

The \$154 Billion Man

The Economic Argument
for Investing in Fathers



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Executive Summary

This report updates a previously published analysis by National Fatherhood Initiative® (NFI) of expenditures for father-absent households in 14 major federal government assistance programs in 2006. It also improves the reliability of the 2006 data and compares 2006 patterns with expenditures for these same 14 government assistance programs in 2018.

At both timepoints, we use total program expenditures drawn from the federal budget and generate estimates of expenditures for households in which a biological, step, or adoptive father does not live (i.e., father-absent households) based on the percentage of single mother-headed households receiving benefits. These estimates come from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), which provides information on family structure and enables us to differentiate among married households and single mother-headed households comprised of those who never married, those who are separated or divorced, and those who are widowed. Due to temporary expansion and subsequent reversal in federal spending for government assistance programs in response to the COVID-19 epidemic, our study does not consider expenditures after 2018. Nor does our study address changes to government assistance programs that are expected due to the July 2025 passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill (OB BB), the Trump Administration's Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Discretionary Budget Request, and other federal directives.

In 2018, as in 2006, the drivers of father absence continued to be the decrease in rates of marriage and the stunning growth in nonmarital births. One of the key consequences of these trends is family poverty. With 23.3 percent of single-mother households living at or below the poverty threshold, as compared with 6.9 percent of married-couple households, single-mother households are larger users of government assistance programs. Research shows that in 2012, 50 percent of single-mother households participated in at least one government assistance program per month compared with 14.7 percent of married-couple households. And although single mother-headed households led by never-married mothers were more likely to use government benefit programs

than their separated or divorced or widowed counterparts, all three types of single mother-headed households received a variety of food, tax, and medical benefits in proportion to their incidence in the SIPP sample.

Our analysis found that federal expenditures in 2018 for 14 major government assistance programs for single mother-headed households totaled \$154.2 billion. This represents a 54.5 percent increase in real dollar expenditures over the nearly \$100 billion estimate for the same 14 government assistance programs in 2006. Despite the increase, the expenditures we document underestimate the total cost of father absence to the nation and represent only 30.8 percent of the \$500 billion per year that the federal government is estimated to spend on programs to reduce childhood poverty. Although we do not address it in this study, it is important to note that the federal tax benefits for wealthy families are estimated to be far higher. It is also relevant that recent causal studies show that the negative effects of child poverty can be mitigated by government assistance programs that provide income transfers, as well as, food, housing, or medical care, but that reductions are anticipated as a result of the passage of the OBBA in July 2025, the discretionary budget request for FY 2026, and other federal directives concerning these government assistance programs.

In addition to supporting all households with children in both married and single-parent arrangements, we recommend preventive policy and research measures to reduce the incidence of single mother-headed households and supportive ones to improve the well-being of single mother-headed households, support the formation and maintenance of two-parent families, strengthen the economic position of fathers and potential fathers, and promote fathers' positive engagement in their children's lives, all of which can help reduce child poverty and the need for government assistance programs.

1. Reduce some of the costs and stress associated with raising children. Adopting paid parental and family leave and accessible and affordable childcare can help to make childrearing less daunting for all families. Other family security measures include increasing the standard deduction and the value of the Child and Dependent Care Credit (CDCC), the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and the Child Tax Credit (CTC). Policies are also needed to address the growing crisis in housing affordability including, but not limited to, rental assistance and zoning reforms to increase housing supply.
2. Adopt state and federal policies and programs to enhance the economic position of fathers, especially non-college educated men who have experienced declines in earnings or wage stagnation that may have reduced their marriageability. This would include increasing the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour, continuing to increase state minimum wage laws to reach \$15 or higher or at least \$10, which is the minimum wage a working parent with one child would need to exceed poverty, and expanding federal and state EITCs for nonresident fathers who are currently treated as childless workers. Other critical policies include improving public and private employment for those with criminal records, adopting tuition

support and supportive services for low-income students in post-secondary education, increasing funding for technical education and workforce training, and adopting robust noncustodial parent employment programs in state and tribal child support agencies.

3. Amend laws and policies to remedy the persistent labor market inequities that low-income fathers of color experience at all educational levels including higher rates of unemployment and underemployment, lower wages and earnings, lower rates of access to employment benefits and support, and lower rates of earnings growth.
4. Create, expand, and stabilize support for educational programs to improve couple relationships and fatherhood programs to enhance father involvement, parenting, and coparenting, and conduct research to enhance their effectiveness and the outcomes they produce.
5. Collect data on the household composition and race-ethnicity of participants in a wide array of government assistance programs and conduct research to assess participant needs, improve service delivery, and maximize program impacts.

Children who live in father-absent households face many disadvantages that reverberate throughout their lives, subsequent generations, and society. Government assistance programs play a critical role in mitigating some of these disadvantages and yield many benefits for children, their families, and the nation. Programs and policies are needed that both increase government investments in children living in poverty as well as strengthening support for single mother-headed households and investing in nonresident fathers to improve their lives and reduce the need for public supports.



Introduction

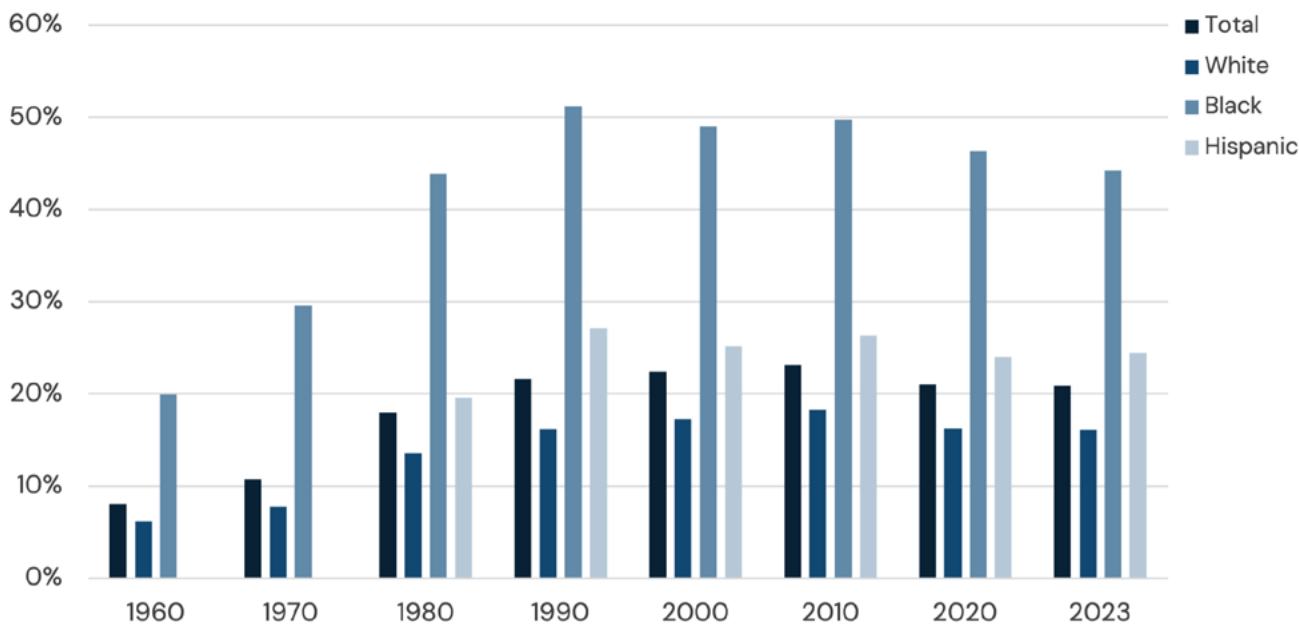
In 2008, National Fatherhood Initiative® (NFI) published *The One Hundred Billion Dollar Man*, the first report to estimate the cost of father absence to United States (U.S.) taxpayers via federal expenditures for government assistance programs to provide income, nutrition, health, early childhood, energy, and housing support for low-income Americans. The 2008 report estimated that in 2006 the federal government spent at least \$99.8 billion assisting single mother-headed households via 14 government assistance programs.¹

To provide an updated estimate, this report examines federal expenditures in 2018 to single mother-headed households for the same 14 government assistance programs. We hope this report, and the updated estimate, will encourage policymakers to support the formation and maintenance of two-parent families, strengthen services to single mother-headed households, and implement policies and programs that enhance the economic position of nonresident fathers and improve their ability to provide positive emotional and financial support to their children. By “father absence,” we refer to single mother-headed households in which a biological, step, or adoptive father is not present in the household in which a mother and her children live. This definition does not negate the fact that many nonresident fathers maintain deep physical, financial, and emotional connections with their children.² Of note, children may also live in a household without either parent and instead with other relatives or with non-relatives. The terms “father absent” and “single mother-headed” households are used interchangeably throughout this report.

