2016–2018 Child Support Policy Research Agreement
Task 4B:

Use of Enforcement Actions and Their Relationship to Payments

Daniel R. Meyer, Maria Cancian, and Melody Waring

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I. IMPORTANCE OF THE ISSUE AND THE POLICY CONTEXT

High poverty rates among children living in custodial-parent families and limited support for these children from public funds have led to re-examinations of the child support system. National data show that collections of child support orders are far from guaranteed. In 2015, for example, less than half of the custodial parents due to receive support received the full amount: 31 percent received nothing, and another 26 percent received something, but less than the full amount (Grall, 2018). The child support program has a number of tools to facilitate child support collections, including, for example, income withholding. In addition, the program can take a variety of actions in response to nonpayment to improve the level of compliance with child support orders. These include intercepting state income tax refunds; suspending driver's licenses, recreational licenses, and professional licenses; and holding court hearings. Delinquent parents may also be incarcerated for failure to pay child support as a result of contempt or criminal nonsupport.

Despite policy interest in raising levels of compliance with child support orders, little research exists on the use of enforcement actions or their effectiveness. In this project, we address these questions in two ways. First, a companion report (Vogel, 2019) presents findings from qualitative interviews with child support agency and court staff who described their county's policy and practice on the use of various enforcement actions. The companion report also summarizes the perspective of these staff on the contexts in which these tools are most effective, and discusses best practices. Second, this report uses administrative data to address three related questions:

1. When noncustodial fathers fall behind in their child support in Wisconsin, how often are various enforcement actions taken? Are there particular patterns of use?

2. How does the use of these tools in Wisconsin compare to that of selected other states?

3. Is there a relationship between these actions being taken and noncustodial parents beginning to pay support in Wisconsin?

II. PRIOR RESEARCH ON ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO PAYMENTS

Use of Enforcement Actions

Fifty years ago, when child support was ordered payments were typically sent directly from the noncustodial parent to the custodial parent, without governmental oversight or intervention. When noncustodial parents fell behind, the primary options for enforcing child support involved the custodial parent initiating a legal action. In very early research, Beron (1988) reported that in 1970, 38 percent of the divorce cases in a Michigan county were subject to either an enforcement action or a judicial appearance. But enforcement activity and even monitoring of payments across states differed. In Wisconsin, for example, payments went through county courts and so were tracked, which could lead to higher levels of enforcement. Early studies suggest that the level of enforcement actions found by Beron in Michigan was probably much higher than that in other states (Chambers, 1979).

With a new awareness in the 1970s and 1980s of the problems in enforcing child support, the child support enforcement environment began to change, and has changed substantially since that time. The following are the most substantial changes:

- To prevent compliance problems, child support amounts are now withheld from noncustodial parents' paychecks from issuance of the order ("routine withholding" or "immediate withholding").

- To expedite enforcement actions by increasing monitoring, payments are now made to a central collection agency in every state before being disbursed.

- To strengthen enforcement, tools such as warning letters; warrants for arrest; court hearings; and suspensions of driver's, professional, or recreational licenses, can all occur upon nonpayment.

