



In Defense of Deadbeat Dads

America's fathers pay tens of billions in child support annually. But in many cases, that money never reaches their children.

Here's why more and more families are being left destitute — and more and more fathers are going to jail

By Harry Jaffe Portrait photographs by Helanna Bratman

NOBODY HATES DEADBEAT DADS MORE THAN JIM TAYLOR DOES.

When he was 2, his father skipped out on him, leaving Jim and his mother penniless. He remembers, as a boy growing up outside Richmond, Virginia, riding his bike to the post office where his dad's child-support checks were supposed to arrive. He recalls getting only one. "There were many nights when we had nothing to eat," says Taylor, 33. "I remember mixing water and seasoning just to get the taste of food. One day we were down to our last quarter. My mom decided to call her mother rather than buy a candy bar." The phone ate the quarter. »

"That," he says, "was the ultimate hopelessness." Eventually they moved in with his grandmother, where Jim lived for most of his young life, wondering how the man who helped bring him into the world could have simply walked away.

Today Taylor has three sons of his own. He makes a solid living, earning about \$60,000 a year running an information network for a national corporation. He was doing well until 3 years ago, when he and his wife of 8 years separated. At first they shared custody and costs, but the cooperation gave way to legal battles; then came the child-support assessment. Though he and his wife now share custody, Taylor is saddled with child-support payments that hover around \$2,000 a month—taken from his paycheck by the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Despite his salary, Taylor is destitute again. "More than a third of my income goes to taxes. More than a third goes to child support," he says. "I have my three sons about half the time. That leaves me with less than \$20,000 to support a family of four." He's been forced to file for bankruptcy. He cannot afford rent on a small apartment. And, perhaps worst of all, if he refuses to pay child support to the Commonwealth of Virginia—if he chooses instead to spend that money on food, clothes, or doctor appointments for his children—the authorities will put him in prison for being a "deadbeat dad."

"I finally had to ask my grandmother if the boys and I could move into her house," Taylor says. "And there I was again."

Getting tough on deadbeat dads is a no-lose proposition for politicians, prosecutors, and bureaucrats. But "for every true deadbeat dad, there's a father who's being punished for the sins of the deadbeats," says Julie Batson, a mother and wife who heads Georgians for Child Support Reform. You'll rarely read about these fathers, men like Jim Taylor who are being financially crushed and

"It's a form of debtor's prison," says Ron Henry, a Washington, D.C., lawyer who's studied child support for more than a decade. No national or state organization tracks the prosecution of men who can't meet their support assessments, but an informal survey conducted by a government agency on behalf of *Men's Health* found that approximately 15,000 men are in jail on any given day for missing child-support payments. Since their incarceration may last from several days to several months, one expert in support and custody issues believes that as many as 100,000 fathers see jail time every year.

Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, is one microcosm that helps illuminate the national picture. It has six deputies working full-time tracking down parents who have missed payments and have had warrants issued for their arrest. In 1999, a company called Goodwill Industries proposed converting a defunct ventilation company in Allegheny County into a work-release facility to hold fathers who were behind in their child support.

They're fathers like Rob Hawkins, 45, a maintenance technician in Newton, North Carolina. "I was totally committed to my

split, his child-support assessment was based on his previous earnings. "I was not able to pay the child support," he says. He folded the business, got a job, and started to make payments, but his ex-wife took him to court to pay his child-support debt—a debt that accrues interest when support payments are missed.

The judge considered the options and said, "It looks like he's trying to get back on his feet. What do you want me to do?" Hawkins's ex-wife bowed her head and didn't answer.

And Hawkins was led away in shackles. "They locked me up because I didn't have enough money to pay my child support," he says. "But if I'm locked up, how can I go out and make money to pay child support?"

"I know there are more dads out there just like me," he says. "We must change the laws."

There are moms out there like Hawkins, too. CaSandra Minichiello's daughter, Amanda, 8, lives with her father, as do 15 percent of children of divorce and breakups. Minichiello and her ex share legal custody, but he has physical custody, so she pays child support to him. She's working as an administrative assistant by day and going to school at night. The child support amounts to nearly 25 percent of her take-home salary. She's living hand to mouth and has fallen behind on her payments.

"He could take me to court and have me jailed at any time," she says. "I now understand the agony men have been in for years."