As the 2008 report explains, 23.3 percent of children in America under the age of 18 lived in father-absent households in 2006 compared to 8 percent of children in 1960.³ In 2018, 22.2 percent of children lived in these households.⁴

Figure 1 shows the percentage of all children living in father-absent households from 1960–2023 broken down by White, Black, and Hispanic children.^{5, 6} **As the figure indicates, the past 60 years has seen a substantial rise in the overall percentage of children living with a mother only, although this rise halted in the mid-1990s and has started to reverse in recent years, most dramatically for Black children.**

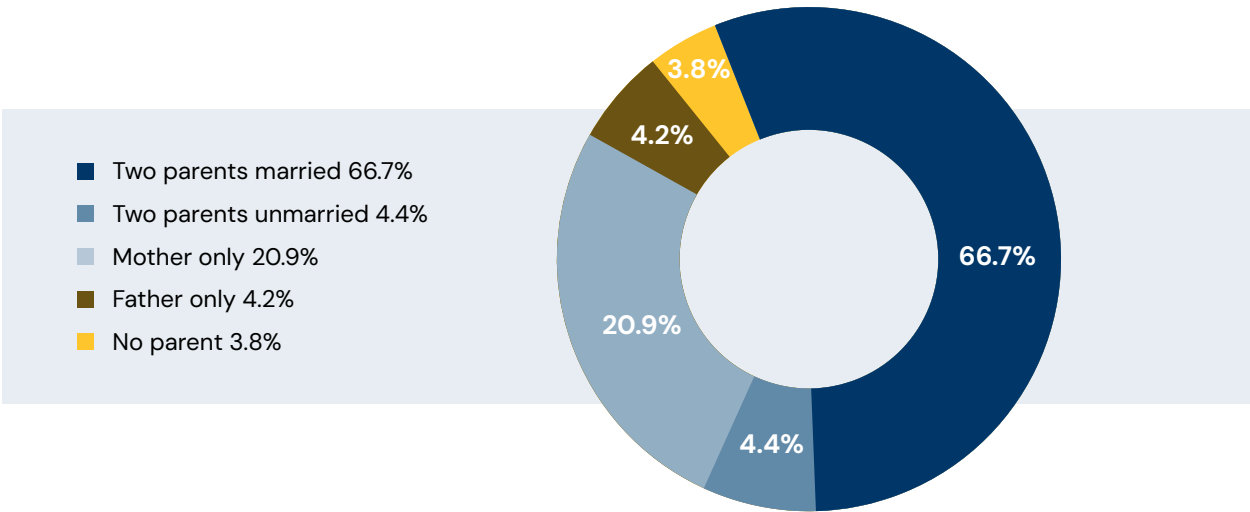
FIGURE 1. Children Living in Father-Absent Households, 1960 to 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). *Historical living arrangements of children* (Tables CH-1-CH-4). Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/children.html>.

Figure 2 shows the living arrangements of children in 2023.⁷ The majority of children, 66.7 percent, lived with two married parents, followed by 20.9 percent who lived with their mother only, 4.4 percent who lived with two unmarried parents, 4.2 percent who lived with their father only, and 3.8 percent who lived with neither parent.

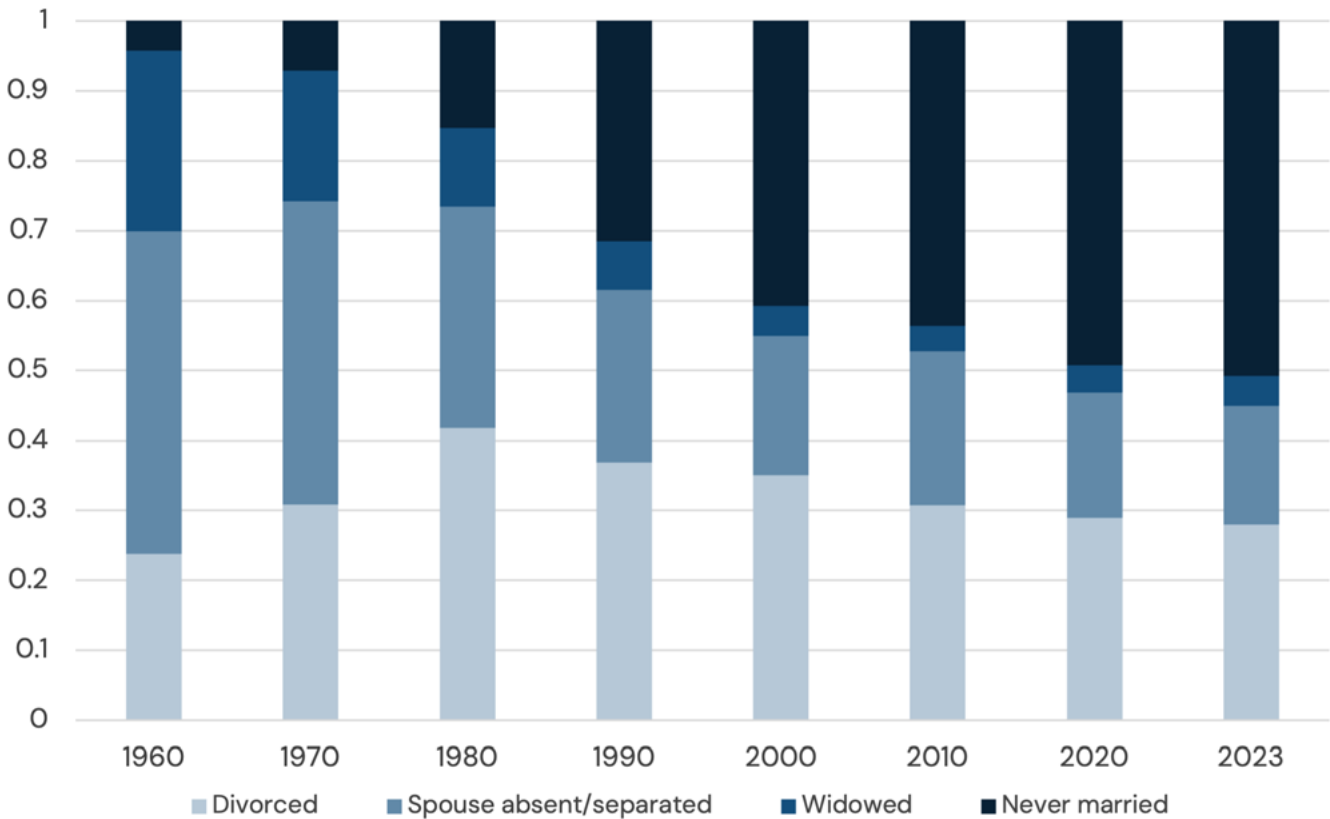
FIGURE 2. Living Arrangements of Children, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2023). *Living arrangements of children under 18 years and marital status of parents by age, sex, and selected characteristics of the child for all children: 2023* (Table C-3). Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/demo/families/cps-2023.html>.

While father absence results in the formation of single mother-headed households, they are comprised of mothers with varying marital statuses. Figure 3 shows the changing composition of single mother-headed households from 1960–2023.^{8, 9, 10} Most evident is the growth of never-married single mother-headed households and the decline in widowed single mother-headed households. Single mother-headed households with divorced, separated, and absent husbands are a declining, yet significant, percentage of single mother-headed households.

FIGURE 3. Single Mother-Headed Households 1960–2023



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau. (2015). *Children under 18 years living with mother only, by marital status of mother: 1960 to 2014* (Table CH-5). Retrieved from <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/tables/families/time-series/children/ch5.xls>.