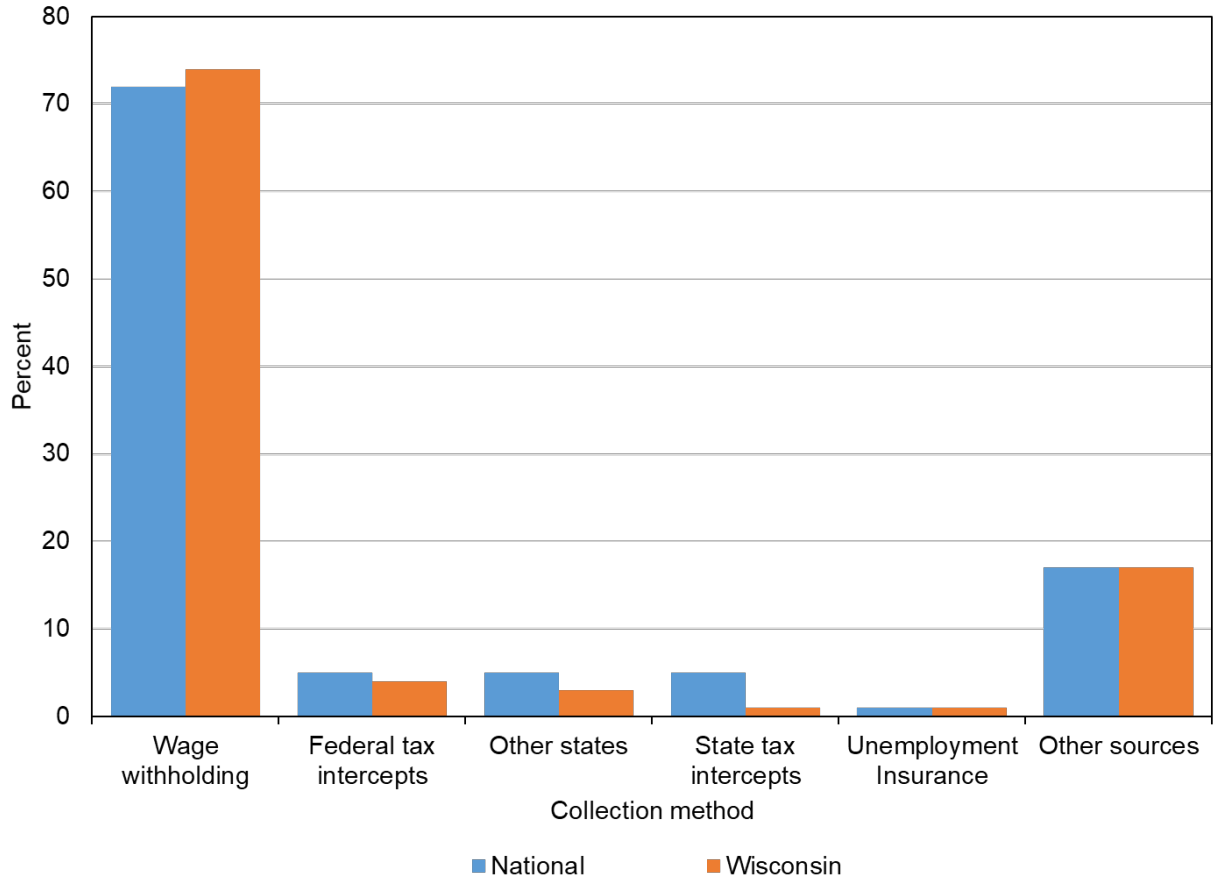
Despite the policy interest in ensuring that custodial-parent families receive the child support due to them, and the degree of change in enforcement tools over the past 50 years, research on the use of different tools is limited. A few older studies using Wisconsin administrative data provide some context. In the first, Meyer and Hernandez (1999) examine noncustodial parents who had their first order in 1996 and were behind in their payments. They find that an enforcement letter was sent to 37 percent of these noncustodial parents and 22 percent were called into a court hearing. Rothe, Ha, and Sosulski (2004) examine noncustodial parents with a first child support order in 1997 or 2000 who were behind in their payments. In the 1997 cohort, they find 50 percent of the cases had an enforcement letter, 29 percent had a contempt hearing, and 24 percent had a Notice of Lien and Credit Bureau Reporting. Enforcement actions were less frequent for the 2000 cohort, for whom 38 percent had a letter, 22 percent a contempt hearing, and only 5 percent a Notice of Lien and Credit Bureau Reporting. In both cohorts, license suspensions and referrals for criminal nonsupport were very rare.

Cook and Noyes (2011) and Cook (2015) provide more information on selected enforcement actions in Wisconsin, focusing on contempt, and civil and criminal nonsupport. Based on interviews with child support and court staff in five counties, Cook and Noyes (2011) find substantial variation across counties in the use of contempt hearings as an enforcement tool.

