

CHILD SUPPORT MODIFICATIONS AMONG NEW ORDERS IN MARYLAND

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Child support is a legal agreement for financial support to children living apart from one or both parents. Importantly, income from child support can help raise families out of poverty (Shrider & Creamer, 2023; Demyan & Passarella, 2019). In 2022, the public child support program distributed just under \$30 billion to families nationally (OCSS, n.d.).

Ensuring these essential financial resources reach families is crucial. However, child support orders can be long-term agreements, spanning all the years until the child reaches adulthood, which is typically at age 18. These fixed child support orders may present challenges over time. For parents who receive support, the monthly support amount may become inadequate over time. Inflation erodes the value of the payments, which limits caregivers' abilities to meet children's needs.

Furthermore, the circumstances of parents can evolve substantially over time. Parents may experience fluctuations in income due to job changes, promotions, or layoffs. Additionally, health issues or disabilities can impact parents' ability to pay child support. According to the Income Shares model,¹ followed by most states, children are entitled to the financial support they would have received if both parents were living together. Therefore, changes in parents' circumstances—such as rising or declining incomes—or changes in children's expenses may necessitate modifications to child support orders.

To address these challenges, federal law has provided guidance for periodically reviewing child support orders. Federal guidance was first established under the Social Services Amendments of 1974 but was most recently updated under the Flexibility, Efficiency, and Modernization in Child Support Enforcement Programs Final Rule of 2016 (see the policy timeline on page 4). States are required to notify parents and legal caregivers every 3 years of their right to request a review of their child support orders (Review and adjustment of child support orders, 2016). Upon parental request, these reviews assess whether modifications are appropriate as determined by each state. Outside of the regular 3-year review cycle, parents and legal caregivers may request modifications if there is a substantial change in their circumstances. This flexibility allows for timely adjustments when needed.

KEY FINDINGS

One quarter (26%) of new orders established in 2010 were modified by 2019.

The percentage of modifications varied across the state from 10% in Caroline County to 43% in Prince George's and Frederick Counties.

Three quarters (73%) of modified orders were adjusted once while 27% were adjusted multiple times through 2019.

Half (49%) of modified orders were adjusted to a lower obligation, from a median of \$637 down to \$371.

The other half (51%) of modified orders were adjusted to a higher obligation from a median of \$300 up to \$524.

One in three (33%) modifications occurred within the first year of order establishment, and the percentage of adjustments declined in each subsequent year.

¹ The Income Shares guidelines model is used by 41 states (including Maryland), Guam, and the Virgin Islands (National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL], 2020). When determining support obligations, this model accounts for both parents' incomes and the cost of raising children at that income level; generally, parents with lower incomes have smaller obligations and those with higher incomes have larger obligations.

For families receiving cash assistance benefits through the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, modification reviews are not optional. The child support agency *must* review their orders every 3 years to determine if modifications are necessary (Review and adjustment of child support orders, 2016). However, this rule applies only to current TANF cases and excludes former recipients who have left the program.

The final rule established in 2016 also provided new guidance related to incarcerated parents. States are required to provide modification services to parents owing support who become incarcerated for at least 180 days (Review and adjustment of child support orders, 2016). States can automatically modify support orders upon verification of incarceration dates or provide notice to those parents that they can have their order reviewed for a modification.²

Despite the ability of orders to be modified, there is little knowledge of how often modifications occur. One study found that between 2% and 3% of all orders in nine states were modified during a single year (Office of Child Support Enforcement [OCSE], 2006b). In Maryland, a similar percentage of all orders were modified. As shown in Table 1, 4% of all cases with a current support order were modified in 2010; in 2018, this percentage was 2%.

This report takes a different perspective. Rather than examine the percentage of all orders modified in a particular year, this report examines the likelihood that a new child support order is modified. Specifically,

the report examines all 11,549 new orders established in 2010 and follows those new orders through 2019 to answer the following questions:

1. What percentage of the new orders in 2010 were modified by 2019, and does this vary by jurisdiction?
2. Among modified orders, what percentage were upward or downward modifications?
3. How long did it take for the first modification to occur?

Table 1. Annual Percent of Modifications in Maryland

Among all cases with a current support order

	Cases with a Current Support Order	Number of Modifications	Percent of Modifications
2010	148,723	5,457	4%
2011	147,194	4,699	3%
2012	145,735	4,471	3%
2013	143,872	5,227	4%
2014	136,831	4,515	3%
2015	135,013	4,020	3%
2016	133,072	3,567	3%
2017	129,984	3,189	2%
2018	126,752	2,627	2%

Note: The count of cases with a current support order differs from the counts provided in Table 64 of the Office of Child Support Services [annual reports](#) to Congress as the counts in the federal reports include orders for arrears-only cases.