U.S. Census Bureau (2020). *Living arrangements of children under 18 years and marital status of parents by age, sex, and selected characteristics of the child for all children: 2020* (Table C-3). Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/families/cps-2020.html>.

U.S. Census Bureau (2023). *Living arrangements of children under 18 years and marital status of parents by age, sex, and selected characteristics of the child for all children: 2023* (Table C-3). Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/demo/families/cps-2023.html>.



Father Absence

Drivers

The demographic trends highlighted in the 2008 report as driving father absence remain true today. **Compared to 60 years ago, Americans marry later and cohabit more. Additionally, there has been a decline in the percentage of adults who ever marry, an increase in divorce, a decline in remarriage, and a surge of nonmarital childbearing.**

For every two marriages in 2018, there was one divorce in the same year.¹¹ Although divorce rates have dropped off since their high levels in the 1970s,^{12,13} remarriage rates for men declined by more than half between 1950 and 2017.¹⁴

As of 2018, one in four parents living with a child was unmarried, 35 percent of unmarried parents lived with a partner, and 9 percent of families with children were headed by cohabiting parents.^{15,16} Cohabiting relationships experience more instability. Children born to cohabiting parents experience a risk of parental separation at five times the rate experienced by children born to married parents.¹⁷

The result of these demographic trends are high rates of births to unmarried women. These represent 40 percent of all births, up from 28 percent in 1990. Moreover, they comprise 52 percent and 69 percent of all births to Hispanic and Black women, respectively.¹⁸ The share of children living with an unpartnered mother is more than two times as high among children whose mothers have a high school degree than it is among children whose mothers have a four-year college degree. The result is a sharp decline in the proportion of children living in a two-parent family driven by a decline in marriage among parents without a four-year college degree.¹⁹

The decline in marriage rates among non-college educated men between 1980 and 2019 corresponds to a decline in their earnings both in absolute terms and relative to women's earnings.²⁰ According to a longstanding theory of marriage that has received empirical support,

their weakened economic status is believed to have reduced their “marriageability.” Thus, between 1980 and 2019, median real earnings for non-college educated men decreased from approximately \$45,000 to \$41,000, while men with four-year college degrees experienced an increase from approximately \$58,000 to \$78,000.²¹ Labor market outcomes are even worse for Black workers who face higher rates of unemployment and underemployment, lower wages and earnings and benefits, and lower rates of earnings growth over the course of a lifetime. More to the point, these persistent gaps exist at all education levels including Black and White workers with college degrees.²²

Divorce trends, on the other hand, have fallen between 2008 and 2017, and divorced mothers are better off than they were in prior decades. The trend is driven by the overall decline in marriage (and subsequently, divorce) as well as a decline in the likelihood of divorce by younger women.²³ The risk of divorce also has dropped for women with a high school degree, some college, and a college degree.²⁴ Finally, in addition to being older and better educated than single mothers who never married, separated and divorced mothers are also more likely to receive regular child support payments.²⁵

Impact

Family Poverty

The effect of father absence on family income remains well-documented and strong. The median household incomes in 2019 of married couples with children and single mothers with children were \$102,308 and \$48,098, respectively. In 2019, according to the official poverty measure (OPM) used by the U.S. Census Bureau, 22.2 percent of single-mother households lived in poverty as compared with only 4 percent of married-couple households.²⁶ The findings are similar when using the more robust supplemental poverty measure (SPM).²⁷ In 2019, 23.3 percent of single-mother households, 6.9 percent of married-couple households, and 12.1 percent of cohabiting-partner households lived at or below the poverty threshold based on the SPM.²⁸

Family structure is not the only factor associated with family poverty. Childhood poverty is also associated with low levels of parental education,²⁹ housing instability, residential mobility, neighborhood conditions, experiences of racial discrimination, as well as lower rates of parental employment and earnings.³⁰ Additionally, single mothers differ from married mothers in many other ways, aside from father absence. Compared with married mothers, single mothers are, on average, less educated, have lower paying jobs, and come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.³¹ In terms of education, there is now a sizeable “college gap” in the family structure of children and children born to mothers with a four-year college degree. In 2019, 84 percent of the children whose mothers had a four-year college degree were living with married parents while this was the case for only 57 and 60 percent of children of mothers with less than or only a high school degree, respectively.³²

Child Outcomes

Although most children raised in single-parent households grow up to be well-adjusted adults, and a separation or divorce may help reduce conflict and provide a safer home environment for children,³³ the research showing that **father absence is correlated with many negative child outcomes is extensive**. For example:

- Children raised in father-absent households tend to have poorer academic performance than those in father-present ones.³⁴ In particular, they are less likely to attend college or even graduate high school.³⁵ This is especially pronounced for boys, who are also more likely to experience behavioral problems in school.^{36, 37}
- Father absence is associated with lower levels of adult employment and earnings, and children raised in father-absent households are also less likely to become high-income adults than children whose fathers are present.^{38, 39}
- Adult children of father-absent households are more likely to be incarcerated, even when controlling for a range of other factors including teen motherhood, low parent education, racial inequalities, and poverty.⁴⁰ This association is stronger when father departure occurs later in childhood.^{41, 42}
- Although there is evidence that intergenerational transmission of divorce may be diminishing over time, children of divorced parents are more likely to report low satisfaction with romantic relationships and to be divorced themselves,^{43, 44} and some research finds they have poorer relationships with their parents as adults.⁴⁵
- Father absence is also associated with higher rates of substance use⁴⁶ and depression in adulthood.⁴⁷ Regarding depression, this effect is stronger for girls and the earlier that father absence begins in childhood.⁴⁸

Fortunately, there is also a growing body of causal studies that link poverty in childhood to children's adult health and economic well-being through the intervention of government programs that alleviate poverty directly by providing income transfers, or indirectly, by providing food, housing, or medical care. A study of the Mother's Pension Program found that the receipt of benefits in childhood led to an increase in completed schooling and earnings and improvements in adult health; a study of the Food Stamp program found it produced improvements in adult cardiovascular health (a correlate of adult economic status); studies of child tax credits like the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC) very early in a child's life found that they yielded significant adult earnings advantages and positive behavioral and achievement score outcomes; and studies of state supplements to federal EITC payments found increases in children's completing college, employment and early-adult earnings, improvements in children's test scores, reductions in behavioral problems, and positive birth outcomes.⁴⁹

Direct Costs

Government assistance programs attempt to assist low-income families by offering support with income, nutrition, health, early childhood, energy, and housing. Federal expenditures for these government assistance programs have doubled in real dollars since the late 1990s, involve over 80 programs overseen by numerous federal agencies that are largely administered by the states, and cost taxpayers over \$300 billion in 2019, even when excluding Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), two of the largest government assistance programs for low-income families.⁵⁰ Others estimate that each year, the federal government invests over \$500 billion in children who live in poverty through direct cash payments, including tax credits, and in-kind goods such as child care, education, food subsidies, and healthcare coverage, and that these investments have significant short and long-term payoffs for the children receiving the benefits as well as for society at large.⁵¹

Because single-mother families are more likely than married-couple families to live in poverty, they use government assistance programs at a much higher rate than married parents. In 2012, 50 percent of single-mother families participated in at least one means-tested government assistance program per month,⁵² compared to only 14.7 percent of married-couple families.⁵³

Indirect Costs

There are also indirect costs of father absence for which we lack data. For example, children from father-absent households may use mental health and other medical services at a higher rate than children of two-parent families.^{54, 55} Schools may have to make additional efforts to educate them.⁵⁶ Finally, as adults, children from father-absent households tend to have lower educational attainment,⁵⁷ are more likely to be incarcerated as adults,⁵⁸ and are less likely to have strong relationships with their fathers.⁵⁹

Conversely, government assistance programs and other investments in children who live in father-absent households can help them thrive, boost their health and school outcomes, and result in higher educational attainment that translates into better jobs with higher wages that have long-term advantages for individuals and society.⁶⁰



Analysis

Government Assistance Programs

This analysis estimates the direct cost of father absence to U.S. taxpayers by focusing on the proportion of federal expenditures for 14 government assistance programs used to help support children in single mother-headed households.