Cook (2015) reports that judicial civil and criminal nonsupport actions appeared to increase in the early 2000s and then declined through 2010. Some of the decline appeared to be related to the lack of staff resources to pursue civil and criminal enforcement actions. In sum, the prior Wisconsin work shows that patterns of use of enforcement tools may be changing. This is especially important because information on the frequency with which a variety of tools are used is now more than 15 years old.

Another approach to gaining information on the use of enforcement tools is to examine aggregate data on the types of payments. Data from every state's child support office identifies the source of collections, so the amount of collections that comes from withholding, tax intercepts, and direct payment is known. As shown in Figure 1, the most recent national data (preliminary data from FY 2017) show that 72 percent of collections come from wage withholding, 5 percent from federal tax intercepts, 5 percent from other states, 1 percent from state tax intercepts, 1 percent from Unemployment Insurance intercepts, and 17 percent from other sources, typically private payments (U.S. Office of Child Support Enforcement, n.d.). Wisconsin's numbers are quite similar: 74 percent, 4 percent, 3 percent, 1 percent, 1 percent, and 17 percent, respectively. But these data only tell us about how often payments came from withholding and intercepts, not how frequently these actions were initiated.

Figure 1. Aggregate data on child support collections, national and Wisconsin: 2017



Source: U.S. Office of Child Support Enforcement, n.d.
Notes: Other sources are typically private payments.

This report contributes to the literature by providing much more recent estimates of the use of various enforcement tools. We also consider a broader array of enforcement actions than has been examined before, as we include enforcement letters, notices of intent to suspend licenses, license suspensions, court hearings, and whether individuals were placed in contempt of court.

The Context: Use of Enforcement Tools in Other States

No recent research that we are aware of has focused on comparing the use of different child support enforcement tools in different states. Some evidence does exist from the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED), a recent demonstration funded by the U.S. Office of Child Support Enforcement (Cancian, Meyer, and Wood, forthcoming). CSPED, which was operated in portions of eight states (California, Colorado, Iowa, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin), aimed to provide noncustodial parents with an integrated set of child support, employment, and parenting services through a child support-led program. Noncustodial parents in CSPED had established paternity, were being served by the child support program, and were either not regularly paying child support or were expected to have difficulty making payments due to lack of regular employment. The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) was awarded a cooperative agreement to procure and manage an evaluation of CSPED by an independent third-party evaluator. DCF selected the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and their partner, Mathematica Policy Research, as the evaluators. The evaluation used a random-assignment design, so half the noncustodial parents were assigned to the CSPED extra services, and half received regular services. Because half the noncustodial parents received regular services, and nearly all these noncustodial parents were behind in their payments, CSPED provides the first opportunity to compare the typical use of various enforcement tools in different states. This report uses administrative data from some of the participating state agencies to compare the use of certain enforcement actions among the noncustodial parents receiving regular services.

Relationships between Enforcement Actions and Compliance

Some early research examined the effectiveness of particular enforcement tools. For example, Garfinkel and Klawitter (1990), in early pathbreaking work, estimate that routine withholding increases the compliance rate in the first years of an order by 11 to 30 percent. Other early research found that routine withholding, collection of support through a public agency, criminal penalties, tax intercepts, the ability to place liens against property, allowing custodial parents receiving welfare to keep some of the child support paid on their behalf, and higher public expenditures on child support enforcement all had a positive effect on compliance with orders or the amount paid (e.g., Beller and Graham, 1993; Garfinkel and Robins, 1994; Sorensen and Hill, 2004). Several state-based experiments have attempted to measure the effect on payments of particular tools, such as billing reminders (Baird, Reardon, Cullinan, McDermott, and Landers, 2015); intensive case-management tools for debt collection (Plotnick, Glosser, Moore, and Obara, 2015); arrests of delinquent parents (Schexnayder et al., 2001); and license suspensions (Thoennes and Pearson, 2000). None of those investigations found more than very modest (less than 5 percent improvement in compliance) or short-term effects.

