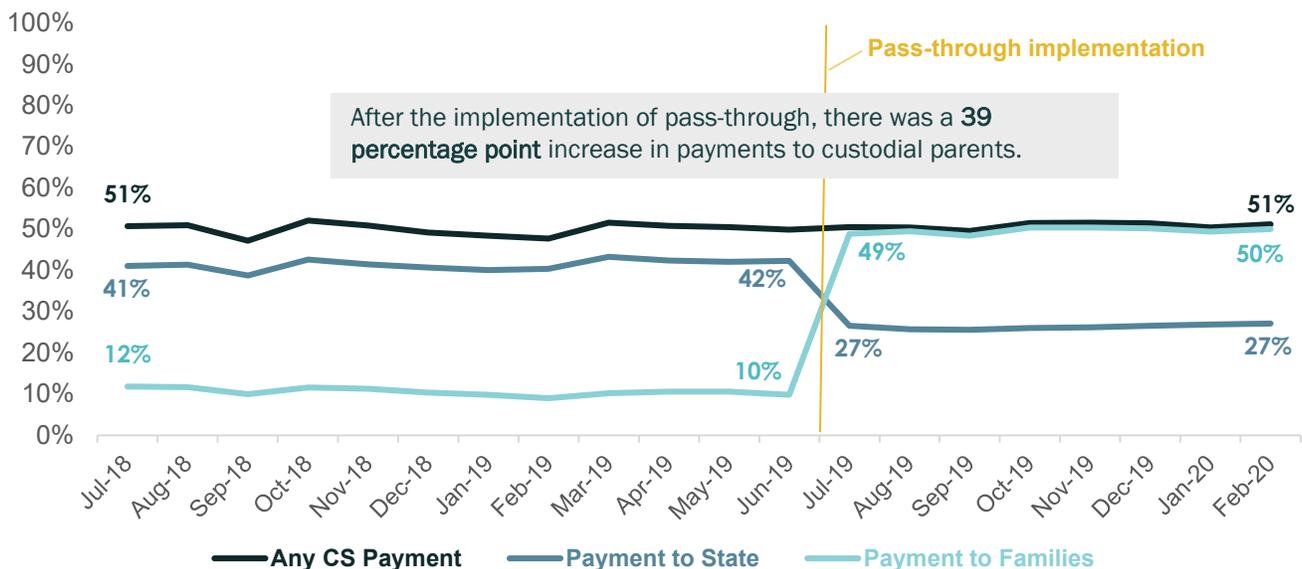
families. In other words, any child support paid over the \$100 or \$200 pass-through ceiling was kept by the state as reimbursement for the cost of the TCA program.

The large and immediate increase in the percentage of custodial parents who received a pass-through payment after the policy's implementation means the policy is working as intended. The lack of impact on the percentage of TCA cases with an open child support case, a support order, or that received a payment (Figure 6) after implementation is a potential area for improvement. However, it is not a cause for immediate concern.

Previous studies have found that it takes program participants time to learn the rules of new child support policies, and that participants often learn new policy rules through experience (Meyer et al., 2007; Nam et al., 2009). This is especially true for policies like cash assistance

(Meyer et al., 2007). For example, when Colorado adopted its pass-through policy, the state experienced a slow increase in the percentage of cases receiving a payment; even after two years, the percentage only grew four percentage points (Zolot et al., 2020). Furthermore, families may look to avoid the process of obtaining a formal child support order if they have had negative experiences with human service agencies in the past or if it is a process they may need to initiate themselves (Richburg-Hayes et al., 2014). For parents facing financial stress, the act of initiating and navigating formal administrative processes might be overwhelming (Richburg-Hayes et al., 2014). Given that this report looks at the eight months immediately after the implementation of pass-through, it is reasonable to assume that parents are still learning about Maryland's pass-through policy, including the benefits of obtaining a formal child support order.