² In Maryland, beginning in October 2012, obligors incarcerated for at least 18 months after the effective date of the law were eligible for suspended orders during the duration of their incarceration and for 60 days after release (HB 651, 2012). In October 2020, the law was revised to include obligors who were incarcerated for 180 days (HB 234, 2020). Although their modifications may be included in the data, this report does not focus on modifications among incarcerated parents.

The findings from these research questions aim to add to the limited knowledge on the likelihood for modification of a child support order. This initial exploration provides an overview of modifications occurring over a substantial period of the life of a new child support order—a full 9 years. This report does not explore the reasons for modifications, but it does shed light on how often Maryland child support agencies and courts considered whether changing family circumstances warranted a modification to the child support obligation. This report will begin to provide a foundation in which Maryland policymakers and program managers can evaluate modification processes and whether they meet the needs of families and children involved in the program.

DATA AND STUDY POPULATION

Study Population

The population for this study includes all child support orders that were newly established through Maryland's public child support program between January 1, 2010 and December 31, 2010. New orders were identified when a final current support order amount greater than \$0 first appeared in the administrative data during the study period. The final population in calendar year 2010 was 11,549 new orders.³

Exclusions

The final population, however, excludes some orders as discussed in this section. Orders that were not based on Maryland's guidelines were excluded, including cases that only address the child's paternity or

orders for spousal support. Orders that were established outside of the public child support program but were included in the administrative data for wage-withholding and collection purposes were also excluded.

Data Sources

Study findings are based on analyses of administrative data retrieved from computerized management information systems maintained by the State of Maryland. Data on the new order amounts and modifications were extracted from the Child Support Enforcement System (CSES).

CSES was the statewide automated information management system for Maryland's public child support program between March 1998 and September 2022.⁴ CSES supported the intake, establishment, location, and enforcement functions of the Child Support Administration (CSA). CSES contains identifying information and demographic data on children and their parents or caregivers who were receiving services from the public child support program authorized under the Social Security Act. Data on paternity status and payment receipt are also available.

Data Analysis

Analyses of new orders include data through the end of calendar year 2019, representing a full 9 years of follow-up data; we choose to end the follow-up period prior to 10 years to avoid the disruption of court closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. This report utilizes descriptive statistics to describe child support orders and modifications between 2010 and 2019,

³ This report does not examine reviews conducted by the Maryland Child Support Administration (CSA) nor whether modifications resulted from any CSA reviews. Hence, the report does not include the reason for modifications or why a modification was denied after a review.

⁴ In September 2022, CSES was fully replaced by the Child Support Management System (CSMS).

including percentages, medians, and averages. The average represents the number at which one would arrive if the total (e.g., all support order amounts) was divided by the number of orders included in the analysis. We also present the median because it is sometimes a better

representation of the data. One can find the median by arranging all values from lowest to highest and selecting the midpoint value. Extreme values do not affect the median, which is why it is sometimes preferred over the average.

EVOLUTION OF FEDERAL POLICY ON MODIFICATIONS

Social Services Amendments of 1974

allowed modifications when parents requested courts to modify orders based on a change in circumstances.

Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1986 prohibited the retroactive modification of past-due child support (i.e., arrears).

Family Support Act of 1988 required that all orders with support assigned to the state (i.e., cases currently receiving cash assistance, foster care, or Medicaid) be reviewed every 3 years without demonstrating a change in circumstances. For orders without current state-assigned support, reviews were only required every 3 years upon request of the parent. States were also required to notify parents of their right to request a review.

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 removed the mandatory triennial requirement to review all current assignment cases. All reviews were conducted solely upon the request of either parent or the state every 3

years. States were required to notify parents of their right to request a review every 3 years. It also allowed for experimentation with cost-of-living adjustments and automated reviews.

Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 required a mandatory triennial review of current TANF cases and a triennial review of non-TANF cases upon the request of a parent. It also allowed parents to request a review outside of the 3-year period based on a change in circumstances. Every 3 years, states must notify parents of their right to request a review.

Flexibility, Efficiency, and Modernization (FEM) in Child Support Enforcement Programs of 2016 required states to address orders for parents owing support who will be incarcerated more than 180 days by either initiating a review or by notifying both parents of their right to request a review.

(Congressional Research Service, 2015; OCSE, 1989; FEM, 2016)

FREQUENCY OF MODIFICATIONS

Child support modifications are not common. A study of nine states found that between 2% and 3% of all orders were modified during a single year (OCSE, 2006b), and Maryland has a similarly low percentage of annual modifications (see Table 1). The time-consuming review and adjustment process may be a barrier to modifications. Orders can be reviewed every 3 years after either the initial establishment of the obligation, modification of the obligation, or a previous review of the order (Review and adjustment of child support orders, 2016). However, parents or legal caregivers must request the review *unless* the case is receiving assistance from the TANF program and the order modification cycle is at the 3-year mark.⁵ Additionally, parents and caregivers can request a review outside of the 3-year period if they can demonstrate a substantial or material change in circumstances (see page 10 for more details).