In addition to this research examining individual enforcement actions, some research has developed indices that combine whether a state has enforcement actions available, the length of experience with these actions, and the amount spent on enforcement; these indices are generally found to be related to levels of child support compliance (e.g., Freeman and Waldfogel, 2001; Huang, 2010). Another strategy has been to consider the extent to which custodial mothers in a particular city receive support compared to what might be expected based on characteristics of that location as a proxy for the strength of enforcement; this research also shows a positive relationship between enforcement and child support (e.g., Nepomnyaschy and Garfinkel, 2010).

However, the work using indices or proxies does not provide information on whether individual enforcement actions are effective.

The research on the use of enforcement actions using Wisconsin administrative data cited above also provides some information on the effectiveness of various tools. Meyer and Hernandez (1999) find that enforcement letters and hearings were associated with beginning to pay support for those who initially were nonpayers. For initial payers who then became nonpayers, letters were not strongly associated with a return to payment status, but court hearings were (though the relationship was not immediate). Rothe and colleagues (2004) examine liens and income withholding as well as letters and hearings. They show that income withholding is strongly associated with beginning to pay support. Court hearings are also associated with beginning to pay, but enforcement letters and sending lien notices were not generally associated with beginning to pay support.

This report contributes to the literature by using recent data to examine the relationship between enforcement tools and beginning to pay support. This research cannot show a causal relationship because the kinds of cases that experience court hearings, for example, may differ from those who do not in ways that we do not measure, so we cannot fully attribute beginning to pay support to a particular enforcement tool. Nonetheless, to the extent that we can control for other factors related to beginning to pay support, this research can suggest relationships between enforcement tools and child support payments. Following the conclusions on factors related to payments from previous research, we control for indicators of a father's ability to pay support (e.g., Bartfeld and Meyer, 2003; Chen and Meyer, 2017; Goldberg, 2015; Nepomnyaschy and Garfinkel, 2010) and some indicators of a father's willingness to pay support (e.g., Chen and Meyer, 2017; Goldberg, 2015), as well as child support enforcement tools.

Contributions of This Research

As highlighted above, this study expands the previous work in several ways. First, we provide more recent information on the use of various enforcement tools in Wisconsin, updating the previous work of Meyer and Hernandez (1999) and Rothe and colleagues (2004). Second, we provide information on how the use of these enforcement tools compares between Wisconsin and several other states, using data from the CSPED evaluation for those who received regular services (not the new intervention). Finally, we provide information on whether these enforcement actions are associated with the initiation of child support payments. While this is only one aspect of enforcement effects (enforcement could also move a case from partial payment into full payment), we believe it is an important step in furthering our understanding of the relationship between enforcement tools and compliance.

III. DATA, METHODS, AND ANALYSIS PLAN

Data and Sample: Wisconsin Administrative Records

Our primary source of data is administrative records from the State of Wisconsin, primarily from KIDS (the state's child support records). In addition to child support records for noncustodial parents, we use administrative records of earnings and incarceration as found in the Multi-Sample Person File (MSPF), a merged database of Wisconsin administrative records held at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Our analysis sample begins with all noncustodial fathers who first began owing child support in Wisconsin in 2010, 2011, or 2012, and who owe support consistently for at least

36 months (three years) after the order begins (N = 26,909).[1] Because we are interested in the use of enforcement actions among cases being served by the child support program, we exclude cases that were never a IV-D case during the period of observation (n = 3,024). We also drop fathers whose location was unknown or who were known to be living outside of Wisconsin for all 36 months (n = 2,665), not known to be age 18 or over when the order began (n = 162), those with a recorded death date before the end of the three-year window (n = 32), and where the age of the youngest child was missing in the MSPF (n = 12). Together, these exclusions resulted in a sample of 21,208 noncustodial fathers (185 fathers met multiple exclusion criterion). From this sample, we conduct most of our analyses on 11,783 fathers who were nonpayers; that is, those who did not make any payment for at least two consecutive months within our 36-month observation period.

