HOW CALIFORNIA’S BROKEN CHILD SUPPORT SYSTEM STRIPS WEALTH FROM LOW-INCOME FAMILIES
PANELISTS

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POLICY AREAS FOR REFORM

- San Francisco Fines & Fees Task Force
  - Criminal Justice Fees
  - Child Support Debt
  - Transportation Fines and Fees
  - Quality of Life Citations
  - Driver’s License Suspensions
  - Money Bail
“If my son would see the money, paying child support wouldn’t hurt that much.”

- William, Father of Three
FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES, MANY OF THEIR PAYMENTS DON’T GO TO THEIR CHILDREN

- There is a 1975 federal law that requires single parents enrolling in welfare to sign over their rights to their child support payments to the government.
- Child support payments are then redirected to repay the federal, state and local government for the cost of welfare, rather than going to support their child and their family.
- The federal government has since allowed states to give families 100% of their child support payments. However, California Law requires only the first $50 of the monthly child support payment goes to the family and the rest is directed to federal, state and local government.
A SNAPSHOT OF THE SYSTEM

Parent Applies for Welfare
Parent must (1) help establish paternity, (2) help establish a child support order, and (3) relinquish their child support payments to the government.

Parent Receives Welfare
Child support is collected and distributed: $50 goes to custodial parent, 50% to the federal government, and the remaining 50% is split between the state and counties.

Parent Leaves Welfare
Custodial parent receives all child support payments and any debt owed to them is paid first. Government-owed debt is paid through the interception of federal taxes.
• There is $17 billion in delinquent child support debt. Of that total, 73% is owed to government, not to parents.
• In California, 78% of child support orders are “public,” affecting more than one million children each year.
• Last year, more than 1.2 million children in California had their payments redirected, in accordance with state law.
IF A PARENT DOES NOT MAKE A PAYMENT, CONSEQUENCES QUICKLY SET IN:

- Wages are garnished
- Taxes are intercepted
- Driver’s licenses are suspended
- Passports are suspended
- Charged ten percent compound interest
- Incarcerated
Parents are charged ten percent compound interest.
Parents are incarcerated for failure to pay, even if it is for money owed to the state, not to the family.
THIS SYSTEM HAS A DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT ON:

- Low-income families and children
- People of color
- Formerly and currently incarcerated people.
PANEL DISCUSSION