



Judicial Council of Georgia

Administrative Office of the Courts

Chief Justice Michael P. Boggs

Chair

Cynthia H. Clanton

Director

Memorandum

TO: Elaine Johnson, Executive Program Manager, Judicial Council, Administrative Office of the Courts

FROM: Andres Bosque, Research Analyst I, Judicial Council, Administrative Office of the Courts

RE: Parental Accountability Court Evaluation 3, for the Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Child Support Services (DCSS)

DATE: August 10, 2023

INTRODUCTION

The Parental Accountability Court (PAC) program aims to address the underlying issues that lead non-custodial parents (NCPs) to consistently fail to meet their child support obligations. Initially piloted in Carroll County and Coweta County in 2009 and 2010 respectively, Georgia's PAC programs have expanded, and there are currently 43 active programs. This evaluation serves as a follow-up to the 2021 evaluation conducted by the Administrative Office of the Courts, which focused on six PAC programs. For this evaluation, six programs have been chosen, and its objective is to assess whether participants in these selected programs experienced an increase in child support payments after joining PAC, benefited from available resources and court interactions, and to evaluate the extent to which the PAC database collects both useful and up-to-date information.

The data set discussed here was extracted from six programs in the Child Support PAC database and matched with payment data from the Division of Child Support Services database and furnished to staff of the Child Support Collaborative Project housed at the AOC. Any subsequent payment history updates to the database will not be reflected in this evaluation. Six PAC programs from these circuits have been selected for this evaluation based on years of operation and the ability to provide quality data: Atlanta

Judicial Circuit, Dublin Judicial Circuit, Gwinnett Judicial Circuit, Mountain Judicial Circuit, Pataula Judicial Circuit, and the Rockdale Judicial Circuit. These six programs offered sufficient continuous years of operation and sufficient numbers of participants and graduates of the program to warrant inclusion in the evaluation.

The sample includes participants from six programs with start dates between January 2016 and December 2019. These dates ensure that at least one year of post-program payment data is available for the 387 program participants. There are two categories and the 387 participants are classified as follows: 91 graduates (NCPs who entered a program and successfully completed the program), 296 removed participants (NCPs who entered a program but did not meet the requirements for graduation and did not complete the program). Additionally, data was collected from 153 NCPs removed in referral status (NCPs referred to the six programs but did not enter or become active in a program). NCPs who entered and became active in a program, namely graduates, and removed participants, will hereafter be referred to as “participants,” while those who were removed in referral status will be referred to as “referrals.”

DATA COLLECTED

- **Payment summaries** - Payment amounts for both participants and referrals beginning 12 months before entering a program, payment amounts during program participation, and payment amounts during the 12 months after leaving a program are being analyzed.
- **Services** - records from the PAC database show services provided to each participant from the six selected programs. These services are intended to help address the root causes of chronic nonpayment and can include resume assistance, GED classes, referrals to employment programs, ID/License assistance, referrals to counseling, and access and visitation mediation, among others.
- **Participant Characteristics** - The PAC database captures personal information for each participant, including, but not limited to, age, education history, employment history, income, monthly support obligation amount, monthly arrears amount, and housing information.

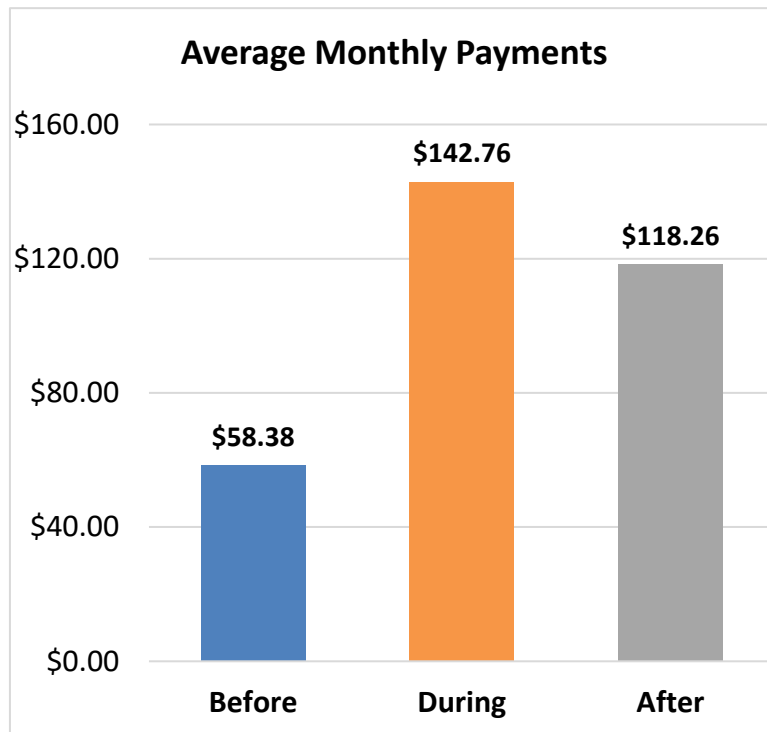
LIMITATIONS

- This evaluation provides a snapshot of participants’ performance in six specific programs.¹
- It should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic, and its potential impact on payment amounts, may have affected payment data for participants and referrals before, during, and after program participation. As such, any conclusions or decisions based solely on this analysis should be made with caution, taking into account the broader context and potential COVID-19-related influences on the payment amounts.