Not only is the review process largely dependent upon parental initiative, but it also requires the collection of a substantial amount of documentation from parents. This may include updated financial information, child care and health insurance costs, or the obligation amount of other child support orders. In fact, many cases do not complete the review process because the necessary information is not submitted (OCSE, 2006a; 2006b). Once the updated information is received and reviewed, states determine whether a modification is warranted. In some states, orders can be modified administratively in the child support office. however, Maryland is a judicial state,

meaning modifications require court approval. Court proceedings can elongate the modification process.

Completing the review process, however, does not guarantee a modification. Demonstration projects in the 1980s found that between 4% and 14% of reviewed orders resulted in a modification (OCSE, 2006a). These percentages have increased over time, however. In the early 2000s, OCSE (2006b) found that among nine states, modifications were made in more than half of cases that requested a review.

To encourage more reviews and adjustments, states have more recently experimented with revising the review process. Small pilot programs have demonstrated that simplifying the modification process or supporting parents and legal caregivers through the process can improve the number of completed reviews. For example, review completions improved when Ohio eliminated the requirement for parents to complete a modification application before receiving a modification packet (Baird & Miller, 2019). Additionally, Ohio found that more reviews were completed when staff were designated to assist parents through the process (Baird & Miller, 2019).

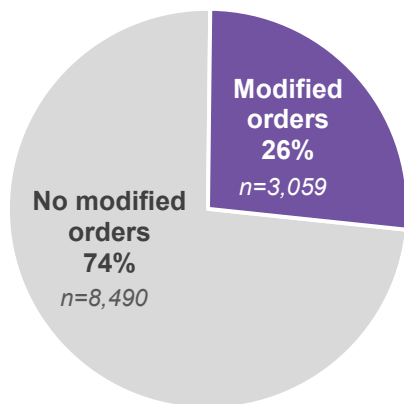
Few studies have examined modifications among newly established orders to determine the likelihood of a revised obligation over the lifetime of a child support order. There are two examples from Wisconsin studies. Rothe (2004) found that one third of new orders in 1997 were modified within 4 years of establishment. Similarly, Ha et al. (2010) found that 32% of

⁵ In other words, an order becomes eligible for a review 3 years after it is established, and the child support agency *must* review the support order if the children on the order are currently receiving TANF.

new orders from 2000 received a modification by the 5th year.

Modifications in Maryland are slightly less common than what was found in Wisconsin. As shown in Figure 1, one quarter (26%) of new orders established in 2010 were modified between 2010 and 2019. Hence, the vast majority (74%) of orders maintained the same obligation for at least 9 years.

Figure 1. Percent of New Orders with a Modification
Among new orders established in 2010 (n=11,549)



Maryland’s child support program is overseen by the state but managed locally across 24 jurisdictions, leading to variation in how modifications are handled. Across the state, the percentage of order modifications ranged from 10% to 43% of new orders, as displayed in Figure 2. In 15 jurisdictions, the percentage of new orders with a modification was within 5 percentage points of the state average (21% to 31%). However, there was substantial variation in the jurisdictions with the largest caseloads—Baltimore City and the counties

of Baltimore, Montgomery, and Prince George’s—which all exceeded 1,000 new orders in 2010. At just over one in 10 (12%) modifications, Baltimore City was among the bottom three jurisdictions—along with Caroline (10%) and Dorchester (11%) counties—where modifications were least likely to occur in the state. Modifications in Baltimore County (21%) and Montgomery County (28%) were both closer to the state average (26%), while Prince George’s County (43%) had the highest percentage of modifications in the state along with Frederick County (43%). Charles (35%), St. Mary’s (36%), and Washington (39%) counties were also on the higher end for modifications of new orders.

Beyond the initial question of whether an order is modified, Figure 2 also examines the frequency of modifications. For the state as a whole, new orders were most commonly modified a single time (73%). One in five (20%) orders were modified twice, and 7% were modified three or more times over the 9-year observation period. This pattern was fairly consistent across the state with a single adjustment occurring in more than half of modifications in each jurisdiction.