Here are a few more dispatches from the child-support front:

▷ Bobby Sherrill was an engineer on contract to the Kuwaiti military in the summer of 1990. When Iraq invaded Kuwait that August, its army took Sherrill and a few colleagues hostage. Four months later, they released him. He was in his mother's house in Fayetteville, North Carolina, less than 24 hours when the sheriffs arrived, handcuffed him, and led him away for failing to pay child support during his captivity.

▷ In Texas, Clarence Brandley was exonerated after 10 years in prison and then presented with a child-support bill for \$22,000. ▷ Eight years ago, Derek Harvey, a landscaper in Baltimore, broke up with the mother of his three children. Three months later, he found the kids shivering at his door in the middle of the night. He's been living with them and supporting them ever since—and paying child support to the state. "I would like to know where my money's going," he says.

And that's the dirty little secret behind the state-run child-support system and its persecution of men like Taylor, Hawkins, and Harvey. Their money is most definitely going to someone. And it's often not their children.

It's fathers who spend the most time and resources on their kids who are hurt most by the system.

often imprisoned by a child-support apparatus they see as irrational and punitive. They are the fathers whose urge to raise their children remains strong after divorce. They fight for custody and visitation. They're often ordered to pay child support that exceeds their ability—support that their children may never see. They go broke. Often, they go to jail for not being able to pay.

marriage and my family," he says. "I loved my wife and kids."

Hawkins says his wife met a man at church, took his two daughters away on his older daughter's birthday, and never returned. That was 2 years ago, and the timing couldn't have been worse. Hawkins was starting his own business at the time, and his income had plummeted. But after the



Jim Taylor shares joint custody of his three boys, but his ex has physical custody. As a result, more than a third of Taylor's net income goes to the Commonwealth of Virginia for child support.

Jim Taylor grew up in poverty because no system was in place to ensure his father's patronage. Reform was needed, and it got its start in 1975, when Gerald Ford's administration established the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement to help ensure that noncustodial parents played a role in the financial support of their offspring. During the welfare reform of the 1980s and '90s, the feds required states to standardize child-support assessments and adopt collection policies that would target men who weren't meeting them. The laws were conceived under the theory that the government was paying to support welfare moms and children, so fathers

should reimburse the government. Most of the money the state collected from fathers of children receiving welfare did not go to the men's offspring, but back to the government.

"The government wanted its money back and saw child support as a profit center," says attorney Ron Henry. Men who failed to "reimburse" the state governments were labeled deadbeat dads.

At the same time, the federal government began to subsidize state child-support-collection programs. The transaction was simple: For every dollar collected in child support, the federal government gave the state 6 cents, figuring that by incentivizing the states

to collect from deadbeats, the feds would save money in welfare costs for the children.

One problem: Women who need government assistance are rarely the ex-wives of millionaires. The men who were ordered to pay support were often broke themselves. And so came another round of welfare-reform laws in 1996, which armed the state governments with new weapons to collect support from fathers. They could go directly to employers to garnishee wages. They could take driver's licenses and professional licenses. They could put liens on property. They could intercept income-tax refunds. If all else failed, they could haul the nonpaying parent into court,

HOME FRONT

charge him with contempt, and throw him in jail. Collections jumped quickly, from \$8 billion a year in 1992 to \$19 billion in 2001.

But if the same disadvantaged deadbeat dads still couldn't pay, where did all that new money come from? Simple: In order to claim the federal subsidies, the states started funneling support payments from middle- and upper-class fathers through their systems as well—and using the same harsh collection tactics, even when there was no history or expectation of collection problems. Leslie Frye, chief of California's office of child support, explained the reality of the system in her testimony before Congress in 1997: "My colleagues across the country have already informed me how I can win at this system. Recruit the middle class, bring those higher orders into your system, and that way you'll be able to benefit like some of the other states."

And the collection system has paid off: The State of Georgia, for example, took in \$72 million in matching child-support funds from Washington in 2000. Additionally, the feds reimbursed states two-thirds of each dollar spent on collection costs and overhead—another \$62.4 million for Georgia in

One private firm collected \$5,867 from "deadbeat" dads. In return, the State of Florida paid it \$2.2 million.

2000. The feds also covered the costs of implementing new computer systems to track parents—\$25.8 million for Georgia in the same year.