¹ Parental Accountability Courts are in operation in 43 judicial circuits across the state.

- The current database tracks changes in participant characteristics related to education, employment, income, housing status, and other areas of interest as they go through the program. However, it was unable to capture this information for participants who were active during the timeframe of this report. The database has been modified to capture this information, and future reports will document these changes, providing a “before and after” snapshot of each participant.
- The payment data provided by DCSS included Arrears & Interest payment summaries. These summaries did not contain payment source codes. Having payment source codes would be beneficial in identifying payments received through income withholding and determining if they were related to employment.
- The database currently does not capture the arrears balance for each participant at the time of entry into the program or departure from the program. Showing compliance of support order amounts and reductions in arrears amounts would show whether participants meet their payment obligations.
- Regional economic conditions, such as concentrated poverty at the local level and the number of job opportunities available, potentially play an important role in the effectiveness of PAC programs. This analysis does not account for those factors.

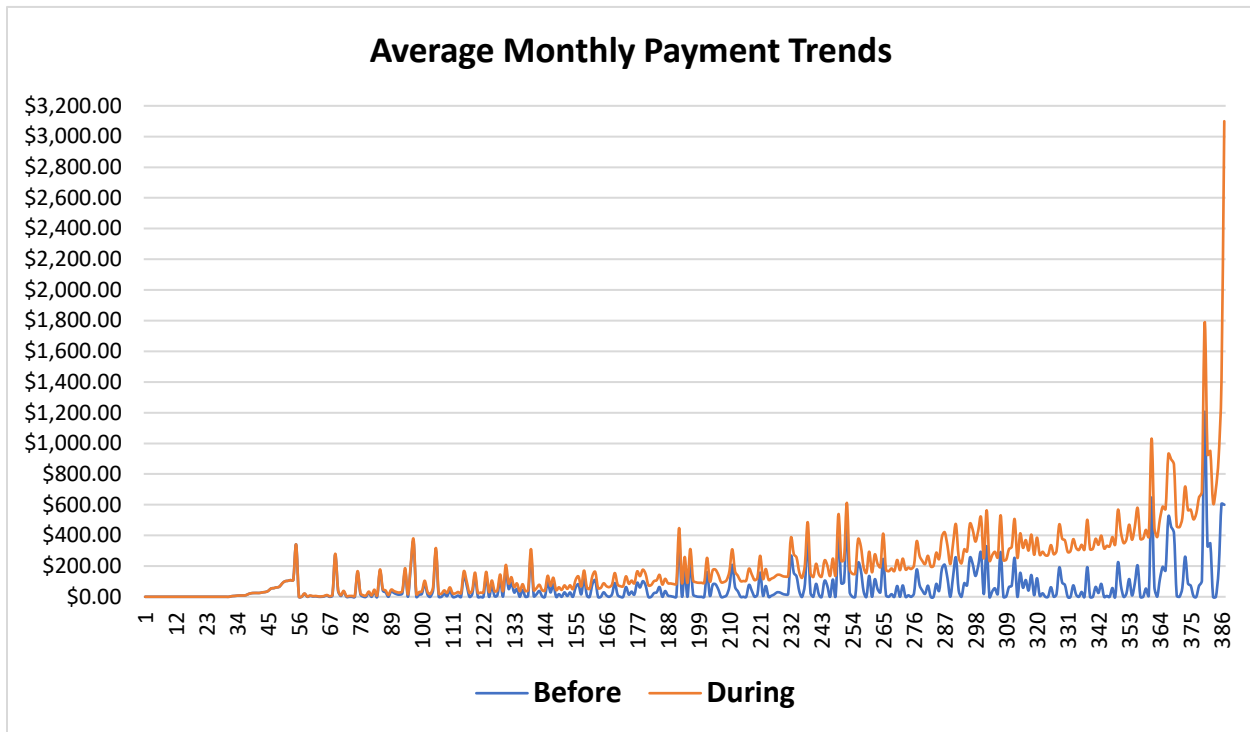
ANALYSIS



AVERAGE PAYMENTS

- Data was collected from 387 program participants across six selected programs to analyze the monthly payment amounts before, during, and after their participation in the program.
- After joining a PAC program, participants increased the average amount of child support payments on a monthly basis by 144%.
- The average monthly payment amount for all participants during a PAC program was \$142.76.

