



The Child Support Enforcement Passport Denial Program

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The [Child Support Enforcement \(CSE\) Passport Denial Program](#) is a mandatory enforcement mechanism that applies to noncustodial parents who owe past-due child support. The program was originally enacted as part of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA; [P.L. 104-193](#)) and was to apply to individuals owing more than \$5,000 in past-due support. Subsequently, the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA; [P.L. 109-171](#)) lowered this threshold to \$2,500. As implemented, the program prevents individuals that meet the arrears criteria from obtaining or renewing a passport, and it can also revoke passports under certain circumstances.

Overview of the Passport Denial Program

All 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and 63 tribal nations [operate CSE programs](#) pursuant to [Title IV-D of the Social Security Act](#) (this report collectively refers to these as “state” CSE programs). The program is federally administered by the [Office of Child Support Enforcement \(OCSE\)](#) in the [Administration for Children and Families](#) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The program is estimated to handle [the majority of all child support cases](#); the remaining cases are handled by private attorneys and collection agencies, or through mutual agreements between parents. In FY2024, the program served [11.6 million cases](#) and collected an estimated [\\$26.7 billion in child support](#), of which [\\$7.5 billion](#) was for obligations that were past-due. The amount of arrears paid were about 6% of the [\\$115.7 billion](#) in cumulative arrears owed to cases enforced by the program. [Title IV-D stipulates](#) that child support collected on behalf of families receiving certain forms of public assistance be retained by the state to reimburse it and the federal government for the cost of that assistance; the rest is distributed to families.

One of the [enforcement methods](#) available to the CSE program for collecting past-due support is denying, revoking, or limiting passports pursuant to [Section 452\(k\) of the Social Security Act \(SSA\)](#). Since the inception of the CSE Passport Denial Program, combined collections due to this enforcement method have been [nearly \\$621 million, with \\$30 million in 2024](#).

Passport denial occurs as part of the [Federal Collections and Enforcement Program](#), and operates through a partnership between state CSE programs, OCSE, and the Department of State (DOS, the federal agency [in which Congress has vested authority](#) to issue and revoke passports). State CSE programs identify and

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certify cases with past-due support that exceed the \$2,500 arrears threshold, [inform the obligors on those cases](#), and submit them to OCSE. OCSE forwards these obligors to DOS for inclusion in the [Consular Lookout Support System \(CLASS\)](#) to facilitate passport denial.

A child support obligor is automatically removed from passport denial once they have paid all their arrears. If they owe arrears on more than one case, they must have paid arrears on all such cases. A state CSE program also may choose to exempt an individual from passport denial (e.g., when arrears have dropped below a certain amount but are not fully paid). [OCSE urges](#) state programs to exercise caution when exempting individuals from this child support sanction, as passports are valid for 5 or 10 years and only can be revoked in limited circumstances.

Passport Sanctions and Emergency Situations

[Prior](#) to issuing an individual a new passport, DOS verifies that they are entitled to one (e.g., they are a U.S. citizen) and checks them against the CLASS system. An individual the CLASS system identifies as owing past-due child support in an amount exceeding \$2,500 is denied a passport. DOS informs that individual and holds their passport application for [90 days](#) to allow the arrears to be paid. If the individual is [released from passport denial](#) within that time frame, their passport application can be processed.

For individuals subject to passport denial who were previously issued a passport, their passports can only be revoked when DOS has physical possession of it and has searched CLASS for a match against the system. Circumstances that trigger revocation include

- renewing an existing passport,
- adding pages to an existing passport,
- repairing/reissuing a damaged passport,
- changing a name or updating a picture, and
- acceptance by DOS (e.g., at a consulate) of an existing passport as proof of identification.

If an individual is abroad when their passport expires or is revoked, DOS regulations allow that individual to be issued a passport for direct return to the United States ([22 C.F.R. §51.60](#)). In addition, state CSE programs at their discretion can allow emergency releases from the Passport Denial Program. [Recent OCSE guidance](#) indicates that emergency releases can be for circumstances that include immediate family emergencies and administrative errors (e.g., a person was erroneously submitted for passport denial).

Recent Developments

On January 14, 2026, H.R. 6903 was [ordered to be reported](#), in the nature of a substitute, by the House Ways and Means Committee (40-2). The bill would amend [Section 452\(k\) of the SSA](#) to clarify that passport revocation is a mandatory enforcement remedy and that temporary passports can be issued in emergency situations (similar to what exists for other revocation statutes). In effect, it appears that these changes would more closely align statutory requirements with how the Passport Denial Program has been implemented by HHS and DOS. [CBO estimates](#) that the bill as ordered to be reported would have no significant budgetary effects if enacted. No further congressional action has occurred as of the date of this Insight.

In addition, recent media reports suggest that HHS and DOS intend to expand their capabilities within the Passport Denial Program to revoke unexpired passports even when not in the physical possession of DOS. However, no new policies or procedures have been announced by HHS or DOS as of the date of this Insight.

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