Figure 7. Percentage of TCA Cases with a Current Support Order and a Current Support Payment



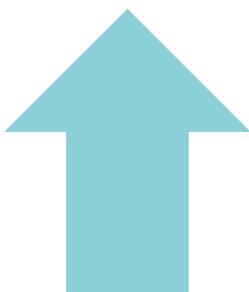
Note: This analysis examines the percentage of TCA families with a current child support order whose case received a payment from the parent who owes support. For example, in July 2018, 51% of TCA cases with a child support order received a payment. Of all TCA cases with a child support order in July 2018, the state recouped a payment in 41% of cases and the family received a payment in 12% of cases.

Impact on Household Income and SNAP Benefits

Household Income

For low-income households, child support makes up about 20% to 30% of recipients' incomes (Solomon-Fears & Falk, 2007; McColl & Passarella, 2019). Establishment of pass-through in Maryland gave TCA families access to some of this child support income they would otherwise receive if they were not receiving TCA (Vogel, 2020). Figure 8 shows by how much pass-through increased the average family's income. Household income includes earnings through UI-covered employment, income from TCA, as well as any income from Supplemental Security Income (SSI). As show, pass-through payments increased families' quarterly income by an average of 11%. More than four in five (84%) families experienced up to a 20% increase in income in the quarter in which they received pass-through. One in six (16%) families experienced an income increase between 21% and 50%.

Figure 8. Changes to Quarterly Household Income due to Pass-Through



Pass-through increased families' quarterly household income by an average of 11%. Most families (84%) had up to a 20% increase.

Note: The percentage increase in family income from pass-through is calculated by dividing pass-through income for each quarter by the sum of a family's UI-wage earnings, TCA grant funds, and any SSI income for the same quarter.

⁷ In order to experience a decrease, families would have had to receive pass-through in August, September, and October 2019. At that point, the administrative data system

SNAP Impacts

The final analysis in this brief examines the effect of pass-through on families' SNAP benefits. Most TCA families rely on SNAP to provide healthy food for their families. Between July 2019 and March 2020, for example, 74% of TCA families received SNAP in the year prior to their TCA receipt (Passarella & Smith, 2021). If a TCA family receives three or more consecutive months of pass-through, the pass-through child support is counted as unearned income in their SNAP benefit calculation (DHS, 2020a). This means a TCA family receiving three consecutive pass-through payments might experience a decrease in their SNAP benefit amount as a result of their additional income from pass-through. As noted previously in Figure 4, about three in five (57%) pass-through families received at least three consecutive months of receipt.

Figure 9 shows the percentage of TCA families who experienced a \$10 or more decrease in SNAP benefits after the start of pass-through. Since families began receiving pass-through payments in August 2019, November 2019 was the first month a family could experience a decrease in their SNAP benefits.⁷ About seven in 10 (68%) families receiving three or more consecutive months of pass-through had a decrease in their SNAP benefits between October 2019 and November 2019. In each month following the initial decline, an additional 22% to 32% of families receiving pass-through experienced a decrease in their SNAP benefits each month. Families who had their SNAP benefits reduced in November did not experience additional reductions, unless the pass-through amount increased, and are generally excluded from the remaining months.

would automatically count the average pass-through income as unearned income in the calculation of SNAP benefits for November 2019.