Whopping figures such as these help explain why the majority of men in America who pay child support now pay it to their state governments, and not to the mothers of their children.

They also help explain how the Golden Valley police cruisers wound up at Mike Beach's cul-de-sac.

On the afternoon of August 9, 2002, Beach came home early from his sales-marketing company in St. Paul, Minnesota. He was meeting a buddy who had tickets for the minor-league Saints game. The doorbell rang. He opened the door expecting his friend. Instead, he saw four police officers at

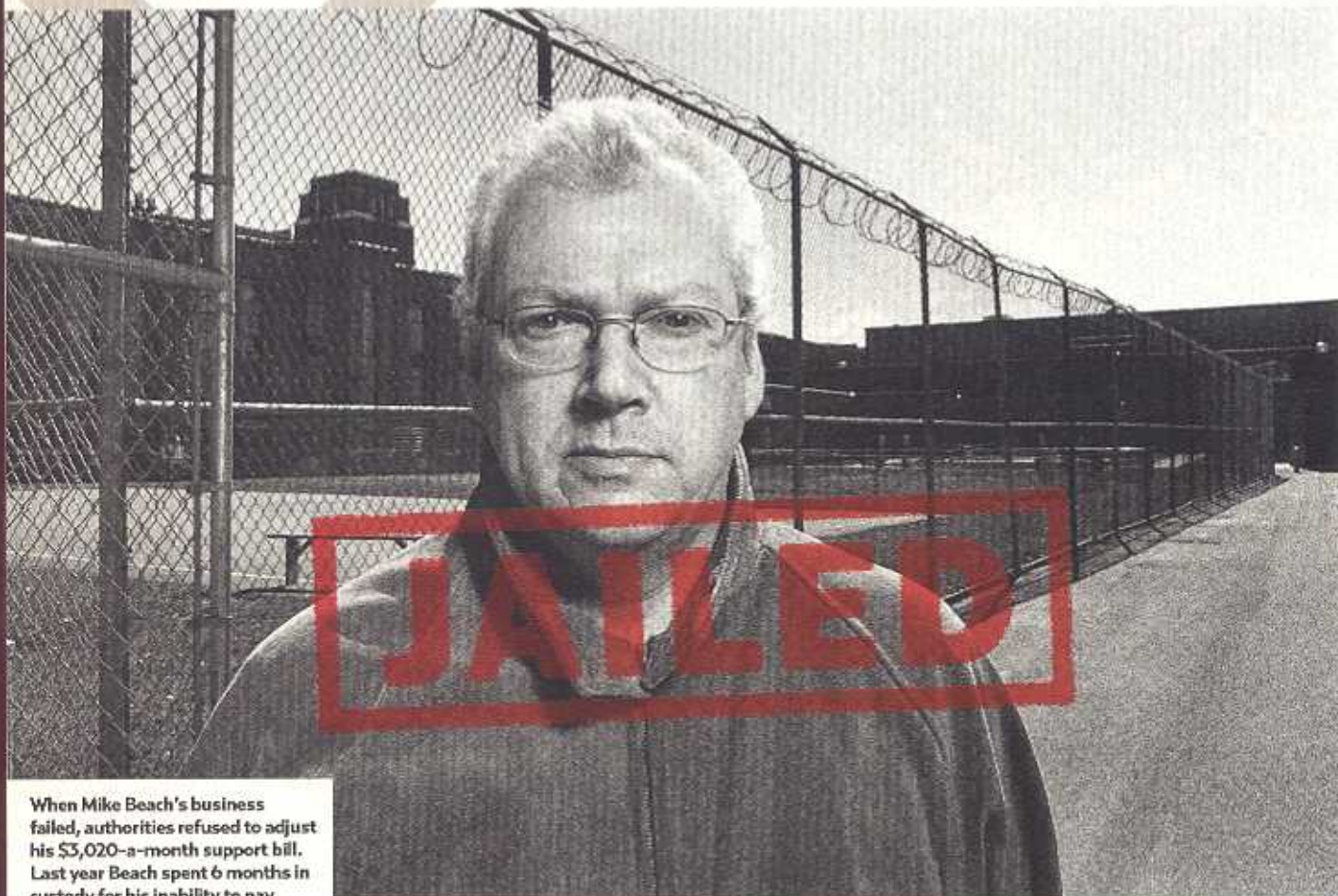
the door and three cruisers in the cul-de-sac where he'd been living for 10 years.