Still, multiple modifications were more likely in some jurisdictions. Some smaller jurisdictions—those with about 500 or fewer new orders—were more likely to modify a new order multiple times throughout the 9 years. For example, in Somerset and Kent counties, nearly half of modified orders received multiple modifications. In these two

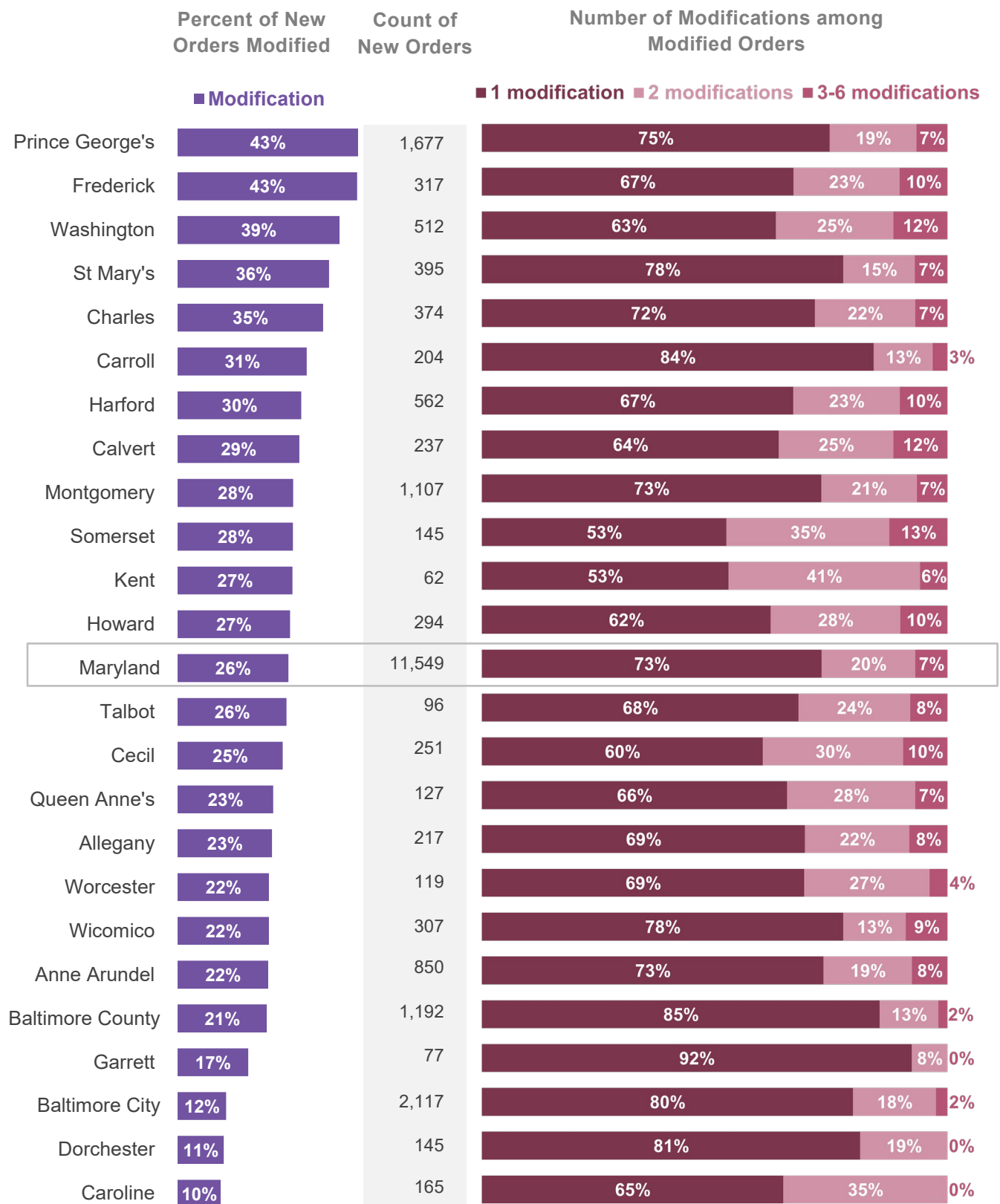
counties more than one third of orders received two modifications (35% and 41%, respectively) and three or more modifications occurred in 13% and 6% of orders, respectively. Additionally, Somerset County was one of three jurisdictions in which more than 10% of modified orders were adjusted three or more times (Somerset (13%), Washington (12%), and Calvert (12%) counties).

Multiple modifications were somewhat less likely among the jurisdictions with larger caseloads. One quarter of modified orders received multiple modifications in Montgomery (27%) and Prince George's (25%) counties. Similar to the state average, 20% of modified orders in Baltimore City were modified multiple times, while only 15% received multiple adjustments in Baltimore County.



Some orders were modified multiple times between 2010 and 2019, resulting in 4,158 modifications among the 3,059 new orders with a modification.