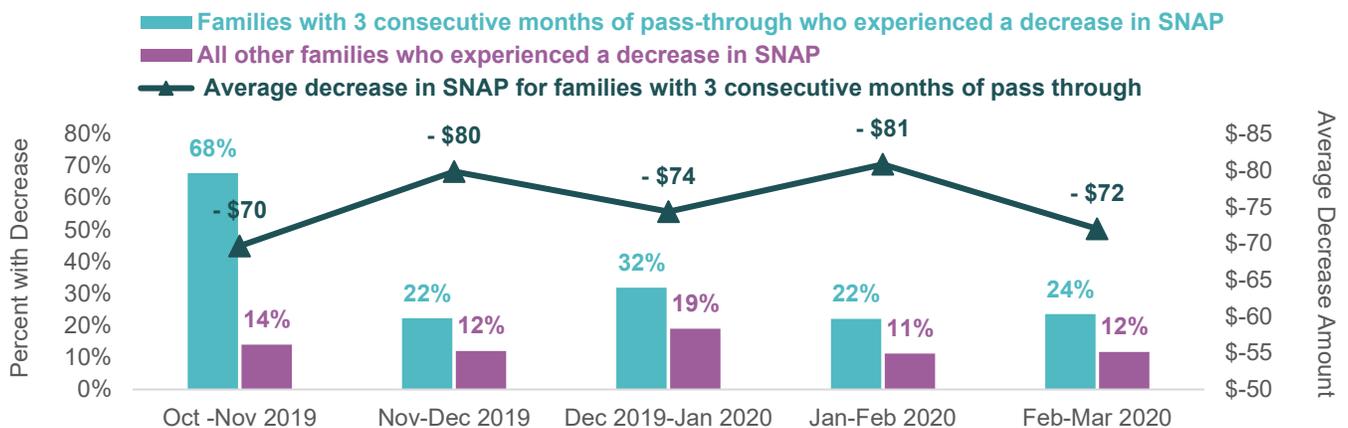
Only families who subsequently met the three-month threshold for calculating pass-through in SNAP benefits are included in the December 2019 to March 2020 percentages. Hence, the first month of the SNAP policy implementation resulted in a higher percentage of families who experienced a decrease.

In contrast, a smaller percentage of all other TCA families—including those that did not receive pass-through for three consecutive months and those that did not receive at all—experienced SNAP decreases. The percentage ranged from 11% to 19% in any given time period and was consistently at least 10 percentage points lower than families who had consecutive pass-through receipt. Though not shown, the results of an interrupted time series analysis found that across all families, pass-through did not have a significant effect on families’ SNAP benefits. So, while those with consistent pass-through payments experienced a substantial decrease, the number of families this affected was small in contrast to the entire population of TCA cases.

In addition to showing the percentage that experienced a decrease in SNAP benefits, Figure 9 also provides the average amount of SNAP benefit decrease for families with three or more consecutive months of pass-through receipt. The average decrease in SNAP benefits each month was roughly between \$70 and \$80. Maryland is not unique in its SNAP benefit decrease, however. For instance, families in Colorado also experienced a decrease in SNAP benefits each month after the state’s pass-through policy took effect (Zolot et al, 2020).

The impact Maryland’s pass-through policy has had on families’ SNAP benefits is unfortunate; however, states are not a position to reform federally-legislated policies. SNAP is a program that is guided by prescriptive rules set by Congress and interpreted by the Food and Nutrition Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (Bresnahan et al., 2021). Consequently, Maryland counts child support received by families as unearned income in the calculation of the SNAP benefit amount (DHS, 2019), consistent with federal rules. Still, the net effect of pass-through is positive, even considering the effect on SNAP benefits.

Figure 9. Percentage of TCA Cases that had a \$10 or more Decrease in SNAP Benefits



Note: The *all other families* category includes TCA families who did not receive three consecutive months of pass-through leading up to their decrease in SNAP benefits (and includes families who did not receive pass-through at all).

Conclusions

Maryland's partial pass-through child support policy provides some of the state's most financially vulnerable families with much-needed child support income. Prior to implementation of the policy in July 2019, families receiving TCA had to sign their full rights to child support payments over to the state. After the implementation of pass-through, families with one child could receive up to \$100 per month in passed through child support payments and families with two or more children could receive up to \$200. This brief examined the impact of Maryland's pass-through child support policy on TCA families, including the percentage of TCA families who received pass-through as well as the impact of the policy on child support orders, family income, and SNAP benefits.