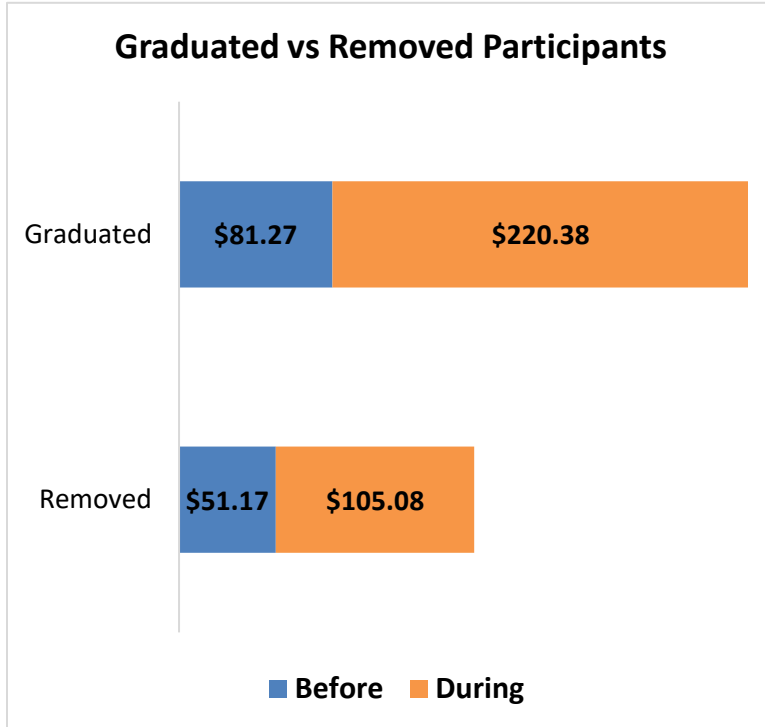
PAYMENT TRENDS



- The line chart above illustrates each participant’s cumulative average monthly child support payment amounts. It provides a comparison between the 12-month period before their enrollment in a PAC program and the average monthly payments after participants became active in a PAC program. Each line in the chart represents the fluctuations or changes in payment data for each individual participant.²
- The upward trend observed during program participation suggests that being involved in a PAC program resulted in higher payment amounts when compared to before participants joined a PAC program.
- Of the 387 program participants, 100 participants (25.8%) decreased the average monthly child support payment after becoming active in PAC.³
- Thirty-one (31) participants did not make any payments in the 12 months before joining a PAC program and did not make any payments while active in a PAC program.
- The remaining 256 participants increased their average monthly child support payment amount after entering a PAC program.

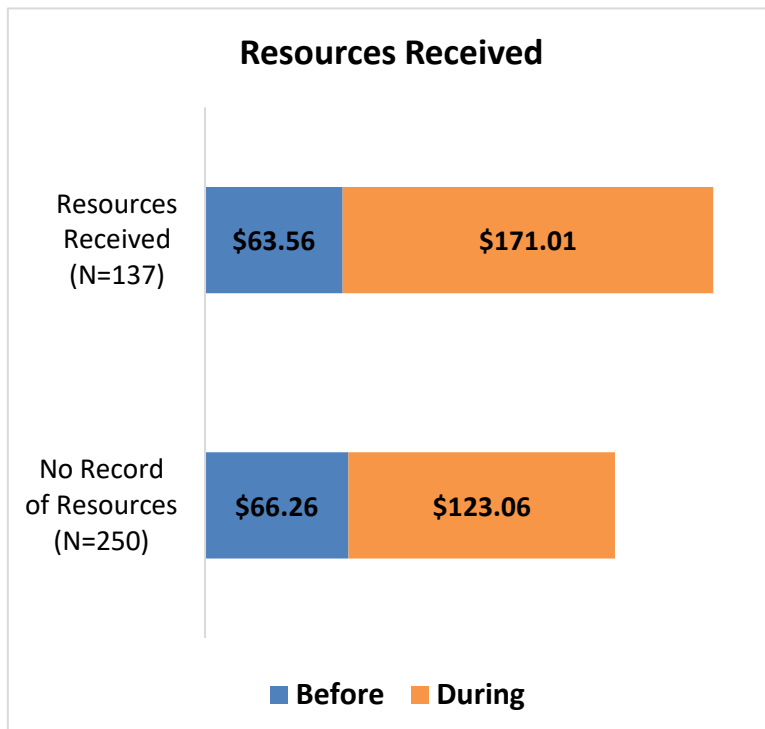
² Two monthly child support payment amount outliers should be taken into consideration when analyzing this data.

³ This data includes case closures, incarcerations, and modifications of orders, which could explain the decrease in payments.