Figure 2. Percent of New Orders with a Modification by Jurisdiction
Among new orders established in 2010 (n=11,549)



Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUPPORT ORDERS BEFORE MODIFICATION

The amount of a child support order may be an important indicator for the likelihood of a modification. Two studies in Wisconsin provide some evidence to support this notion. That is, orders with lower amounts as well as those with higher amounts were more frequently modified relative to orders that fell in the middle (Rothe, 2004; Ha et al., 2010). To examine this in Maryland, the first section of Table 2 provides five categories of support order amounts (SOAs), and these categories represent the SOA before an order was modified. If an order was modified multiple times, then the order amount before each modification is included in the corresponding category.⁶

The five categories range from \$250 or less to \$851 or more, and there was a fairly even distribution across these categories. One quarter (25%) of orders were for \$250 or less before they were modified, and this is the highest percentage among the five categories. The remaining four categories ranged between 17% and 20%.

The second section of Table 2 includes the SOA for all new orders in 2010 across the same five categories. This order amount represents all new orders regardless of any future modifications. In contrast to the SOAs of modified orders, the distribution of order amounts among all new orders skewed toward lower obligations. Two in five (41%) new orders were for \$250 or less, and one in five (21%) were for \$251 to \$375. Only 7% of new orders were in the highest category of \$851 or more.

Relative to their percentage of all new order amounts, lower SOAs were less likely to be modified. Although 41% of new orders were for \$250 or less, only 25% of modifications were among orders in this lower category. Conversely, 7% of new orders were for \$851 or more but 19% of modifications were among these higher order amounts. Hence, relative to their percentage of new orders, higher order amounts were more likely to be modified.

However, this information does not account for the reasons that orders were modified, and that information is not available for this

Table 2. Support Order Amounts (SOA)

Initial SOA	Among All Modifications (n=4,158)		Among All New Orders (n=11,549)	
	%	n	%	n
\$250 or less	25%	1,037	41%	4,740
\$251 to \$375	17%	724	21%	2,429
\$376 to \$550	18%	767	17%	1,999
\$551 to \$850	20%	841	13%	1,518
\$851 or more	19%	789	7%	863

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

⁶ For example, an order that was modified twice will be included in this table twice. If the SOA was \$250 before the first modification, then it will be counted in the \$250 or less category; if the amount is \$200 at the second modification, then it will be counted in the same category twice, but if the amount is \$275 before the second modification, then it will be counted in the \$251 to \$375 category.

report. Nonetheless, it is possible that material changes in circumstances, as outlined in the textbox below, were more common among parents with higher obligations as opposed to those with lower obligations. Given the likely higher income of parents with higher obligations, it is also likely they can afford legal representation to pursue modifications. That representation may be particularly important for successful modifications given that many parents lack knowledge about the child support process (Vogel et al., 2022, Vogel et al., 2023).

Conversely, research indicates that income volatility among lower-income individuals is common (Maag et al., 2017), and these income changes may justify a modification. Yet, despite the frequency of lower SOAs, these obligations were less likely to be modified. This may suggest that courts considered these orders already low enough to balance the needs of the children with the ability of the parent to pay, or that parents with lower obligations were less likely to request a review for a modification.

Material Change of Circumstance

The review and adjustment policy in Maryland follows federal rules. Hence, parents may request a review every 3 years and current TANF cases *must be* reviewed every 3 years. However, all parents may request a review outside of the triennial period if a parent can demonstrate a material change in circumstances which may include one of the following:

- ❖ Incarceration of the parent who owes support;
- ❖ A change in income of either parent that is continuing and substantial;
- ❖ Emancipation of a child while other minor children remain on the order;
- ❖ A change in the number of overnights has occurred in a shared custody case;
- ❖ Custody has changed from shared to sole custody or from sole to shared custody;
- ❖ Sole custody has changed from one parent to the other;
- ❖ A change in child care expenses has occurred;
- ❖ A change in health insurance expenses has occurred; or
- ❖ A change in extraordinary medical expense has occurred.

(Md. Family Law Code §12-104.1, 2022; CSA, n.d.-b)

MODIFICATION DIRECTION

Modifications result either in an increase or decrease of an existing support obligation. Demonstration projects in the 1980s found that more than 80% of modifications resulted in a higher obligation (OCSE, 2006a). Over time, however, there have been fewer upward modifications (Rothe, 2004; Ha et al., 2010). In a nine-state

review of modifications in the early 2000s, OCSE (2006b) found there was an even split between modifications resulting in higher or lower obligations.