In the eight months following implementation, Maryland passed through \$2.3 million dollars in child support to TCA families, money that prior to July 2019, would have gone to the state and federal governments. These additional payments reached two out of every five (40%) TCA families with a current support order. Three in five (57%) families who received pass-through received at least three months of consecutive pass-through receipt. On average, families received an additional \$132 per month in pass-through payments. For the typical family, the additional support raised households' quarterly income by 11%. Because federal law mandates that passed through support be counted in the calculation of SNAP benefits, most families who received three or more consecutive months of pass-through experienced a reduction in their SNAP benefits.

While pass-through increased income for many TCA families, more families could benefit, or benefit additionally, from the policy. After the start of pass-through, child support payments made on behalf of TCA families were distributed to families instead of the state. However, pass-through did not have an effect on child support outcomes. Specifically, pass-through did not increase the percentage of TCA families with an order for child support or the percentage of payments being made; rather, it ensured that TCA families who already had a child support order and had payments made on their case received some or all of the payments instead of the payments going to the state. These findings differ from findings in other states. For instance, studies of pass-through policies in Wisconsin, D.C., and Colorado found that the percentage of TANF cases receiving a child support payment increased after the implementation of pass-through (Cancian et al., 2008, Lippold et al., 2010; Zolot et al., 2020).

One reason there might not have been an increase in the percentage of Maryland families with a child support order or a payment is *time*. Research shows that it takes families time to learn new social policy rules (Meyer et al., 2007; Nam et al., 2009). Since this study examined the eight months immediately following the implementation of Maryland's pass-through policy,⁸ it is highly likely participants were still learning about the policy and its benefits. As Maryland families learn more about pass-through, they may be more likely to obtain a child support order. Future studies, then, might reasonably expect to find an increase in the number of TCA cases with a child support order and the percentage of cases that have received a support payment.

⁸ To ensure results were not biased by the effects of the pandemic, the study period for this brief ended in February 2020, which did not allow for a full-year of follow-up data.

Getting the most benefit from the state's pass-through policy, however, requires action and understanding from both custodial parents and parents who pay support. To help families get the most benefit from the policy, increases in outreach efforts and communications to both custodial parents and parents who pay support might help them follow through with required processes (Richburg-Hayes et al., 2014). For example, when Colorado adopted a pass-through policy, their Department of Human Services found that most TANF leavers did not know about the policy change (Dunaway et al., 2019). Moreover, parents acknowledged that knowing about the policy would have encouraged them to communicate with the other parent and engage with the child support office. The department then used this information to collaborate with the Child Support Services department, and later conducted focus groups with parents (Dunaway et al., 2019).

Another obstacle to pass-through payments might also be the employment status of obligors. Obligor who face employment barriers are less likely to be able to make their child support payment (Baird et al., 2015). In that vein, Maryland continues to work with parents who owe support to help them address barriers and receive job training. The state currently provides eight employment programs specifically for parents who owe support (DHS, n.d.-b). Continued investments in these supportive services may help TCA families receive consistent pass-through payments.

As families gain more experience with the pass-through policy, it will be important to re-examine some of the topics addressed in this report, including analyses where the policy was found to have no effect. Until then, it is important to celebrate the positive effects this policy had—and continues to have—on families' overall incomes. This additional source of income

undoubtedly helps low-income parents with necessary expenses. And, as a wealth of research shows, providing families with additional financial resources, such as child support, can impact the long-term health and wellbeing of children.