The government assistance programs included in the analysis are:

1. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)
2. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
3. The child support program
4. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for low-income disabled children
5. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program
6. School lunch and child nutrition programs
7. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
8. Medicaid
9. The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), formerly known as the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP)
10. Head Start
11. The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)
12. The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
13. Public housing
14. The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program, also referred to as Section 8

(See Appendix A for more information on each program.)

These programs assist low-income families and individuals with various household compositions, including those that are headed by single mothers. The assistance provided through these programs includes direct cash payments (EITC, TANF, child support program, SSI) as well as access to support dealing with nutrition (SNAP, school lunch and child nutrition programs, WIC), health (Medicaid, CHIP), early childhood (Head Start, CCDF), energy (LIHEAP), and housing (public housing, HCV program).

Of note, there are anticipated changes to nine of these programs due to the July 2025 passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill (OBBB),⁶¹ the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Discretionary Budget Request,⁶² and other federal directives. The OBBB introduces new work and reporting requirements, including for some parents who were previously exempt, to receive assistance from SNAP and Medicaid. It also introduces changes related to program enrollment and eligibility, including restrictions related to immigration status, for Medicaid and CHIP while also delaying the implementation of a final rule meant to simplify these processes. The discretionary budget request eliminates LIHEAP; cuts funding to school lunch and child nutrition programs and WIC; and combines five housing programs (including public housing and the HCV program) into a State Rental Assistance Block Grant (SRABG) program. In addition, in July 2025, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced a policy shift to restrict access to their federal public benefit programs, including Head Start, from undocumented immigrants.⁶³

Methodology

To calculate the portion of total program costs accorded to single mother-headed households specifically, we used two main data sources: (1) the federal budget, which provides total expenditure amounts for each of the government assistance programs, and (2) the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP),⁶⁴ which allowed us to determine program participation by family structure.

We first determined the total federal expenditures for a particular program. We then determined the fraction of program participants who are in father-absent households (i.e., headed by single mothers). Finally, we used this fraction (or multiplier) to estimate the total program costs that go to father-absent households. Where feasible we also estimated program costs expended for different types of single mother-headed households: never married, separated or divorced, and widowed.

This analysis builds on the 2008 report, which used 2006 data. In this report, we reassess 2006 expenditures and update the analysis to 2018. We also compare expenditures made in 2006 with those made in 2018. The 2008 report used the 2006 federal budget to calculate federal expenditures, but it used a variety of data sources to calculate the single mother headed-household multipliers for each government assistance program. For example, the WIC multiplier for the 2006 study was based on a 1995 Census report, while the SNAP multiplier came from 2006 data collected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Moreover, many of those sources have

not been consistently updated, making it impossible to draw accurate comparisons between expenditures in 2006 and 2018. Nor could we assume that the multipliers in effect in 2006 would be the same in 2018 given the many changes in government benefit programs that affect eligibility and participation during that 12-year time span (most notably, the Affordable Care Act of 2010).

To ensure the data and conclusions were comparable across years and programs, we identified a single data source, the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), to calculate multipliers for both years (2006 and 2018). The SIPP is a nationally representative longitudinal study that collects income, employment, and government assistance program participation data on families and households by household structure, making it possible to identify households led by single mothers of children under the age of 18. Our objective was to minimize variation across years and data sources to create comparable estimates at both timepoints. Our reanalysis of multipliers generated with the 2006 data using the SIPP sample for 2006 yielded some differences for certain government assistance programs, but the overall level of expenditures for single mother-headed households in 2006 in the 14 government assistance programs that were the subject of the 2008 study remained approximately \$100 billion. (See Appendix B for a comparison of the multipliers for the original report in 2006 using a variety of data sources alongside the multipliers for 2006 using the SIPP.)

Our analysis provides a conservative estimate of the costs of father absence. There are other federal programs that disproportionately impact single mother-headed households, but that lack robust data on household structure—Healthy Start and Child Welfare, for example. (See Appendix C for more information on some of these other programs.) We were also unable to measure required expenditures for federal programs made at the state and local levels which in many cases comprise 34 percent of total program costs.⁶⁵ Finally, while beyond the scope of our analysis, there are a variety of long-term indirect costs associated with father absence that include the reduced earnings and tax payments due to lower earnings of children from single-parent households,⁶⁶ or the fact that children from father-absent households are more likely to be incarcerated, both of which pose steep costs to federal and state governments.^{67, 68}

The Impact of COVID-19

The federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021 resulted in a massive expansion of government assistance. The U.S. Congress passed bipartisan legislation, notably the \$2.1 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the \$915 billion Response and Relief Act, and the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). An indirect impact of this influx of assistance was an unprecedented, temporary decline in poverty.^{69, 70} Alongside cash payments to households, increased unemployment benefits, and increases in the Child Tax Credit, these aid packages increased SNAP payments,⁷¹ expanded EITC eligibility,⁷² and established the Emergency Rental Assistance program to protect families from eviction and provide energy assistance.⁷³

Furthermore, several states made changes to TANF policy to relax certain eligibility requirements—such as job search and work requirements—and froze or extended the five-year lifetime limit.⁷⁴ While more people benefitted from these programs than ever before, and child poverty dropped by 46 percent from 2020 to 2021,⁷⁵ high inflation in 2022 and the expiration of these expansions pushed some families into even greater hardship.⁷⁶ **Since the pandemic years of the early 2020s represented an anomaly in federal social welfare spending, we decided not to include data beyond 2018 in our analysis.**



Results

2018 Spending

Table 1 shows total program budgets (in millions), the percentage of single mother-headed households that received benefits, and the cost of services provided to single mother-headed households (in millions) in FY 2018 for each of the 14 government assistance programs included in this report.

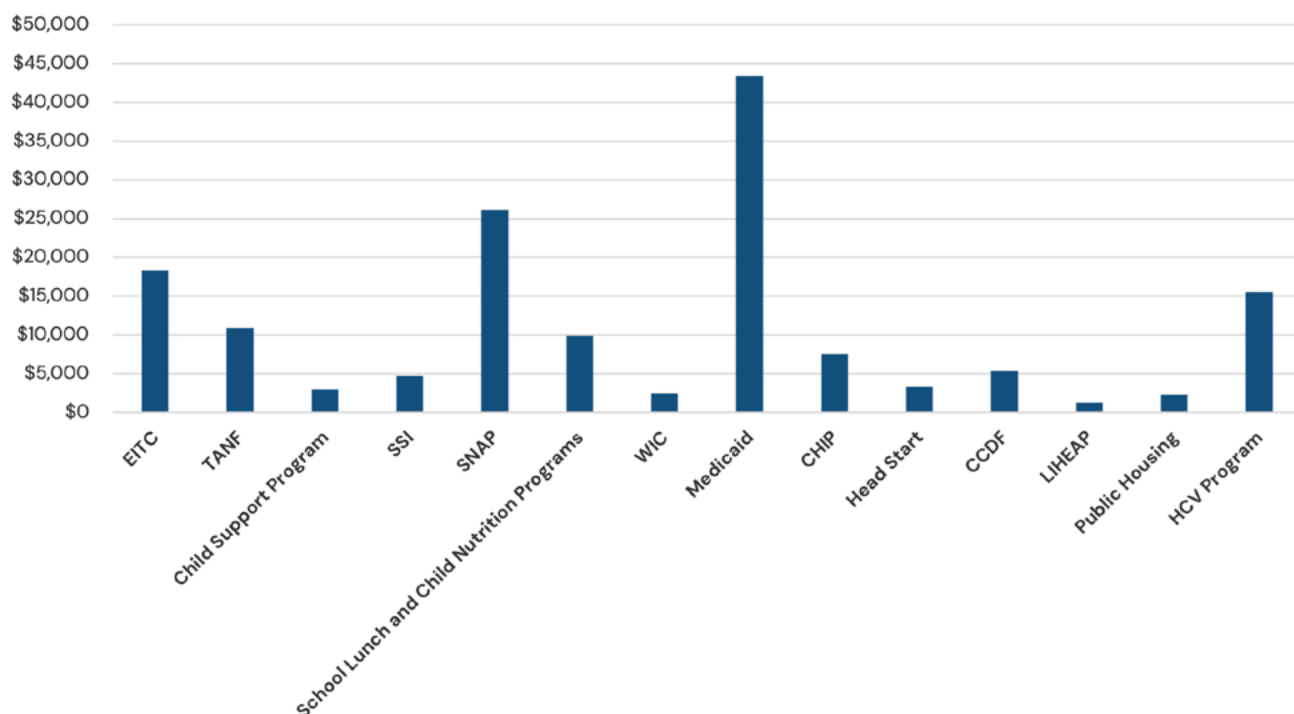
We estimate that the federal government spent \$154.2 billion in FY 2018 to assist father-absent households. This is 41.9 percent of the \$368.1 billion combined total program budgets of the 14 government assistance programs in the study. The \$154.2 billion spent directly on assistance to single mother-headed households comprised nearly 4 percent of the total FY 2018 federal budget of \$4.1 trillion,⁷⁷ and 30.8 percent of the estimated \$500 billion spent annually by the federal government to address child poverty.⁷⁸ The percent of single mother-headed households that received benefits in the 14 targeted government assistance programs in FY 2018 ranged from 31.2 percent (EITC) to 67.0 percent (child support program).