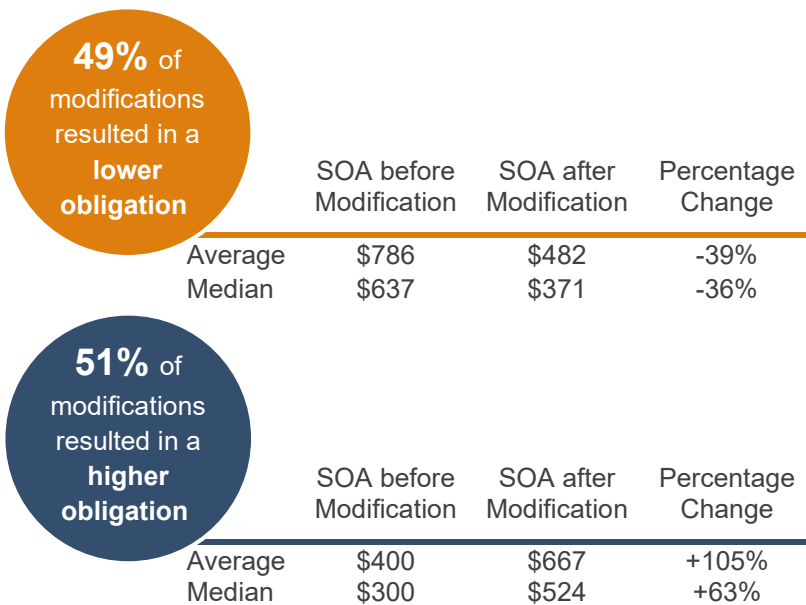
This shift to fewer upward modifications may stem from the evolution of the child support program's focus solely on enforcement to a stronger emphasis on family well-being. In particular, federal and

state programs aim to ensure orders are appropriate to actual income, often referred to as *right-sizing* orders (FEM, 2016). There has been a similar shift in the Maryland child support program. To reflect the program changes made in Maryland to right-size orders, encourage employment, and reduce child support debt, Maryland renamed its program from the Child Support Enforcement Administration to the Child Support Administration in 2017 (HB 103, 2017). Given those efforts, Maryland courts may be more inclined to lower obligations to ensure order amounts are appropriate to parental incomes. This would be particularly beneficial to parents whose child support obligations were based on their potential incomes⁷ rather than their actual incomes, resulting in unrealistic support orders (Demyan & Passarella, 2018; 2022).

Table 3 explores whether modifications produced higher or lower obligations, and there was an equal split between upward and downward modifications. Half (49%) of modifications lowered the obligation, while the other half (51%) increased the obligation. Among downward modifications, the median SOA before modification was just under \$640. These higher orders were then modified downward by a median of 36%, resulting in a median new order of just under \$375.

Upward modifications, on the other hand, occurred among orders with lower obligations in which the median pre-modified SOA was \$300. The median percentage increase for upward modifications was 63% to a median of \$525.

Table 3. Support Order Characteristics of Modified Orders
Among all modifications (n=4,158)

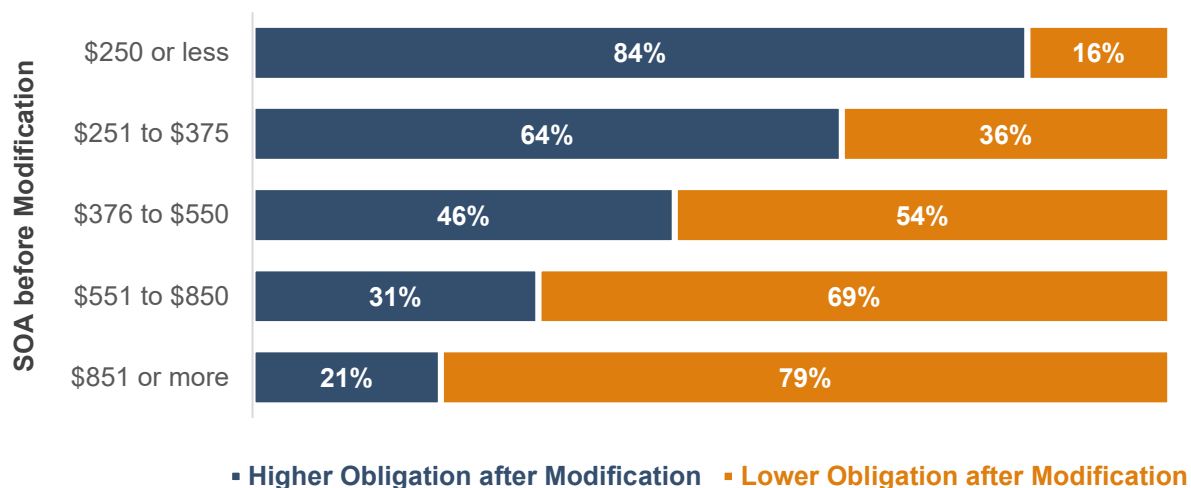


⁷ This is also referred to as income imputation, a practice in which a court assigns a different, usually higher, income than the amount a parent is actually earning. Low-income individuals often experience income imputation during the order establishment process because they have limited wage data (FEM, 2016).