References

- Aspen Institute. (2020). *Paying support to families: Child support policy fact sheet*. <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/>
- Baird, P., Reardon, L., Cullinan, D., McDermott, D., & Landers, P. (2015). *Reminders to pay: Using behavioral economics to increase child support payments*. U.S. Department for Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default>
- Bresnahan, C., Ellison, C., Green, C., Headrick, G., Lee, C. J. Y., Lyons, M., Moran, A., & Tse, J. (2021). SNAP waivers and adaptations during the COVID-19 pandemic: A survey of state agency perspectives in 2020. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. <https://files.constantcontact.com/391325ca001/43b432bd-bdde-4525-8e63-a1b0293de236.pdf>
- Cancian, M., Meyer, D., & Caspar, E. (2008). Welfare and child support: Complements not substitutes. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 27(2), 354-375. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.20328>
- Cancian, M., Meyer, D., & Choi, Y. (2006). *The effects of the full child support pass-through/disregard on marriage and cohabitation*. The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development & The Institute for Research on Poverty. <http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/>
- Cancian, M., Meyer, D., & Wallace, G. (2001). TANF participation dynamics: Lessons from Wisconsin. *Journal of Applied Social Sciences*, 25(1), 57-75.
- Cancian, M., Yang, M., & Slack, K. (2013). The effect of additional child support income on the risk of child maltreatment. *Social Service Review*, 87(3), 417-437. <https://doi.org/10.1086/671929>
- Curtis, M.A., & Warren, E.J. (2015a). *Child support receipt, moves, and school changes*. University of Wisconsin-Madison, Institute for Research on

- Poverty. <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CS-2014-2016-T8.pdf>
- Curtis, M.A., & Warren, E.J. (2015b). Child support receipt, mobility, and housing quality. *Housing Studies*, 31(6), 672-693. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2015.1121212>
- Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, Pub. L. No. 109-171, 120 Stat. 4 (2006). <https://www.congress.gov/109/plaws/publ171/PLAW-109publ171.pdf>
- Demyan, N., & Passarella, L.L. (2019). *Maryland's child support caseload: A profile of custodians, 2018*. University of Maryland School of Social Work. <https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/media>
- Dunaway, D., Osborn, S., & Barthle, C. (2019, September). *Surveying Colorado's TANF leavers: Getting us through the rough patches* [PowerPoint Slides]. Colorado Office of Economic Security, Division of Employment & Benefits. <https://peerta.acf.hhs.gov/sites>
- Gunter, S. (2013). Effects of child support pass-through and disregard policies on in-kind child support. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 11(2), 193-209. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-012-9140-2>
- Ha, Y., Cancian, M., & Meyer, D.R. (2011). The regularity of child support and its contribution to the regularity of income. *Social Science Review*, 85(3), 401-419. <https://doi.org/10.1086/661923>
- Hall, L.A., & Passarella, L.L. (2015). *Welfare recidivism in Maryland: The importance of child support*. University of Maryland School of Social Work. <https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/media>
- Huang, C., Kunz, J., & Garfinkel, I. (2002). The effect of child support on welfare exits and re-entries. *Journal of Public Policy Analysis and Management*, 21(4), 557-576. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.10073>
- Linden, A. (2015). Conducting interrupted time-series analysis for single- and multiple-group comparisons. *The Stata Journal*, 15(2), 480-500. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536867X1501500208>
- Lino, M., Kuczynski, K., Rodriguez, N., & Schap, T. (2017). *Expenditures on children by families, 2015* (Miscellaneous Publication No. 1528-2015). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion. <https://www.youngwilliams.com/sites>
- Lippold, K., Nichols, A., & Sorensen E. (2010). *Evaluation of the \$150 child support pass-through and disregard policy in the District of Columbia*. Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/sites/>
- Maryland Department of Human Services. (n.d.-a.). Child Support Administration: *Support pass through*. <https://dhs.maryland.gov/child-support-services/paying-support/support-pass-through/>
- Maryland Department of Human Services. (n.d.-b.). *Noncustodial party employment programs*. <https://dhs.maryland.gov/child-support-services/paying-support/noncustodial-parent-employment-programs/>
- Maryland Department of Human Services.⁹ (2016). *Report on potential for implementing a child support pass-through and disregard policy for TCA-related child support cases*. Completed pursuant to the 2016 Joint Chairmen's Report. http://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/JCR/2016/2016_89.pdf
- Maryland Department of Human Services. (2019). *FIA action transmittal 19-19: Child support pass-through initiative*. <https://dhs.maryland.gov/>
- Maryland Department of Human Services. (2020a). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program manual: 210.33 Unearned Income*. <https://dhs.maryland.gov/documents/Manuals/>
- Maryland Department of Human Services. (2020b). *Temporary Cash Assistance manual: Child support pass-through 1312*. <https://dhs.maryland.gov/documents/Manuals/Temporary-Cash-Assistance-Manual/>
- McColl, R. & Passarella, L.L. (2019). *Life after welfare: 2019 annual update*. University of Maryland School of Social Work. <https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/media/ssw/fwrtg/welfare-research/life-after-welfare/life2019.pdf>
- Meyer, D., Cancian M., & Nam, K. (2007). Welfare and child support program knowledge gaps reduce program effectiveness. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 26(3), 575-597. <https://www.doi.org/10.1002/pam.20266>