TABLE 1. Federal Expenditures on Single Mother–Headed Households, FY 2018

Program	Total Program Budget (millions)	Percent of Single Mother–Headed Households Receiving Benefits	Cost of Services to Single Mother–Headed Households (millions)
INCOME SUPPORT			
Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)	\$58,640 ⁷⁹	31.2	\$18,313
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	\$16,714 ⁸⁰	65.0	\$10,857
Child Support Program	\$4,429 ⁸¹	67.0	\$2,967
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	\$10,436 ⁸²	45.7	\$4,773
NUTRITION SUPPORT			
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	\$69,425 ⁸³	37.6	\$26,104
School Lunch and Child Nutrition Programs	\$23,681 ⁸⁴	42.0	\$9,934
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	\$6,039 ⁸⁵	41.6	\$2,510
HEALTH SUPPORT			
Medicaid	\$100,323 ^{86, 87}	43.2	\$43,360
Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP)	\$17,489 ⁸⁸	43.2	\$7,558
EARLY CHILDHOOD SUPPORT			
Head Start	\$9,556 ⁸⁹	34.8	\$3,324
Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)	\$8,219 ^{90, 91}	65.0	\$5,342
ENERGY/HOUSING SUPPORT			
Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)	\$3,641 ⁹²	35.0	\$1,275
Public Housing	\$4,767 ⁹³	48.1	\$2,293
Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program	\$34,720 ^{94, 95}	44.8	\$15,555
Total	\$368,079		\$154,165

Figure 4 shows the cost of serving single mother-headed households in the 14 government assistance programs in FY 2018. **The four most costly programs were Medicaid (\$43.4 billion), SNAP (\$26.1 billion), EITC (\$18.3 billion), and the HCV program (\$15.6 billion).**

FIGURE 4. Federal Expenditures on Single Mother-Headed Households, FY 2018



Comparing 2006 and 2018

Table 2 shows the multipliers for single mother-headed households calculated for 2006 and 2018 using a single data source: the SIPP. Doing so minimized variation in the generation of multipliers at both timepoints and **they are virtually identical in 2006 and 2018 for TANF, the child support program, and CCDF.** Some differences, however, remain. For example, the reduced use of SSI by single mother-headed households over the past decade, might be due to lack of knowledge of the program or perceived challenges with applying.⁹⁶ In a similar vein, the decline in single mother-headed households receiving EITC benefits may reflect the fact that eligible families must file a tax return to receive benefits, and low-income workers are not always required to file a tax return and thereby miss out on the credits for which they are eligible.⁹⁷ Reductions in the proportions of single mother-headed households receiving health support benefits (Medicaid and CHIP) in 2018 relative to 2006 might reflect expanded use of these government assistance programs by other groups including married and childless households following the passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010.

TABLE 2. Single Mother–Headed Households Receiving Benefits, FY 2006 and FY 2018

Program	Percent of Single Mother–Headed Households Receiving Benefits, SIPP Estimate (2006)	Percent of Single Mother–Headed Households Receiving Benefits, SIPP Estimate (2018)
INCOME SUPPORT		
Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)*	41.0	31.2
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	66.1	65.0
Child Support Program**	67.0	67.0
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)*	56.3	45.7
NUTRITION SUPPORT		
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	46.6	37.6
School Lunch and Child Nutrition Programs	49.1	42.0
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	49.1	41.6
HEALTH SUPPORT		
Medicaid***	51.7	43.2
Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP)***	51.7	43.2
EARLY CHILDHOOD SUPPORT		
Head Start*	48.2	34.8
Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)	66.1	65.0
ENERGY/HOUSING SUPPORT		
Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)	42.6	35.0
Public Housing	45.8	48.1
Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program	50.8	44.8

* Not included in SIPP data for 2006 but included in 2018. The original multiplier estimate was used to analyze 2006.

** Not included in SIPP for 2006 or 2018; alternative source⁹⁸ used.

*** Differentiated in the original report but not in SIPP, so the same multiplier is used for both programs in the same year.

Changes in the real dollar value of programs' funding (i.e., adjusted for inflation) similarly suggest shifting participation and policy priorities over time. Table 3 shows program expenditures in FY 2006 and FY 2018, adjusted to 2018 dollars.

Predictably, when not accounting for inflation, every program except for TANF received increased funding in 2018 relative to 2006. But in real dollars, four of the 14 programs saw decreases in funding (TANF, child support program, WIC, LIHEAP) while the other 10 increased anywhere from 7.3 to 209.2 percent. Obama-era investments are largely responsible for these increases. These investments rolled back the work requirements instituted by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, expanded eligibility and access for programs such as SNAP, EITC, the HCV program, Head Start, and reauthorized the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act.^{99, 100, 101} Most significantly, the Affordable Care Act of 2010 vastly expanded funding, access, and eligibility for CHIP and Medicaid, and given that two-thirds of states had adopted Medicaid expansion as of 2018, federal spending on Medicaid increased dramatically.^{102, 103}

TABLE 3. Federal Expenditures, FY 2006 and FY 2018

Program	Real FY 2006 Expenditures ¹⁰⁴ (millions)	Real FY 2018 Expenditures ¹⁰⁵ (millions)	Percent Change in Real Expenditures	Percent Change in Nominal Expenditures
INCOME SUPPORT				
Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)	\$45,062.84	\$58,640.00	30.1%	62.1%
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	\$21,356.44	\$16,714.00	-21.7%	-2.5%
Child Support Program	\$5,317.93	\$4,429.00	-16.7%	3.8%
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	\$8,472.80 ¹⁰⁶	\$10,436.00	23.2%	53.5%
NUTRITION SUPPORT				
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	\$43,292.27	\$69,425.00	60.4%	99.8%
School Lunch and Child Nutrition Programs	\$15,943.82	\$23,681.00	48.5%	85.1%
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	\$6,682.30	\$6,039.00	-9.6%	12.6%

Program	Real FY 2006 Expenditures ¹⁰⁴ (millions)	Real FY 2018 Expenditures ¹⁰⁵ (millions)	Percent Change in Real Expenditures	Percent Change in Nominal Expenditures
HEALTH SUPPORT				
Medicaid	\$39,747.40 ¹⁰⁷	\$100,323.00	152.4%	214.5%
Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)	\$5,655.59	\$17,489.00	209.2%	285.3%
EARLY CHILDHOOD SUPPORT				
Head Start	\$8,536.35	\$9,556.00	11.9%	39.5%
Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)	\$6,206.33	\$8,219.00	32.4%	65.0%
ENERGY/HOUSING SUPPORT				
Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)	\$3,937.36	\$3,641.00	-7.5%	15.2%
Public Housing	\$4,440.74	\$4,767.00	7.3%	33.8%
Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program	\$24,050.29	\$34,720.00	44.4%	79.9%
Total	\$238,702.46	\$368,079.00	54.2%	

Table 4 shows the cost of services to single mother-headed households for each program in 2006, as found in the 2008 report, and in 2018. **The total cost of services to single mother-headed households increased from nearly \$100 billion in 2006 to \$154.2 billion in 2018. This represents a real dollar increase of 54.5 percent.** As previously noted, when the cost of services to single mother-headed households in 2006 was recalculated using the SIPP estimates, it remained at the level reported in the 2008 report—nearly \$100 billion (\$97.148 billion).