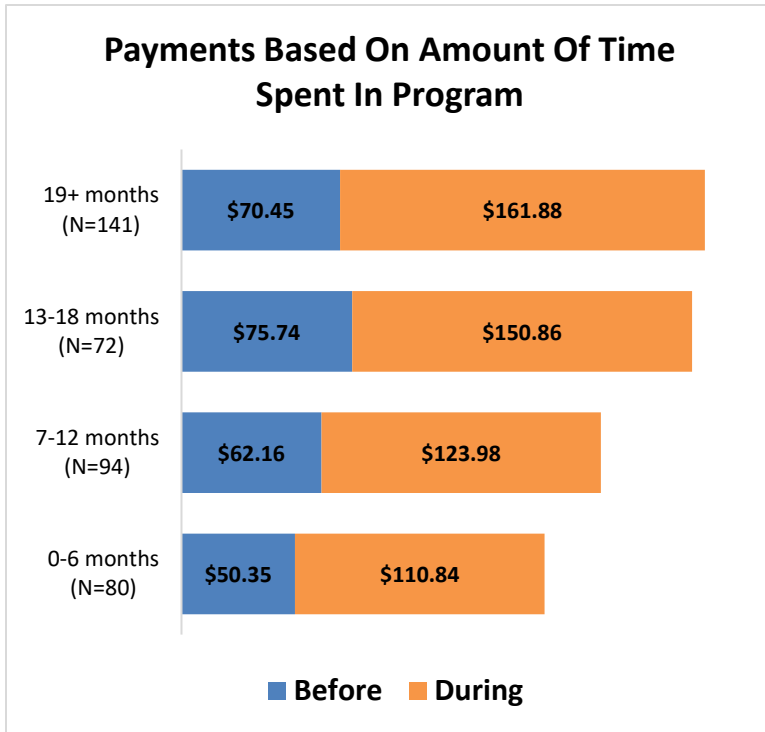
COMPARING GRADUATES AND REMOVED PARTICIPANTS

- On average, participants who graduated from the program started with higher monthly payments compared to those who did not graduate.
- After becoming active in a PAC program, both graduated and removed participants experienced an increase in their average monthly payment amount. Though, the increase was more significant among graduates.



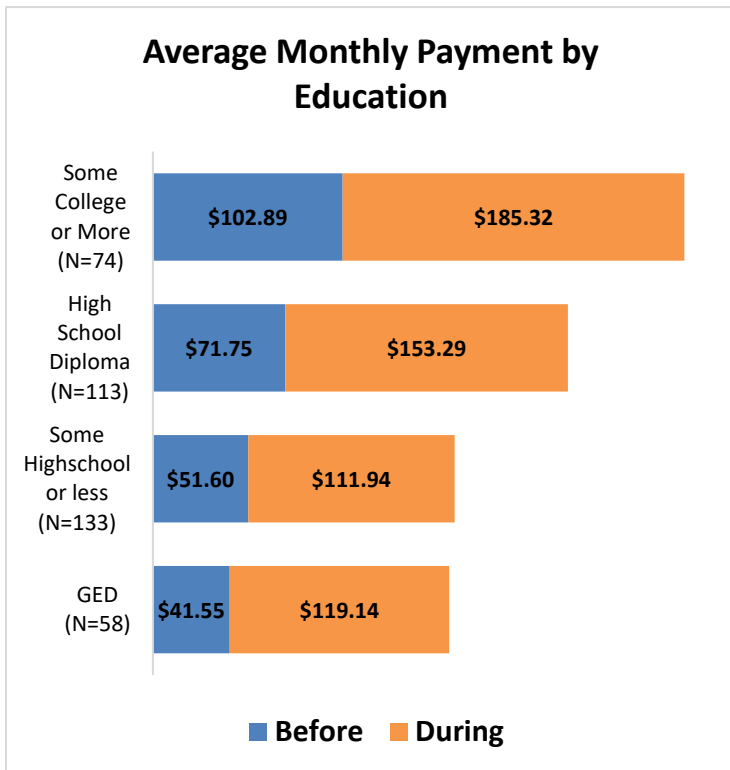
RESOURCES RECEIVED

- The PAC database tracks community resources provided to each participant. Resources provided typically include referrals to local clothing programs, resume assistance, job search assistance, assistance acquiring transportation, etc.
- Of the 387 program participants, 137 were reported to have received at least one resource provided by PAC programs. The remaining 250 participants had no record of any resources provided by PAC programs.



LENGTH OF TIME IN PROGRAM

- The chart on the left groups participants by the number of months in between program start date and the program exit date.
- The average participant spent 19.3 months in the program.
- After joining a PAC program, all groups experienced higher monthly payments on average. The increase was larger for participants who spent more time in the the program.