⁹ This department was formerly titled Maryland Department of Human Resources. Though the *current* department

name is used in this reference, the linked document makes reference to the *former* title of the department.

- Nam, K., Cancian, M., & Meyer, D. (2009). How program participants learn program rules: Implications for implementation and evaluation. *Social Service Review* 83(1), 53-78. <https://www.doi.org/10.1086/598756>
- National Conference of State Legislatures. (2020). *Child support pass-through and disregard policies for public assistance recipients*. Retrieved July 5, 2021. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/>
- Passarella, L.L. (2020). *Jurisdictional snapshots: Custodian- & state-owed support in Maryland*. University of Maryland School of Social Work. <https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/child-support-research>
- Passarella, L.L., & Smith, H. (2021). *Life on welfare: Temporary Cash Assistance before and during the COVID-19 pandemic*. University of Maryland School of Social Work. <https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/media/ssw/fwrtg/welfare-research/life-on-welfare/Life-on-Welfare,-2020.pdf>
- Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-193, 110 Stat. 2105 (1996). <https://www.congress.gov/104/plaws/publ193/PLAW-104publ193.pdf>
- Richburg-Hayes, L., Anzelone, C., Dechausay, N., Datta, S., Fiorillo, A., Potok, L., Darling, M., & Balz, J. (2014). *Behavioral economics and social policy: Designing innovative solutions for programs supported by the Administration for Children and Families*. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation. <https://www.mdrc.org/sites>
- S.B. 1009, 2017 Reg. Sess. (Md. 2017). <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2017RS/bills/sb/sb1009e.pdf>
- Schott, L., Floyd, I., & Pavetti, L. (2021). *Cash assistance should promote equity: Applying the "Black Women Best" framework to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. <https://www.cbpp.org/>
- Solomon-Fears, C., & Falk, G. (2007). *The financial impact of child support on TANF families: Simulation of selected states*. Congressional Research Services. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL34105>
- Sorensen, E. (2016). *The child support program is a good investment. (The Story Behind the Numbers)*. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ocse/sbtn_csp_is_a_good_investment.pdf
- U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d). Commuting characteristics by sex, 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-year estimates (Table S0801). [Data set]. U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved February 10, 2021. <https://data.census.gov/>
- Vogel, L.K. (2020). Barriers to meeting formal child support obligations: Noncustodial father perspectives. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 110 (Article 104764). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.104764>
- Zolot, T., Martinez-Schiferl, M., Desbien, & Kauffmann, M. (2020). Dollar for Dollar: Why the child support pass-through makes sense. *Policy & Practice* 78(6), 5-39.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This brief was prepared by the University of Maryland School of Social Work with support from its long-time research partner, the Maryland Department of Human Services. The authors would like to thank Somlak Suvanasorn and Mike Funk for their assistance in the collection and processing of data for this research and Letitia Logan Passarella for her assistance with data preparation and editing.

For additional information, please contact Lauren A. Hall (lahall@ssw.umaryland.edu or 410.706.2763) at the School of Social Work.

Please visit our website <https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/familywelfare/> for additional copies of



525 W. Redwood Street
Baltimore, MD 21201
410-706-2479
www.ssw.umaryland.edu/familywelfare/