On the way to the police station, the officers didn't have much to say, but as they were booking him, one said, "Forty-two thousand dollars. Sounds like theft."

"Actually, it was pass-through child support," Beach responded.

"Sounds like the same thing to me," the cop shot back.

And that's how it sounded to the legal system and the judge who ruled against Mike Beach time after time, when he petitioned for joint custody, when he asked to have his child-support payments reduced, when he argued against the automatic cost-of-living increases in his support payments, and, eventually, when he was arrested and thrown in jail. "It was as crushing an experience as I've ever faced," Beach says, "to be jailed for



When Mike Beach's business failed, authorities refused to adjust his \$3,020-a-month support bill. Last year Beach spent 6 months in custody for his inability to pay.

not paying bills for children you would rather have in your care."

Beach, 47, had founded a manufacturer's-representative company that brokered major sales with department-store chains. Back in 1996, the company was flourishing, and Beach was bringing in \$130,000 a year. He and his wife built a house in Golden Valley, a posh suburb of Minneapolis, for themselves and their two sons. They vacationed in Vail.

"We were living the good life," he says, "piling up the house, the cars, the debt—the American Dream thing."

But the marriage was falling apart. Counseling failed. Beach filed for divorce in July 1996. After 3 years of litigation, the family-court judges awarded custody of the boys to Beach's ex-wife, and they ordered Beach to pay child support, which he had already started to pay in 1997 after a temporary ruling.

In computing child support, most states use the "income shares" formula, which is based on the combined monthly income of the parents, the number of children, and various monthly costs. Judges plug the numbers into a chart and determine a monthly payment to be made by the parent who does not have custody of the children. Minnesota uses a "percentage of income" model, based solely on the income of the noncustodial parent, or the "obligor."

Using Beach's highest annual income, the judge set his payment at \$1,780, plus \$1,000 a month for private-school tuition, plus \$240 for health-care reimbursements. In addition to the \$3,020 bill, Beach was ordered to pay the lion's share of the couple's debt. The order was handed down in June 1999.

At the same time, Beach says his company lost its primary client, and his income started to sink. In 1999, he had an income of \$50,000, and in 2000, he brought in \$25,040. In 2001, his business lost money, and he showed an adjusted gross income of \$8,900. Beach started to fall behind in paying the child support. According to his records and canceled checks, he did use savings, income, and loans to pay more than \$130,000 to his ex-wife from 1997 through 2002. Nevertheless, he was behind by \$11,595 by early 2001.

Using Minnesota law, Beach applied for a reduction in child-support payments. Instead, Judge John Holahan Jr. held a hearing to determine whether Beach should be held in contempt and thrown in jail. Beach argued that he was broke and brought in tax returns and bank statements to buttress his argument.

"I'm not making enough money to make these payments, let alone anything else," Beach says he told the judge.

Holahan questioned the veracity of Beach's

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Child-Support Survival Guide

You can have a say in your child-support payments—if you understand these rules

BY ROBERT SEIDENBERG

Child support is a hefty, potentially crippling financial obligation that can shadow the larger part of your peak earning years. The child-support guidelines can be excessive because they're a product of politics, not a true assessment of children's needs. You owe it to yourself, and your children, to seek the lowest obligation possible. The more you retain control of your own income, the better you'll be able to care for your children directly.

Make sure you read the statutes for your state and work the calculation yourself so you're sure to get every deduction you can. Online child-support calculators are helpful, but they don't always give the full story. Like lawyers and judges, they tend to do only the "presumptive calculation":

First, a bottom figure is usually established based on the combined gross income of the parents; child-care and medical-insurance expenses are added; then the percentage that you "owe" is determined according to your income ratio. If you and your wife earn exactly the same amount, you have to pay your wife 50 percent of the total obligation; it's assumed that she spends an equal amount on the child. The figure arising from this calculation is presumed to be correct unless rebutted. Most lawyers and judges never go a step further. But there are adjustment factors that can be considered to reduce support, if you bring them to the attention of the court:

1. Ask for shared-parenting credit. Spending more time with your children—what almost every divorced dad wants to do anyway—gives you the biggest reduction possible. In Virginia, for example, with a shared-custody adjustment, a monthly support obligation could be reduced by as much as half,

depending on how much time you spend with your kids. To get this adjustment, you must meet these two criteria: (a) your court order must specify that you have joint custody, and (b) your custody share (visitation schedule) must reach the threshold, which varies by state from 90 to 140 days a year. If your visitation schedule comes to 1 day less than the threshold, you get no credit whatsoever for the time your children spend with you. Be aware: Obtaining joint custody and threshold visitation often can be very difficult.