Figure 3 reinforces the finding that smaller SOAs were more likely to have an upward modification while larger SOAs received a downward modification. This figure provides the percentage of orders modified to either a higher or lower obligation by each of the five SOA categories before modification. More than 80% of SOAs that were \$250 or less were modified to a higher obligation. As the SOAs rise, the percentage of upward modifications declines. Less than half (46%) of SOAs between \$376 and \$550 were modified upward, and only one in five (21%) SOAs greater than \$850 resulted in a higher obligation.

In contrast, SOAs that were initially higher were more likely to have a downward modification. Nearly 80% of SOAs greater than \$850 were modified to a lower obligation. Downward modifications decreased to 54% among SOAs between \$376 and \$550, and only 16% of SOAs that were \$250 or less were modified downward. Rothe (2004) and Ha et al. (2010) also found a similar trend of upward modifications among smaller orders and downward modifications among larger orders in Wisconsin.

Figure 3. Modification Direction by Support Order Amount (SOA)
Among all modifications (n=4,158)



TIME TO FIRST MODIFICATION

This last section explores when an order was first modified relative to when the order was newly established. Although child support agencies are required to notify parents or legal caregivers of their right to request a review 3 years after a new order is established, new orders in 2010 were modified quickly and well before the end of

the first triennial period. As shown in Figure 4, one in three (33%) orders were modified within the 1st year of order establishment. These very quick modifications may be the result of temporary or *pendente lite* orders. Temporary orders can be used when the courts require additional information before finalizing the permanent order (Justia, n.d.).⁸ The use of temporary orders is beneficial for two reasons. First, the temporary order can

⁸ Maryland's child support administrative data does not distinguish between temporary and final orders. Any order signed by a judge is considered final for enforcement actions (CSA, n.d.-a).

help to provide financial support to the child while the final order is determined. Second, it ensures that a parent does not accrue any child support debt during a potentially lengthy establishment process. This latter point is particularly important for lower-income parents who will find it difficult to manage retroactive support orders.⁹

After the 1st year, the percentage of new orders receiving their first modification declined by half. In that 2nd year, 16% of new orders received their first modification. Modifications declined in the subsequent years, with just over 10% each in years 3 (11%) and 4 (12%) and less than 10% in the remaining years.

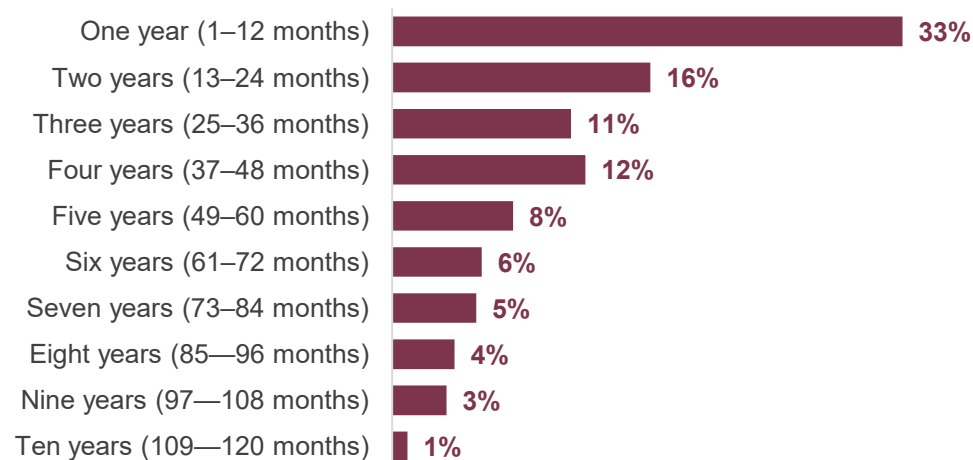
Ultimately, modifications appear to occur in those first few years after new orders were established, and the likelihood of an initial modification declined in each subsequent year. This finding is consistent with data from Wisconsin, in which the majority of modifications among new orders

established in the late 1990s were modified within the first year (Rothe, 2004).

Initial modifications happened very quickly, and Figure 5 explores whether those modifications were more likely to be upward or downward. More than three in five (63%) modifications were for higher obligations during the 1st year after new orders were established. This is aligned with the previous assumption that the high percentage of modifications occurring in the 1st year may be due to the use of temporary orders. These temporary orders may be modified upward to better reflect the incomes and circumstances of the parents.

Modifications in years 2 and 3 were slightly more likely to be downward modifications; more than half of modifications in these two years resulted in a lower obligation. The distribution of upward and downward modifications was nearly evenly split in all remaining years, with upward modifications occurring slightly more often in most of those years.