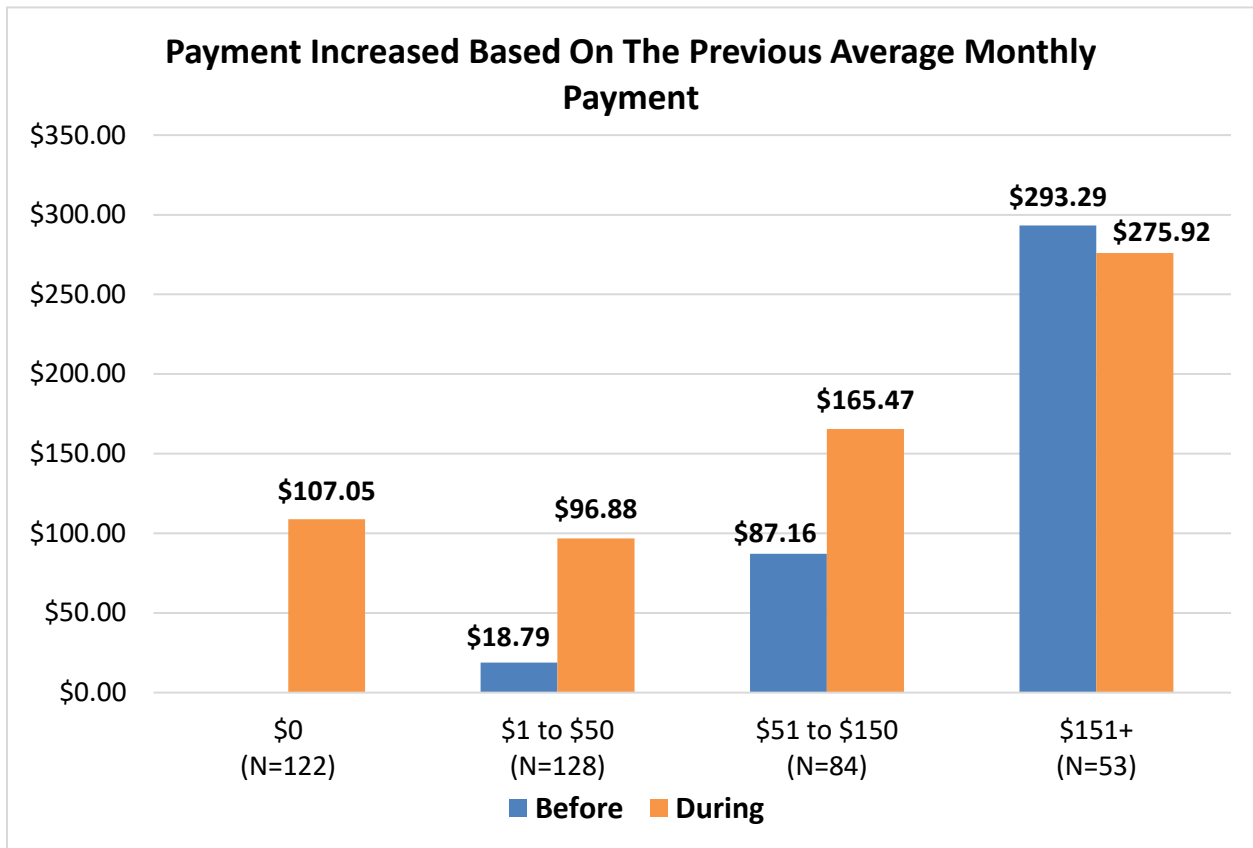


PAYMENT BY EDUCATION LEVEL

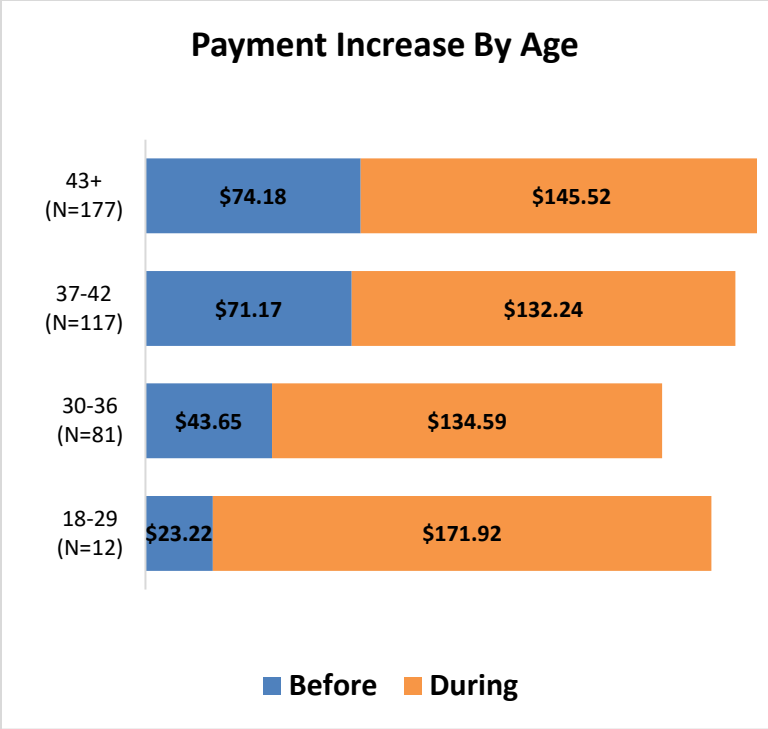
- The chart to the left compares average monthly child support payments by education level.
- The largest group was “Some high school or less.”
- The average monthly child support payment level increased for all education groups, with a positive correlation observed between the increase in higher levels of education.⁴