2. Claim the tax deductions. Exemptions for dependents automatically go to the custodial parent unless negotiated or ordered otherwise. Go for a court order that specifies either that you get the exemptions or that they alternate every year. If you have to litigate this issue, you must argue that you provided more than half the support.

3. Present your business expenses. If you're self-employed, your gross income for purposes of child support may be closer to the net amount on your Schedule C (the amount on which you pay income tax and social-security tax) than to the total revenue of your business. Remarkably, lawyers and judges may overlook this sizable deduction unless you call it to their attention.

Bringing these three factors into the equation can shrink your child-care assessment. Protect yourself further by heeding the following warnings.

1. Don't overwork. You should not be working overtime or have a second job at the time your support obligation is calculated. You'll end up with an obligation based on more than 40 hours' work per week.

2. Beware of out-of-court negotiations. Avoiding litigation is always desirable. However, you can't negotiate as freely as you once could. For example, you can't offer your wife a better property settlement in exchange for lower child support. After the agreement is signed, she could immediately go to court to have child support raised to guideline levels. On the plus side: With a negotiated agreement, things like a second job are more likely to be disregarded.

3. Verify child-care costs. Inflating the cost of child care is a common tactic used to increase child-support assessments. If your ex suddenly transfers your child from a \$150-a-week day care to a \$250-a-week day care, make sure you see the receipts. Also, in most states, child-care expenses are allowed only for the time the mother is working. If Mom works only half-time, she can't claim full-time child-care expenses.

4. Consider a paternity test. If you have any reason to suspect that the child is not yours—especially if you're unmarried and the child lived with you—you should seek a paternity test right away. If you're married, some states say the child is yours even if DNA tests prove otherwise.

Robert Seidenberg is the author of *The Father's Emergency Guide to Divorce-Custody Battle* (IES Books).

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DEADBEAT DADS

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documents in open court and ordered Beach to serve 6 months. A marshal cuffed him and locked him up. But family members came up with the \$11,505 Beach owed, and he was out after 3 days.

Still, his business ventures continued to deteriorate, and his child-support debt continued to mount. His ex-wife sued for contempt again, which led to his arrest last August. This time he couldn't come up with the back payments—\$42,000. He spent 6 months in custody, most of it in a work-release program.

If the judges are right and Mike Beach is the ultimate deadbeat dad, it would mean he chose jail rather than fork over cash that he supposedly has squirreled away. He also would have willingly left his new wife for 6 months. "I may be crazy," he says, "but not that crazy."

Now he's out of jail but still in debt to the system and still trying to make a go of his business ventures.

"I'm not making any money at all right now. Any money I can send, I do. But it's so little, they can put me back in jail anytime."

The equations that determine a

man's child-support obligations in some states aren't all that complicated—if anything, they're simplified beyond reason. They were compiled by Robert Williams, a private research consultant, who was hired by the federal government in the 1980s to help figure out uniform guidelines for establishing child support. First issue: How much is enough? Williams researched the matter and came up with the "income shares" model. He explains it this way: A child should receive the same amount of income from his parents as he would if they still lived together. Based on Bureau of Labor Statistics data, Williams calculated the cost of raising children and then divided it between the parents based on their combined income. When the federal government ordered the states to adopt child-support guidelines, most used this income-shares model.

In 1984, Williams established the firm Policy Studies, Inc., to continue advising federal and state governments. In 1991, when Tennessee became the first state to seek help from a private company to administer its child-support system, PSI was poised to get the contract.

"We became the first in the country," Williams says. His tiny shop grew quickly and now employs 1,000. *Inc.* magazine named it one of the fastest-growing companies in 2000. "We operate 28 offices at the moment," he says.

Williams found himself in the unusual

position of advising one state on how much to charge in child support and then helping them collect the funds. His company not only gets paid to run certain state programs, but in some cases receives a cut of the money it collects.

