Child Support

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Overview

Child support calculations in Massachusetts follow the 2025 Child Support Guidelines, which produce a presumptive support amount based on both parents' incomes. Most parents assume that the number is final. It is not. The guidelines allow for deviation when specific circumstances warrant it, and parents who fail to understand those factors routinely overpay or leave money on the table.

Paternity adds a separate layer of complexity. For unmarried parents, no legal parent-child relationship exists with the father until paternity is formally established, either through a voluntary acknowledgment or a court adjudication. Until that step is completed, a father has no enforceable rights to custody or parenting time, and a child has no legal claim to the father's benefits, inheritance, or support.

Our child support attorneys represent parents on both sides of these matters throughout Massachusetts and Rhode Island, focusing on the financial details that determine outcomes.

How We Help With Child Support and Paternity

Our family law attorneys handle child support and paternity matters from filing through enforcement, including:

Child support calculations under the 2025 Massachusetts Guidelines

We analyze both parents' gross incomes, health insurance costs, childcare expenses, and other factors to determine the presumptive support amount and identify whether deviation is appropriate. Either parent may owe support depending on income and parenting time allocation.

Paternity establishment

We guide clients through voluntary acknowledgment of parentage and represent parents in contested proceedings requiring genetic testing (paternity test) and court adjudication.

Deviation arguments

The guidelines permit deviation based on factors including extraordinary medical expenses, educational costs, and the standard of living the child would have enjoyed if the family remained intact. We build deviation cases with documentation and financial analysis.

DOR enforcement and contempt

When a parent fails to pay court-ordered support, the Department of Revenue can initiate enforcement actions including wage garnishment, license suspension, and tax intercept. We represent parents facing DOR involvement and those seeking enforcement of existing orders.

Rights flowing from paternity

Establishing paternity unlocks a father's rights to custody and parenting time, and secures the

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child's right to inheritance, health insurance, and Social Security benefits. A father's rights attorney who understands the paternity process and support guidelines can protect these interests early.

Why Families Choose Cohen Cleary

At Cohen Cleary, our practice teams combine deep subject-matter experience with disciplined execution and responsive client service. We do not take a one-size-fits-all approach. Every matter is handled with careful preparation, clear communication, and a strategy tailored to the client's goals and the realities of the forum.

Clients choose Cohen Cleary because we deliver:

Practice-Focused Legal Experience

Our attorneys work in defined practice areas, allowing us to develop practical insight into the legal, procedural, and regulatory nuances that matter most in each case. This focus allows us to anticipate issues, avoid unnecessary delays, and position matters for efficient resolution.

Clear Guidance and Proactive Communication

We prioritize clarity at every stage. Clients receive straightforward explanations of their options, timely updates on developments, and practical advice grounded in real-world outcomes.

Strategic Advocacy with Trial Readiness

Whether a matter calls for negotiation, mediation, or litigation, our attorneys prepare every case with discipline and foresight. We pursue efficient resolution when possible and are fully prepared to advocate aggressively when necessary to protect our clients' interests.

Regional Knowledge and Local Presence

With offices throughout Massachusetts and experience across New England courts and agencies, we bring local insight and regional reach to every matter.

Client-Centered Service

We treat every matter with urgency and respect. Our clients rely on us for responsive service, sound judgment, and steady counsel through complex legal challenges.

In our Family Law work, this approach helps clients navigate child support and paternity matters with clarity, efficiency, and confidence.

Our Approach to Child Support and Paternity Matters

We tell our clients that the guidelines worksheet is a starting point, not an endpoint. The 2025 Massachusetts Child Support Guidelines use an income shares model that calculates support based on both parents' combined gross incomes, apportioned by each parent's share. But the worksheet does not capture every relevant factor. We prepare detailed financial analyses that account for parenting time allocations, health insurance and childcare cost-sharing, and the specific deviation factors the Probate and Family Court evaluates when a parent requests departure from the presumptive amount. A parent with significantly more overnight parenting time may have grounds for an adjustment the base calculation does not reflect.

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Representing Parents Across Massachusetts and Rhode Island

Cohen Cleary represents parents in child support and paternity proceedings in Probate and Family Courts throughout Massachusetts and Rhode Island. In Massachusetts, our attorneys appear regularly in Bristol County, Plymouth County, and Norfolk County courts, where familiarity with local filing procedures and judicial expectations allows us to prepare cases efficiently. We also handle matters involving the Department of Revenue's Child Support Enforcement Division. In Rhode Island, we represent parents in Family Court support and paternity proceedings, including cases requiring coordination across state lines. With offices in Taunton and Plymouth, we serve clients across southeastern Massachusetts, with capacity to serve clients throughout New England.

Contact Our Massachusetts Child Support Attorneys

If you need a child support lawyer or an attorney to establish paternity, contact Cohen Cleary to schedule a consultation. Our family law attorneys will evaluate your situation, explain your options under current guidelines, and develop a strategy tailored to your circumstances.

Frequently Asked Questions About Child Support and Paternity

How is child support calculated in Massachusetts?

Massachusetts uses the 2025 Child Support Guidelines, an income shares model that calculates a presumptive support amount based on both parents' combined gross incomes. The calculation factors in health insurance premiums, childcare costs, dental and vision insurance, and the number of children. The court applies the guidelines presumptively but may deviate when circumstances justify it, including extraordinary expenses, the child's standard of living prior to separation, or parenting time arrangements that differ from the guidelines' assumptions. Use our calculators to estimate child support obligations under Massachusetts law.

What is the difference between voluntary acknowledgment and court adjudication of paternity?

A voluntary acknowledgment of parentage is a form both parents sign, typically at the hospital after birth, that legally establishes the father's paternity without court involvement. Once filed with the Registry of Vital Records, it carries the same legal weight as a court adjudication. If either parent disputes paternity, the matter proceeds through the Probate and Family Court, where the court can order genetic testing. A father who signs a voluntary acknowledgment has a limited rescission window of 60 days, absent fraud.

Does child support end when my child turns 18?

Not necessarily. In Massachusetts, child support may continue until the child turns 23 if the child is dependent on a parent and enrolled in an educational program. Support terminates at age 18 only if the child is not enrolled in an educational institution and is no longer dependent. The court retains authority to resolve disputes over termination.

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What role does the Department of Revenue play in child support?

The DOR Child Support Enforcement Division can establish, enforce, and modify child support orders. DOR involvement often begins when a custodial parent applies for services or receives public benefits. Enforcement tools include wage garnishment, interception of tax refunds, license suspension, and reporting to credit agencies. Parents who receive a DOR notice should seek counsel promptly, because DOR proceedings move on administrative timelines that do not wait for a parent to retain an attorney.

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