⁴ Education was unavailable for 9 participants

PAYMENTS BY INCOMING MONTHLY AVERAGE

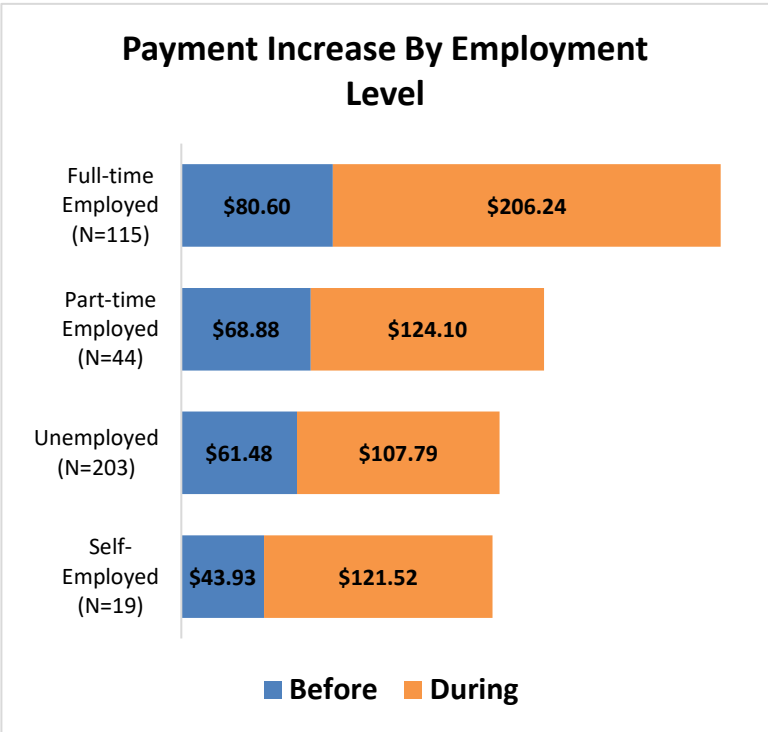


- The chart displayed above categorizes participants based on their average monthly payments in the 12 months prior to entering the program.
- In the 12 months before joining the program, the average monthly payment amount for all participants was \$58.38. See the “Average Monthly Payments” chart on page 3 of this report.
- Participants in all payment groups, except for those in the \$151+ payment group, experienced an increase in their average monthly payments after becoming active in a PAC program.
- Based on average monthly payments in the 12 months prior to entering the program, the average monthly payment amount for these participants after entering a PAC program was \$139.49.



PAYMENT BY AGE

- The chart to the left compares child support payment levels among different participant age groups.⁵
- The average age (at the time of program acceptance) was 42 years old.
- Among all participants, the 18-29 age group had the highest average payments for child support.



PAYMENT BY EMPLOYMENT LEVEL

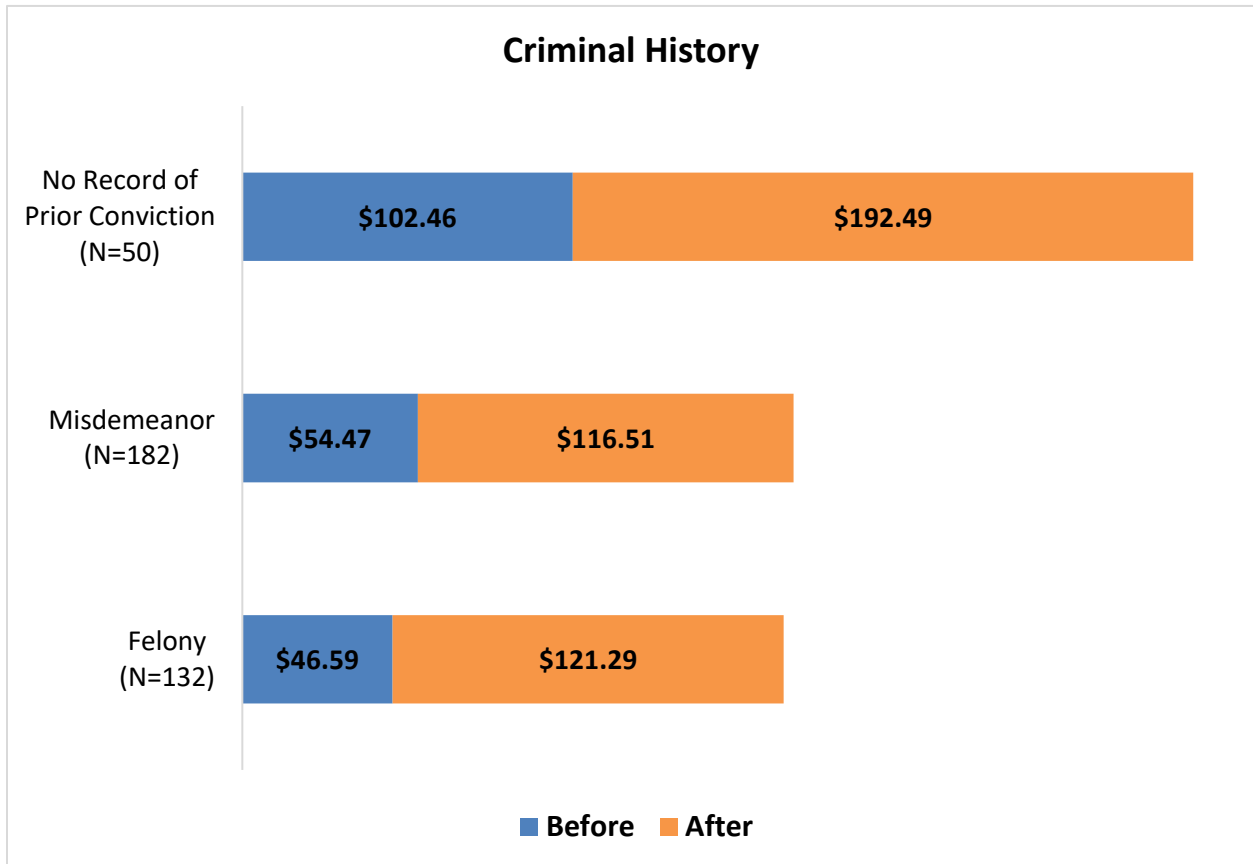
- The chart to the left compares average monthly child support payments among participants at different employment levels.⁶
- While all employment groups experienced an increase in child support payments after joining PAC, employed participants averaged higher monthly payments.⁷