Measures: Wisconsin Administrative Records

Child support payments. We use the record of total current child support paid within a calendar month.[2] We consider only payments that originate from an income or benefits withholding order or are made directly by the noncustodial parent—excluding payments made via, for example, intercepting a tax refund or lottery winnings, since we do not expect these automatic intercepts to reflect a noncustodial parent's behavioral response to enforcement actions. Since we are limiting the sample based on the year of a first child support order, 90 percent of the sample has only one case on which they owe child support during our period of

[1]For the amount owed, we use the record of how much the noncustodial parent was invoiced every month. The advantage of this measure is that it avoids considering the lack of "timely" payments on retroactive orders as meaningful nonpayment. However, our data checks revealed that there are rare occasions in which amounts continue to be owed using this variable even when other variables suggest the order has stopped.

[2]We use the effective date of a payment to assign months, rather than the date the payment was received. We consider only payments made on current child support owed (e.g., not payments on arrears or alimony).

observation. When a noncustodial father has more than one case, we aggregate payments across all of his cases. For this analysis, we treat partial payments (i.e., less than the amount ordered in the month) as a payment; "nonpayment" includes only no payment.

Enforcement actions. We focus on whether a particular type of enforcement action occurred and its timing, rather than considering multiple actions of the same kind. Our criteria for which enforcement actions we consider included: there must be a record in the MSFP (based on KIDS records); actions must happen directly to the noncustodial parent (e.g., ignoring notices to custodial parents or financial representatives); and actions cannot be an automatic process (e.g., being placed on the lien docket) that is unlikely to effect a behavioral response. Based on interviews with child support staff in Wisconsin (Vogel, 2019), we expected to find five enforcement action types: 1) enforcement letters and warnings, including automatic state-generated letters and letters generated by case workers; 2) notice of intent to suspend the noncustodial parent's license (driver's, professional, or recreational); 3) license suspension; 4) court hearing; and 5) being found in contempt.[3] We aggregate enforcement actions across all of a noncustodial parent's child support cases and consider only the calendar month of the action, not the day of the month.[4] We consider only actions that occur during a spell of nonpayment

[3]We identify the type of action by the CDEVTTY event type field. We exclude actions such as new income withholding orders, levy payments, or the initiation of a lien, because these occur automatically and do not represent levers child support staff have discretion over to use to affect behavior. The measure of "letter" we used is broad, including all notices a noncustodial parent receives except for the notice of license suspension. For enforcement letters, we use codes EN01, EN04, EN05, EN08, EN12, EN29, EN30, EN31, and EN35 in the CDEVTTY event type field; for notices to suspend licenses, we use codes AE15 and AE16; for license suspensions, we use code AECT; for court hearings, we use codes HEAS, HECM, and HECN; and for contempt, we use codes EN10 and EN25, and the disposition code in the CDDSPEV field CNTP or CTMP when the event code is HECN (i.e., the contempt hearing resulted in contempt). Note that we were not able to include a request for a voluntary or court-ordered work search order, which may precede hearings.

[4]When two or more events of different types occurred in the same month, we sequence them by assuming they follow the temporal ordering of 1) letters; 2) a notice of intent to suspend the noncustodial parent's driver's license; 3) license suspension; 4) court hearing; and 5) contempt.

(beginning in the first month of nonpayment and including the month, if any, where we observe a payment).

Demographic controls. In some analyses we consider the county where the child support case was serviced; in our multivariate analyses (described below), we distinguish between cases ever in Milwaukee County, other urban counties (using Census Bureau designations), and rural counties.[5] We also consider a variety of other characteristics of noncustodial fathers, including his age and the age of his youngest child when the order begins, number of children in the first three years, and race (missing for about 14 percent). We create an indicator for whether any of the noncustodial father's children are marital (missing for about 2 percent of fathers). We also use an indicator to distinguish fathers who only had IV-D cases from those who had a case that was not IV-D for some of the three-year period after the order begins.

Using administrative data from unemployment insurance (UI) records of quarterly earnings, we sum the noncustodial parent's formal earnings in the year before the order begins and count the number of quarters employed (i.e., 0–4).[6] Using UI records of wages is limited in that it excludes any informal, unreported income (e.g., from odd jobs) and some classifications of labor (e.g., independent contractors, clergy, self-employed, etc). We cannot distinguish people who actually had $0 in earnings from those who have earnings that are excluded from UI records, so the 4,681 fathers (3,580 nonpaying fathers) with $0 reported earnings includes both.