Figure 4. Time to First Modification
For all new orders with a modification (n=3,059)

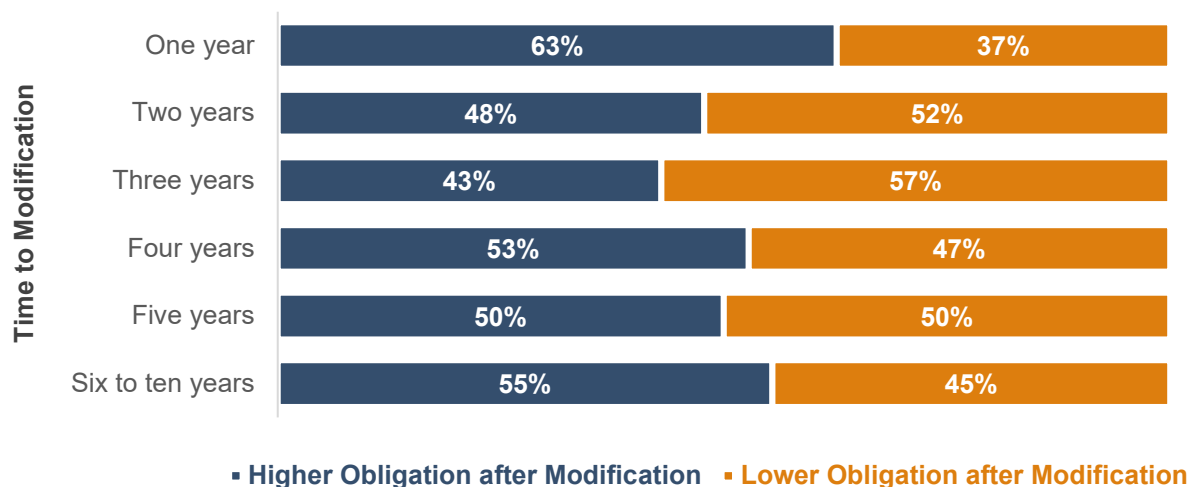


Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding. All orders have a full 9 years of follow-up data; however, orders established between January and November 2010 do have some months of follow-up data in the 10th year.

⁹ Courts have the option to make child support orders effective from the date that the request for support was initially filed. This can mean that an order established in June, for example, can be made effective as of the previous January resulting in 6 months of support due in June. Often this results in child support debt from the beginning of the order.

Figure 5. Time to the First Modification by Modification Direction

For all new orders with a modification (n=3,059)



CONCLUSIONS

This brief delves into child support orders established in Maryland in calendar year 2010, providing valuable insights into child support modifications. Foremost, the findings reveal that the vast majority (76%) of these new order amounts remained unchanged between 2010 and 2019. This level of stability in support order amounts could suggest that parents' circumstances remained consistent and did not warrant modifications. For example, stable incomes, minimal fluctuations in expenses like child care and health insurance, or permanent custody arrangements may signify that the existing obligation adequately meets the children's needs. Alternatively, this level of stability in support orders may also highlight potential barriers that prevent parents or legal caregivers from seeking reviews or modifications of their orders.

Among the one quarter (26%) of new orders that did receive a modification, there was a balanced distribution between upward (51%) and downward (49%) adjustments.

However, the direction of the modification appeared to be influenced by the initial order amount. Specifically, lower order amounts tended to receive upward modifications, while higher order amounts were more prone towards downward modifications. This pattern indicates a trend of adjusting obligation amounts toward a more moderate level.

Regardless of the direction of these modifications, orders were adjusted relatively quickly. Nearly three quarters of modifications occurred within the first 3 to 4 years after the initial order establishment. In fact, one in three modifications occurred within the 1st year. This suggests that parents or legal caregivers may quickly recognize the necessity of support order adjustments for the well-being of their children. On the other hand, it also indicates that parents who do not obtain modifications soon after order establishment may never receive an adjustment. This raises questions about parents' awareness of their rights to request modifications, potential

obstacles in the modification process, or the possibility of denied requests.

While this brief provides valuable insights into the frequency, direction, and timing of modifications among newly established orders, there are additional questions. Future research could explore the characteristics of modified orders, such as the TANF status of the case as well as parental demographics, earnings, and poverty status. Additionally, a comparative analysis of payment compliance between modified and stable orders could offer further insights into the efficacy of child support modifications in ensuring consistent financial support for children. Prior research

in Maryland does indicate an increase in payments after a modification, particularly among orders with a downward adjustment (Demyan & Passarella, 2022).

Understanding child support modifications is essential for promoting fairness and enhancing the well-being of families in Maryland. This is particularly important for ensuring families receive the same level of service regardless of the jurisdiction managing their support order. To that end, there may be some best practices to be learned from jurisdictions. Further research efforts can play a pivotal role in informing policy decisions and refining the child support program to meet the evolving needs of families.

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