⁵ Age data was unavailable for 4 participants.

⁶ Employment data was unavailable for 6 participants.

⁷ Some participants may have changed their employment status after joining the program, and the information in the database might not accurately reflect these employment status changes.h

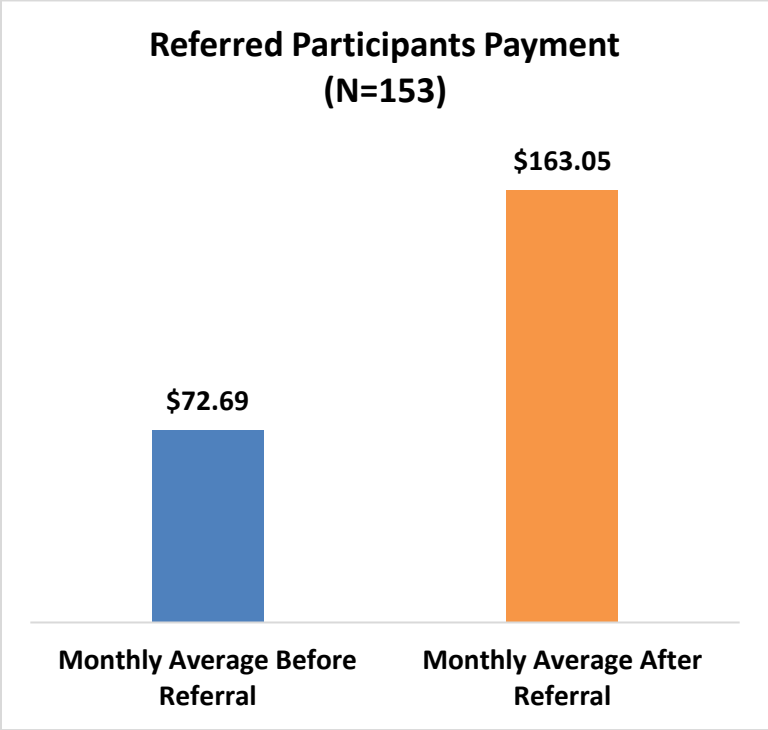
CRIMINAL HISTORY



- The PAC database includes information on participants' criminal history, indicating whether they have previously been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor.⁸
- The chart above compares increases in average monthly child support payments among participants with different criminal histories.
- All groups increased the amount of average monthly child support payments. This increase was higher for participants with no record of prior convictions.⁹
- Participants with felony convictions had higher average child support payments in comparison to participants with misdemeanor convictions after leaving PAC.
- Of the 387 program participants, 81% of participants had prior felony or misdemeanor convictions.

⁸ The database does not distinguish between individuals with exclusively felony convictions and misdemeanor convictions.

⁹ Criminal history was unavailable for 33 participants.