"He helps states set high guidelines and then gets a percentage of every dollar he collects," says Mike McCormick, director of the American Coalition for Fathers and Children. "I wish I could make rules that way."

"The higher the guidelines, the more they can make," points out R. Mark Rogers, a former Federal Reserve Bank economist in Atlanta who serves on Georgia's commission on child support. "It's an obvious conflict of interest."

Williams disagrees. "Guideline amounts are set by the courts or legislature. Any recommendations we make to the states about their guidelines don't have an impact on the collections. We have recommended that orders should go up in some cases, but we've also recommended reductions. If the states set orders that are outrageously high, they become too hard to collect," he says. "They're shooting themselves in the foot."

Even Williams, the godfather of the child-support system, sees its excesses. It can be "unnecessarily punitive" at low income levels. He says every state should have an adjustment for shared parenting, so that a father would get credit for caring for his children in his own home. Williams included those adjustments as an option in his original model, but most states haven't utilized it. Which means the "deadbeat dads" who devote the most time and resources to their children are the ones who get clobbered the hardest.

Steve Wolfe, 41, is a master machinist.

He makes his living crafting retractor valves for NASA spaceships and makes his home in the Baltimore suburbs with his wife, Ricki, and their son, Cayce, 30. Their working-class community is close to the Chesapeake Bay. There's a small speedboat in their garage. It seems like the perfect family scene, but for one small fact: The Wolfe family is on the verge of bankruptcy because Steve Wolfe is paying child support to the State of Maryland—child support for Cayce.

"It is totally out of whack for me to be paying child support for the son I'm living with," Wolfe says. "It doesn't make sense to anyone but the state collection agency."

A tall, bearish man with gentle eyes, Wolfe fell in love with Ricki Schneider in 1992, and they had Cayce. At first they didn't marry. He and Ricki split up for 2 years, but they got back together and married in late July 1998.

But during the time Steve and Ricki were apart, she went on public assistance. In the eyes of the state, Wolfe has to repay the cost of that period when his son was on public support. Maryland ordered his employer to automatically deduct child support from his wages.

"The state has been taking money from my paycheck for years to pay child support for Cayce," Wolfe says. Worse, the private collection firm hired by the State of Maryland hasn't kept proper track of the money it's garnished from Wolfe. "The more I paid," says Wolfe, "the more I owed." In 1996, Maryland took away Wolfe's driving privileges for failing to make payments, despite the fact that he could produce canceled checks and wage-deduction statements that proved his payments were up-to-date: in 1998, two Baltimore city sheriffs showed up at the factory where he worked, cuffed him, and led him away.

"The company comptroller came out onto the floor and showed the sheriffs my pay stubs that proved I was paid up," Wolfe says. "And they still hauled me off to jail." Like Mike Beach, Wolfe leaned on friends and family to raise funds for his release, but today he's still paying child support for his son. Wolfe would rather be using the money to get a degree in computer-aided design. If the child-support collection system stays on his back, though, he wonders if he and his family can afford to stay in their house another year.

Wolfe's nightmare is unusual, but not an isolated case. Eager to maximize their matching federal funds, many states have outsourced their support-collection process. It has grown into a multimillion-dollar business that operates with the power of the law, but without its oversight. At least 38 companies are now in the business of collecting child-support payments outside the state system. They advertise heavily on the Internet. They promise to track down deadbeat dads. But they also charge an average of 30 percent of what they collect. Critics say that in many cases they're merely processing money that's been collected by the government and skimming off hefty fees.

A few years ago, Florida hired two companies to collect child support from 200,000 deadbeats. According to a report in the *Orlando Sentinel*, Lockheed Martin (yes, the aircraft manufacturer) was assigned 101,325 cases. It closed 37,270 cases and collected \$137,839 in child-support payments, but was paid \$2.2 million for its services. Another major collection firm, Maximus, "got 12 deadbeats to cough up \$5,867," the article said. Maximus was paid \$2.2 million in return. Still, matching federal funds for these programs can make even screwy numbers like these add up for state comptrollers.

"Some [collection programs] are well run; some are black holes," says Teresa Kaiser. A child-support veteran, Kaiser started off as a lawyer specializing in family matters in Washington State and became a hearing officer and then director of child-support offices in Idaho and Missouri, before taking

over Maryland's program 3 years ago.