TABLE 4. Federal Expenditures on Single Mother-Headed Households, FY 2006 and FY 2018

Program	Cost of Services to Single Mother-Headed Households, 2006 (millions) ¹⁰⁸	Cost of Services to Single Mother-Headed Households, 2018 (millions)
INCOME SUPPORT		
Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)	\$14,828	\$18,313
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	\$14,998	\$10,857
Child Support Program	\$3,820	\$2,967
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	\$3,912	\$4,773
NUTRITION SUPPORT		
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	\$9,312	\$26,104
School Lunch and Child Nutrition Programs	\$6,688	\$9,934
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	\$2,960	\$2,510
HEALTH SUPPORT		
Medicaid	\$22,649	\$43,360
Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)	\$1,589	\$7,558
EARLY CHILDHOOD SUPPORT		
Head Start	\$3,302	\$3,324
Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)	\$4,358	\$5,342
ENERGY/HOUSING SUPPORT		
Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)	\$1,169	\$1,275
Public Housing	\$1,319	\$2,293
Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program	\$8,894	\$15,555
Total	\$99,798	\$154,165

Patterns by Type of Single Mother–Headed Household

Tables 5 and 6 show the receipt of government assistance programs in 2006 and 2018 by three groups of single mother–headed households: mother who are never married, mothers who are separated or divorced,¹⁰⁹ and mothers who are widowed. At both points in time, all three groups used certain programs in rough proportion to their incidence in the SIPP sample. These programs consisted of school lunch and child nutrition programs, WIC, Head Start, and housing support. On the other hand, there were differences in program use by these three groups at both timepoints, too. Consistent with their lower socioeconomic status,¹¹⁰ households led by never–married mothers were overrepresented in programs that alleviate child poverty: TANF, SSI, SNAP, Medicaid, CHIP, and CCDF. Households led by separated or divorced mothers, on the other hand, were less likely to receive benefits that address child poverty: TANF, SSI, SNAP, Medicaid, CHIP, and LIHEAP. Households led by widowed mothers were disproportionately high users of SSI, WIC, and housing support benefits. They were proportionate in their use of school lunch and child nutrition programs and Head Start, and were less likely to receive TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, CHIP, CCDF, and LIHEAP benefits.

TABLE 5. Single Mother-Headed Households Receiving Benefits, by Marital Status, FY 2006

Program	Percent of Single Mother-Headed Households Receiving Benefits (Never Married) [35.8% of the Sample]	Percent of Single Mother-Headed Households Receiving Benefits (Separated or Divorced) [56.1% of the sample]	Percent of Single Mother-Headed Households Receiving Benefits (Widowed) [8.2% of the sample]
INCOME SUPPORT			
Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)*	N/A	N/A	N/A
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	46.2	46.9	6.9
Child Support Program**	N/A	N/A	N/A
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	48.8	39.4	11.8
NUTRITION SUPPORT			
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	47.4	46.6	6.0
School Lunch and Child Nutrition Programs	38.9	52.9	8.2
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	39.0	51.5	9.5
HEALTH SUPPORT			
Medicaid	45.3	47.5	7.2
Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)	45.3	47.5	7.2
EARLY CHILDHOOD SUPPORT			
Head Start	34.1	57.9	8.1
Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)	46.2	46.9	6.9
ENERGY/HOUSING SUPPORT			
Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)	48.7	46.1	5.2
Public Housing	30.7	58.4	10.9
Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program	32.1	57.2	10.7

* The 2006 SIPP data does not have information on EITC.

** The SIPP data does not have information on the child support program.

TABLE 6. Single Mother–Headed Households Receiving Benefits, by Marital Status, FY 2018

Program	Percent of Single Mother–Headed Households Receiving Benefits (Never Married) [35.9% of the Sample]	Percent of Single Mother–Headed Households Receiving Benefits (Separated or Divorced) [50.9% of the sample]	Percent of Single Mother–Headed Households Receiving Benefits (Widowed) [13.3% of the sample]
INCOME SUPPORT			
Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)	39.7	49.9	10.5
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	50.0	39.7	10.5
Child Support Program*	N/A	N/A	N/A
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	40.5	46.0	13.5
NUTRITION SUPPORT			
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	43.9	42.4	13.7
School Lunch and Child Nutrition Programs	38.5	50.3	11.2
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	54.2	34.4	11.5
HEALTH SUPPORT			
Medicaid	38.7	47.7	13.6
Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP)	38.7	47.7	13.6
EARLY CHILDHOOD SUPPORT			
Head Start	46.7	42.2	11.1
Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)	50.0	39.7	10.3
ENERGY/HOUSING SUPPORT			
Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)	44.7	45.9	9.4
Public Housing	57.1	34.7	8.2
Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program	53.7	38.0	8.3

* The SIPP data does not have information on the child support program.

This analysis shows that while all types of single mother-headed households receive government assistance program benefits, with all types of households using some food support (school lunch and child nutrition programs) and health support (Medicaid and CHIP) in direct proportion to their incidence in the SIPP sample, other patterns of usage by household type tracks with the demographic differences of mothers with different marital status. Single mothers who have never married are disproportionately racial and ethnic minorities, younger, have lower educational attainment, and have lower incomes.¹¹¹ They are also less apt to receive regular child support payments.¹¹² They rely on government assistance programs to offset their insufficient earnings and the absence of financial support from nonresident fathers.¹¹³ Separated, divorced, or widowed single mothers, on the other hand, are older, better educated, and earn more money. In addition, separated or divorced mothers are more likely to receive regular child support payments.¹¹⁴ They have less need to apply for government benefits and less capacity to qualify for them.



Conclusion

This report updates a previously published analysis of expenditures for father-absent households in 14 major federal government assistance programs in 2006. It also improves the reliability of the 2006 data and compares 2006 patterns with expenditures for these same 14 government assistance programs in 2018. At both timepoints, we use total program expenditures drawn from the federal budget and generate estimates of expenditures for father-absent households based on the percentage of single mother-headed households receiving benefits. Our estimates of the percentage of total participants in single mother-headed households in 2006 and 2018 come from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), which provides information on family structure. Where feasible, we analyzed program usage in both 2006 and 2018 by three different subgroups of single mother-headed households: never married, separated or divorced, and widowed. We did not analyze data following 2018 due to unusual expenditures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nor do we consider the anticipated changes to many of these government assistance programs due to the July 2025 passage of the OBBB, the FY 2026 Discretionary Budget Request, and other recent federal directives.

This analysis found that U.S. taxpayers paid at least \$154.2 billion in 2018 to fund 14 major federal government assistance programs that help support father-absent households. This compares to the 2006 estimate of almost \$100 billion and represents a 54.5 percent increase in real dollar expenditures. This \$154.2 billion comprised 41.9 percent of the combined total program budgets of the 14 government assistance programs (\$368.1 billion) and nearly 4 percent of the total federal budget (\$4.1 trillion) in 2018.

Our results represent only a fraction of the total cost of father absence to this nation. Our study does not include the required state matching funds for many of the 14 government assistance programs. Nor do we include the many other relevant government assistance programs that lacked data on the types of households they assist, making it impossible to estimate expenditures for father-absent households. (See Appendix C for a list of examples of such programs with their 2018 federal budget allocations.) Finally, we do not include the many indirect costs associated with father absence or its longer-term economic effects on intergenerational child well-being.