REFERRALS PAYMENT COMPARISON

- The data set also contains payment summaries for 153 NCP’s who were referred to PAC programs, but who did not participate in a PAC program.
- The chart displays the average monthly payment amount for individuals referred to the program, both 12 months before and 12 months after their referral date.
- Following their referral to a PAC program, participants increased average monthly payments by 124.3%.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- After becoming active in PAC, participants in the six selected circuits experienced an increase in the average monthly child support payments. On average, graduated participants saw a 171% increase in their monthly child support payments, while removed participants experienced a 105% increase in their monthly child support payments. Graduates increased payments at a higher rate than removed participants.
- Of the 387 program participants included in the analysis, 256 increased their average monthly payment after becoming active in a program, while 100 averaged less in monthly payments after entering a program. The remaining 31 participants continued to average \$0 in monthly payments after joining the program.
- Participants who remained in the program for longer durations experienced greater increases in their monthly child support payments. Individuals who participated for six months or less demonstrated the lowest average monthly payment increases, whereas those who stayed in the program for 18 months or more experienced higher and more consistent payment increases over time.
- In this sample, participants with higher levels of education experienced a greater rate of payment increases compared to those who did not complete high school or had no available education information. On average, participants with a High School Diploma saw a 113% increase, while participants with GED's saw a 187% increase in their monthly child support payments.
- Among all the participant groups, those who were employed showed a higher level of success in increasing their average monthly child support payments compared to those who were unemployed.
- Participants with prior felony or misdemeanor convictions were less successful than those with no record of prior convictions in increasing the monthly amount of child support payments.
- Referrals also showed increases in average monthly child support payments. Collecting more information on referral cases could improve this analysis.
- 153 of the Referred participants did not give a reason for why they did not want to participate in a PAC program.
- Interacting with a PAC program appeared to correlate strongly with an increase in the average monthly child support payment for both participants and referrals.
- On average, there was a 17% decrease in child support payments after participants left the program. Out of the 387 participants, 89 terminated participants averaged \$0 in monthly payments after leaving the program. Collecting more information after a participant's departure from the program could improve this analysis.

PROGRAM TESTIMONIALS

The Parental Accountability Court has had a tremendous and positive impact on the lives of the participants who were willing to join the program and ultimately achieve their goal of graduation from the program. The judges and coordinators have provided support and guidance to the participants as the participants learned and grew through their experiences and diligent work. One of the participants has chosen to share his thoughts on the program from his perspective. And a few of the coordinators have chosen to share their experiences with the participants as well. The stories below are a testament to the leadership of the judges and coordinators involved in the Parental Accountability Court program. They are also a testament to the hard work of the participants who were eager and willing to become a more stable presence in the lives of their children, who have chosen now to provide financial support for their children, and who, perhaps for the first time, have now established lifelong relationships with their children. We are pleased to include these reflections in this evaluation report.

Atlanta Judicial Circuit PAC
Judge Chris Brasher
Comments written by Keera Freeman

Mr. Harold joined the PAC program in July of 2016. He previously went almost a full year without paying towards his case. He was able to obtain full time employment that helped him pay off his arrears balance owed on the case. With Mr. Harold's participation in the program, he never missed another payment until his case closed in late 2022. Mr. Harold was able to receive different resources from the PAC program including employment references from the Department of Labor. He used his time in the program to better himself, which is why he was able to graduate in the recommended 18 months.

Dublin Judicial Circuit PAC
Judge Donald Gillis
Comments written by Keldrick Wright

Ms. Roxann joined the PAC program in 2016. Before joining the PAC program Ms. Roxann was faced with several barriers such as education, lack of adequate housing, and lack of access to childcare. After enrolling in the PAC program Ms. Roxann worked with the PAC coordinator to develop a plan to overcome each of her barriers. The first barrier that Ms. Roxann worked to overcome was her education. Within 6 months of joining the PAC program, Ms. Roxann obtained her GED and focused on setting new goals. After obtaining her GED Ms. Roxann worked diligently to obtain her CNA license and became gainfully employed as a CNA. Overcoming her educational barriers and becoming gainfully employed, provided Ms. Roxann with the tools needed to overcome her remaining barriers of childcare and adequate housing. At the time of her graduation from the PAC program, Ms. Roxann was employed full time as a CNA, which allowed her to fully meet her child support obligations. When asked about the PAC program, Ms. Roxann stated, "The program helped me figure everything out and helped me reach my goals. I give the program a 10 out of 10". Ms. Roxann is one of many examples of how working with the PAC program can produce positive results for the families we serve at DCSS.

Gwinnett Judicial Circuit PAC
Judge Angela Duncan
Comments written by Sharmaine Butler

The definition of success has a different meaning to each person, some people define it through work status and others by the amount of money they make. In this success story it is defined by one man's determination, hard work and learning from failure. Back in March 2017, Mr. Aaron was found to be in contempt of court, at which time the Judge referred him to the Parental Accountability Court Program. He was later enrolled into PAC on May 31, 2017. Shortly after enrolling into PAC, he began making smaller payments on a weekly basis. Mr. Aaron was referred to Goodwill Career Center, Department of Labor, and several temp agencies. In the beginning, he struggled with making his payments and checking in with the PAC Coordinator. As time went on, he showed great improvement with communicating his barriers. He successfully completed his registration and training with both community-based organizations and began working. Despite losing his first job, home and means of transportation, he was determined to steer the course. He moved in with his brother and took a job working at the same factory so he could catch a ride to and from work. By the winter of February 2018, Mr. Aaron was gainfully employed full-time with the Rooms to Go Distribution Center. His child support payments were collected via wage withholding. Upon his success, Mr. Aaron graduated from the PAC program January 31, 2019, paying a total of \$3500 while enrolled in the program.