Kaiser spent much of that time locked in battle with Maximus, the private company the state pays to collect and distribute child-support funds. She charged Maximus with sloppy record keeping, harsh or nonexistent service to clients, inability to close cases, and sitting on money it collects, rather than giving it to the children it's supposed to support. Legislative auditors in Maryland confirmed that Maximus was not distributing funds and not closing cases. They discovered that 94 percent of support collected was undistributed to the children, and Kaiser and Maryland's former governor, Parris Glendening, both worked to block Maximus's contract—a move that was stopped by the state legislature.

"This is a very powerful company," Kaiser says, though she learned just how powerful only in January, when a new governor took office. One of his first official acts: firing Teresa Kaiser.

It's been more than 20 years since

federal and state governments became involved in child-support enforcement matters. Have children been helped or hurt?

For underprivileged children, the system has added little to their welfare or well-being, since most of the money collected from their absent parents has gone to reimburse the government. To the extent that the system has further impoverished their fathers or driven them away from them, it has done damage.

For working-class and middle-class children, the results are mixed. To be sure, the panoply of laws and regulations and collection tools has forced many fathers to pay child support. But critics say it has also had the effect of impoverishing fathers who never chose divorce, of creating a rigid and punitive system of debt collection, and of reducing child rearing to a financial transaction.

"We're focused on the wrong end of the telescope," says David L. Levy, president of the Children's Rights Council, a Washington-based nonprofit firm that advocates joint custody. "The government sees it as a money issue. It's really a shared-parenting issue."

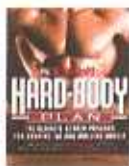
"I did not become child-support director to inflict pain," says Kaiser. "The average child-support worker is troubled when the father is denied access for whatever reason. If the policy hurts people, it's time to change the policy."

People on both sides of the conflict agree that guidelines for the middle class could benefit from three simple, basic changes: first, when families get back together, forgive all child-care payments. Second, base the payment on the noncustodial parent's actual ability to pay, rather than on a standard percentage of income set by a government agency. Third, take into account the amount of time children spend with the parent who's

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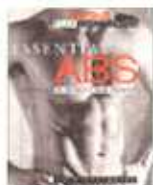
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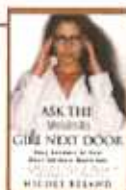
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paying child support. If the child is with that parent 40 percent of the time, should the father—or the mother—be paying 100 percent of the child support?

The most radical approach would be to take the government out of the child-support transaction, except where there's a genuine problem. No foul, no crime. At least let fathers pay directly to their former mates and children.

The changes may occur naturally. High courts are just starting to examine and discover fundamental inequities in the system. Judges in Georgia and Tennessee have recently declared child-support guidelines in their states unconstitutional.

Jim Taylor and his three sons were

having dinner in a Richmond restaurant late one Sunday night last February. Their companion was Chase Shifflett, who had founded the Virginia Family Law Reform Coalition, a nonprofit organization dedicated to raising awareness about child-support laws. Taylor's cell phone rang.

"I'll be right over," he told the caller.

A Virginia state senate committee hearing was taking public testimony on a bill to raise child-support payments. Taylor dropped the boys at his grandmother's house and drove down to the heart of the capital, where he took a place in line to testify before the senators. He approached the microphone and held up his last paycheck.

"It's for \$275.82," he said. "I have a negative balance in my checking account. My sons will come to stay with me throughout this weekend. What resources have been left to meet their needs?"

"If this bill were law right now, my support obligation would increase by \$60. That's gasoline for a month. Gasoline is what I use to get to work. To put food on the table. Without it, the game's over."

A few weeks later (after the senate passed the bill), the house sent it back to a commission for more study, and the guidelines remain the same.

Taylor and Shifflett declared a small victory, but there's a long war ahead.

Taylor says he was despondent and hopeless until he ran into Shifflett. Now Taylor is appealing his case to the Virginia Supreme Court and challenging the validity of the state child-support laws to the U.S. Supreme Court.

He admits that his battle has given him new understanding for the man who abandoned him all those years ago.

"Now I've finally gotten a taste of why my dad ran," he says. "The pressure and self-doubt can be overwhelming." But in the choice between fight and flight, Jim Taylor has decided to stay and slug it out. **MH**

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