Indeed, the \$154.2 billion spent in 2018 on the 14 government assistance programs represents only 30.8 percent of the \$500 billion per year that the federal government is estimated to spend on programs to reduce childhood poverty.¹¹⁵

All types of single mother-headed households use government assistance programs. Never married, separated or divorced, and widowed single mother-headed households use government assistance programs with all three groups receiving income support (EITC), food support (school lunch and child nutrition programs), and health support (Medicaid and CHIP) roughly in proportion to their incidence in the SIPP sample. At the same time, households led by never-married mothers are bigger users of TANF, WIC, CCDF, Head Start, and public housing benefits to offset their insufficient earnings and lack of child support. To contrast, reflecting their improved financial status, households led by separated or divorced mothers in 2018 declined in their use of Head Start and public housing benefits relative to their 2006 usage patterns, but continued to use EITC, school lunch and child nutrition programs, health support, and LIHEAP in proportion to their incidence in the SIPP sample. And households led by widowed mothers utilized SSI, SNAP, Medicaid, and CHIP in 2018 in proportion to their incidence in the SIPP sample, with school lunch and child nutrition programs, WIC, and Head Start coming close to being proportionate.

Recommendations

While specific policy recommendations or program interventions are beyond the scope of this report, we call attention to a limited list of preventive and supportive research and policy measures to consider in reducing the incidence of single mother-headed households, supporting the positive engagement of fathers in those families, and improving outcomes for children. These measures will have the added benefit of supporting the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

1. Policies and programs are needed to help reduce the costs and stress associated with childrearing.^{116, 117} Paid parental and family leave and accessible and affordable childcare can help with raising children for all households. For example, a recent report finds that childcare costs have tripled since 1990 and push an estimated 134,000 families into poverty each year.¹¹⁸ Extending the expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC), which is credited with lifting an estimated 2 million children out of poverty in 2021,¹¹⁹ or at least adopting some compromise CTC provisions that drew the support of 169 House Republicans in 2024,¹²⁰ increasing the standard deduction, raising the cap on the Child and Dependent Care Credit (CDCC), eliminating marriage tax penalties, and creating an ongoing universal child allowance are other family-supportive policies that can reduce some of the burdens of childrearing. Finally, the housing crisis has underscored the need for rental assistance and zoning reforms to increase housing supply.
2. In a similar fashion, we need federal and state policies and programs that enhance the economic position of fathers.¹²¹ Given the evidence linking men's economic position and marriage rates, efforts should be made to increase median real earnings among non-college

educated men who have suffered wage declines that have reduced their marriageability.¹²² This would include increasing the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour, continuing to increase state minimum wage laws to reach \$15 or higher or at least \$10 which is the minimum wage a working parent with one child would need to exceed poverty, and expanding the federal and state EITCs for nonresident fathers, who are currently treated as childless workers, whether or not they support their children, and are thus eligible for only meager benefits. Since 2025 began, 23 states have increased their state minimum wage, including seven historically red states (Alaska, Arizona, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Ohio, and South Dakota). Alaska and Missouri, two deeply red states, are on track to reach a minimum wage of \$15 or higher in the coming years.^{123, 124} Other critical policies include improving public and private employment opportunities for those with criminal records; adopting tutoring, tuition support, and supportive services for low-income students to increase attendance and completion in post-secondary education; increasing funding for technical education programs, apprenticeships, and workforce training; and creating robust job programs for noncustodial parents who have child support orders they cannot pay. In a welcome move, the Federal Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) approved a final rule in December 2024 that permits child support programs to use regular federal funds for employment and training services for eligible noncustodial parents in the child support program.¹²⁵ although as of this writing OCSS has not released policy guidance to enable its implementation.

3. Laws and policies need to be amended to remedy the persistent labor market inequities that low-income fathers of color experience. According to data recently released by the National Bureau of Economic Research, Black workers, compared with White workers, face persistently higher rates of unemployment and underemployment, lower wages and earnings, lower rates of access to employment benefits and supports, and lower rates of earnings growth. More to the point, these racial disparities exist at every level of education with some of the highest gaps in labor market outcomes occurring between White and Black workers with college degrees. Correcting these labor market flaws will require policies that address longstanding structural inequities in our economy, and continued efforts to eliminate laws and policies that contribute to these disparities.¹²⁶
4. Another strand of needed intervention and research deals with educational programs to enhance couple relationships and father involvement with their children. The coparenting relationship is a priority because it is among the largest predictors of nonresident fathers' involvement with their children.^{127, 128} Although most meta-analyses of educational programs to improve couple relationships have failed to find improvements in relationship stability, they have found modest but statistically significant impacts on relationship skills and quality.¹²⁹ And several meta-analyses of the effectiveness of fatherhood programs targeted primarily to unmarried, low-income, nonresident fathers have found that they produced small but statistically significant effects on father involvement, parenting quality, and coparenting relationships, with the strongest effect size in coparenting.^{130, 131} Unfortunately, they frequently failed to produce improvements in father employment and economic

well-being, and payments of child support. On the other hand, numerous evaluations of noncustodial parent employment programs conducted since the 1990s have found that they were effective in expanding employment, generating child support payments, and increasing parent-child contact levels among unemployed and underemployed fathers.¹³²

5. Finally, further data collection and research is needed to more thoroughly assess the needs of single mother-headed households as a whole and for different racial and ethnic groups, and to examine the federal expenditures for supportive programs that mitigate the disadvantages that children experience. Thus, we would benefit by having information on the participation of families of different household composition and racial-ethnic groups in programs to alleviate poverty and enhance opportunity at all stages of the life cycle and in all areas of need. This would include home visiting, Head Start, Healthy Start, and other early childhood programs, federally funded primary and secondary education programs in school districts with high rates of poverty, and promising interventions to increase attendance and completion of post-secondary education including federal financial aid, tutoring, childcare services, as well as access to promising career and technical education programs. The lack of data for different household types and racial-ethnic groups in many government assistance programs precludes analysis of patterns of engagement, service delivery, and impact, as well as program improvement. For example, while 23 percent of single mothers across the nation reported receiving some child support during 2020–2022, the rate receiving child support was just 12 and 13 percent in Tennessee and Louisiana, respectively.¹³³ The lack of data also limits the ability to track the persistent effects of racial disparities and discrimination in all sectors of society including government assistance programs.

Children who live in father-absent households face a multitude of disadvantages that reverberate throughout their lives, through subsequent generations, and society. Recent causal studies show that government assistance programs that provide income transfers and/or food, housing, or medical care play a vital role in mitigating some of these disadvantages to the benefit of affected individuals and the nation.¹³⁴ This report presents an updated picture of the support accorded to father-absent households in 2018 through 14 government assistance programs. Compared with 2006, the level of support increased by 54.5 percent in real dollars from nearly \$100 billion to \$154.2 billion. As noted in the report, it is a conservative cost estimate since it does not take into account state level match funding for these programs, expenditures in other relevant programs for which we lack data on the household composition, and the costs of reduced productivity, and increased crime for children who spend their childhood living in poverty. More to the point, the expenditures we document comprised only about 31 percent of \$500 billion that the federal government is estimated to spend every year to address childhood poverty in recent years.¹³⁵ While considerable, they are less than the benefits that wealthy families receive from various tax provisions that reduce the amount of tax that they owe and the revenue that the government collects.¹³⁶

Finally, it is necessary to note that up to nine of the 14 government assistance programs discussed in this report are expected to be reduced and/or eliminated as a result of the passage of the OBBB in July 2025, the FY 2026 Discretionary Budget Request, and the implementation of other recent federal directives. Given the documented role that government assistance programs play in insulating children from some of the detrimental effects of poverty, these changes underscore the need to invest more intensively in low-income fathers and help them become the generators of the income their families require, thus offsetting the \$154 billion in taxpayer support that has hitherto been provided.

About the Authors

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Appendix A

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC): The EITC is a refundable tax credit intended for low- to moderate-income working individuals and couples, especially those with children. To qualify, taxpayers must have an earned income below a certain level based on tax filing status and number of children, though the amount of the credit varies. In tax year 2024, for example, a single or head of household filer with two children must have an income below \$55,768 and may receive a maximum credit of \$6,960.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): TANF provides cash assistance to families in need via state programs. As such, states have discretion regarding income eligibility requirements. The program has a five-year lifetime limit and requires recipients to work, and 25 states have a lifetime or partial ban for individuals with drug felony convictions.

Child Support Program: The child support program is responsible for ensuring that non-custodial parents contribute to their children's well-being. Aside from enforcing child support payments (mostly by paycheck withholdings), the program supports state agencies in locating non-custodial parents, conducting paternity tests, and establishing and enforcing support orders.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI): SSI provides cash assistance to individuals who are low-income and are aged 65 or older, blind, or disabled, and, unlike Social Security, is not based on work history. For the purposes of this report, SSI recipients are low-income disabled children whose benefits are received by a parent or guardian.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): SNAP is a program that provides food vouchers to low-income families and individuals. The total amount varies based on income, household size, and geographic location. To qualify, a household must have a gross monthly income below 130 percent of the federal poverty line, and recipients must work or else be limited to three months of benefits every three years. Individual states may have additional requirements.

School Lunch and Child Nutrition Programs: These programs are intended to promote child nutrition, generally within a school setting. They include the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, and the Special Milk Program, and they provide schools with the funding to serve meals to low-income students.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): WIC aims to safeguard the health of low-income women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are deemed to be at nutritional risk. The program provides vouchers to purchase nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthy eating, and referrals to health care. Unlike SNAP, there are limitations on the kinds of food that can be purchased using WIC.

Medicaid: Medicaid is designed to offer free or low-cost health coverage to those in need, including low-income individuals, pregnant mothers, parents of minors, and disabled individuals. Eligibility requirements vary across states due to the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid expansion, which not every state has adopted. In states that have adopted the Medicaid expansion, the recipient categories have been eliminated and all individuals with income up to 138 percent of the poverty line are eligible.

Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP): CHIP is designed to provide insurance coverage to children whose families do not qualify for Medicaid but whose incomes are too low to afford Marketplace coverage.

Head Start: Head Start provides early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parent support services for low-income families with children under 5. Families qualify either by being below 100 percent of the federal poverty line or by concurrent enrollment in SNAP, TANF, or SSI, or by demonstrating that they are experiencing homelessness.

Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF): CCDF provides funding to states to help low-income families pay for childcare while parents are at work or school. Eligibility is directly related to TANF enrollment.

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP): LIHEAP provides assistance on energy, heating, and cooling bills; weatherization and weather crises; weather-related repairs; and other energy-related expenses for low-income families. The methods of payment and assistance vary by state.

Public Housing: Public Housing programs are intended to provide safe and decent rental housing for low-income families. The government owns housing units that are rented to families at a low rate, generally a proportion of their income.

Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program: The HCV program, also known as Section 8, provides a way for low-income families to participate in the private rental market. Recipients may find a place to live, and their monthly rent payment is subsidized by the funds.

Appendix B

Single Mother-Headed Households Receiving Benefits, FY 2006

Program	Percent of Single Mother-Headed Households, Original Estimate ¹³⁷	Percent of Single Mother-Headed Households, SIPP Estimate
INCOME SUPPORT		
Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)*	41.0	41.0
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	87.5	66.1
Child Support Program**	89.5	67.0
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)*	56.3	56.3
NUTRITION SUPPORT		
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	26.8	46.6
School Lunch and Child Nutrition Programs	69.2	49.1
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	55.2	49.1
HEALTH SUPPORT		
Medicaid***	71.0	51.7
Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)***	35.0	51.7
EARLY CHILDHOOD SUPPORT		
Head Start*	48.2	48.2
Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)	87.5	66.1
ENERGY/HOUSING SUPPORT		
Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)	37.0	42.6
Public Housing	37.0	45.8
Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program	37.0	50.8

* Not included in SIPP data for 2006 but included in 2018. The original multiplier estimate was used to analyze 2006.

** Not included in SIPP for 2006 or 2018; alternative source¹³⁸ used.

*** Differentiated in the original report but not in SIPP, so the same multiplier is used for both programs in the same year.

Appendix C

There exist many other federal programs that we expect to disproportionately impact single-parent households, but that lack meaningful data on household structure to analyze the way we did with the programs included in this report. Below are some examples, with their 2018 federal budget allocations in parentheses.¹³⁹

Healthy Start Program (\$883M): The Healthy Start program provides support to improve mothers' and children's health before, during, and after pregnancy, with the aim of reducing racial and ethnic disparities in maternal and infant health outcomes. Funding is distributed to communities experiencing high rates of poor health, including those in which infant mortality is at least one and a half times the U.S. national average, or which have high rates of preterm birth, low birth weight, and maternal illness.

Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program (\$411M): The MIECHV Program connects expecting and new parents with trained home visitors to promote positive health and education outcomes. Home visitors work with a family individually to develop a plan to address their specific needs, such as teaching parenting skills, promoting early parent-child communication, screening children for developmental delays, and screening parents for postpartum issues, substance abuse, and family violence.

Title I (\$16,262M): Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, per the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA) amendment, provides supplemental funding to school districts that serve low-income students to help close the achievement gap between high- and low-income students. It aims to ensure that children of all backgrounds may receive equitable educational opportunities.

Child Welfare Programs (\$8,407M): Child welfare programs seek to identify children living in unsafe or neglectful environments and temporarily place them with relatives or foster parents until they can be reunited with their biological or adoptive parents.

Juvenile Justice Programs (\$274M): Aside from funding the juvenile court and detention systems, juvenile justice programs seek to prevent youth delinquency and rehabilitate justice-involved children and teenagers. Some of these programs include substance treatment, gang violence and human trafficking education, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and youth reentry and family engagement post-detention.

Endnotes

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How to Use the \$154 Billion Man Report

A Practical Guide for Advocates, Leaders, Researchers, Organizations, and Agencies

About the Study

The “\$154 Billion Man: The Economic Argument for Investing in Fathers” report quantifies the enormous economic cost of father absence by examining spending on 14 major federal government assistance programs that support children and mothers in father-absent families. The findings reinforce the need for proactive, sustained investment in fatherhood initiatives, policies, and programs that engage fathers and increase their economic capacity and their involvement in their children’s lives. This document highlights six ways to use the findings in your work to strengthen families.

1. Raise awareness internally and externally about the importance of a father’s presence.

- Integrate the findings into existing fatherhood and family programming as conversation starters.
- Share the findings with leadership and the board of directors to inform annual program planning.
- Share the findings with local and statewide media to raise public awareness.
- Use the findings to mobilize community leaders and stakeholders around policies and initiatives that strengthen the economic capacity of fathers, fatherhood, and families.

2. Secure public and private support for father-supportive policies and funding for local fatherhood initiatives and programs.

- Provide policymakers, funders, and donors with compelling evidence on the economic consequences of father absence to motivate the adoption of supportive policies and funding and donation decisions.
- Incorporate the findings into legislative and funding proposals, including needs assessments and problem statements, and into meetings with individual policymakers and donors.
- Highlight the importance of government programs for children’s well-being in single-mother-headed households, and how supporting innovative or emerging father-friendly policies and programs may reduce families’ reliance on public sources of financial support.

- 3. Advocate for strengthening existing local parenting and family–strengthening efforts.**
 - Use the findings to encourage father engagement as part of these broader initiatives.
 - Use the findings to support the case for a whole–family approach.
 - Share the findings with local media to generate coverage of efforts to increase father presence and capacity.
- 4. Build broad support for starting and expanding statewide fatherhood initiatives and other family–strengthening efforts.**
 - Use the findings to argue for expanded or new statewide fatherhood and family–strengthening initiatives.
 - Include the findings in grant applications and policy advocacy to justify prioritizing fatherhood support.
 - Support community mobilization efforts using the findings as a motivating factor.
- 5. Further inform federal and state legislation and policy that make a long–term investment in strengthening fathers’ economic capacity, involvement, and two–parent families.**
 - Present the findings to policymakers to inform fatherhood–related policy decisions.
 - Use the economic impact to justify increased support for policies and programs that increase fathers’ economic capacity and their engagement.
 - Integrate the findings in testimony, reports, and legislative advocacy to demonstrate the broader societal benefits of father capacity and presence.
 - Encourage policies that adopt a whole–family approach in family–strengthening initiatives.
- 6. Bolster the research and evaluation literature on what works in strengthening child, family, and community well–being.**
 - Use the findings in research proposals, such as in the background and literature review sections.
 - Use the findings to help secure funding for more research on the economic benefits of fatherhood and family–strengthening efforts.

Need Help Applying the Study?

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