[5]For county-based descriptive information in Appendix -, we use the first observed county. For other analyses, we make mutually exclusive categories for ever in Milwaukee, never in Milwaukee but ever in another urban county, and always rural. Due to a limitation in how child support service location is recorded in the MSPF, location is missing for approximately 5 percent of noncustodial parents and the "first" observed county may not be the county where the order originated.

[6]Because wage records are constructed on a calendar quarter basis, we define "year before" as most recent quarter completed before the month the order begins plus the prior three.

An additional 493 fathers (329 nonpaying fathers) cannot be matched to the earnings records at all, so are missing earnings.

Using administrative data from the Department of Corrections, we create an indicator for whether the father was ever observed in a Wisconsin correctional facility in the five years prior to the beginning of the order, and whether he was in a facility in the month the order begins.

Analysis Plan: Wisconsin Administrative Records

Use of enforcement actions. We use simple descriptive statistics for the use of enforcement actions, describing the extent to which a noncustodial parent ever had an action during their first nonpayment spell. We also consider the timing and sequencing of actions. With respect to the timing of enforcement actions, we show the proportion of nonpaying noncustodial parents with actions within a given period of nonpayment.[7] In analyzing the sequence of enforcement actions, we distinguish alternative pathways or branches of a "tree." For each potential first action we count whether there was a second action (and its type) within the spell, and similarly, if applicable, whether there was a third action (and its type).

Relationship between enforcement actions and beginning to pay support. To model the relationship between enforcement actions and resuming payment, we use a Cox proportional hazards model, a type of survival analysis that accounts for censored data.[8] This type of model is particularly useful for considering transitions (beginning to pay support after a period of not paying) when the event may or may not occur before the end of the observation period, and the sequencing of events is important. The model calculates the change in the "hazard" of moving to

[7]These analyses use a life table approach, in which the proportion receiving an action within a particular period explicitly considers whether a person is still "at risk," or has made a payment or the end of the observation period has been reached.

[8]In this case, the models account for observation for which our period of observation ends before a transition from nonpayment to payment.

payment expected from a given predictor—for instance, how much more or less the hazard of payment is (i.e., how much more or less likely payment is) after a noncustodial father has received an enforcement letter. In this model, enforcement actions vary over time; most other control variables are set at the time of the beginning of the order.[9] We operationalize the timing of enforcement actions in two ways. In our first model, we consider both immediate and lagged relationships between an enforcement action and beginning to pay. For example, we consider the relationship of beginning payments "this month" when a noncustodial father receives an enforcement letter, versus the relationship of making a payment after receiving a letter "last month," or "two months ago," or "three or more months ago." In the second model, we consider whether an enforcement action occurred relatively early in a nonpayment spell or relatively late. The definition of "early" and "late" is set separately for each enforcement action and is set so that about one-quarter of cases are defined as "early." Thus, "early" is within two months for enforcement letters; within six months for notices of intent to suspend, court hearings, and contempt; and within nine months for license suspensions.[10]

Subgroups. In addition to the models that consider all nonpayers together, we conduct three subgroup analyses. First, we look at two income subgroups: fathers who earned less than $20,000 in UI-reported earnings in the year prior to their first child support order, contrasting them with fathers who earned $20,000 or more.[11] Second, we divide the sample by when nonpayment began. We have one subgroup of fathers who are initial nonpayers (that is, they do

[9]The number of children is measured at the end of the three-year period.

[10]Since the key events could be "tied" (e.g., a payment made within the same calendar month as a license suspension), and survival analyses depend on sequenced events, we use the Efron method of dealing with ties. All analyses were conducted using the PHREG procedure of SAS 9.4.

[11]This subgroup analysis excludes the 388 individuals for whom we could not identify their earnings in the prior year.

not make any payments in at least the first and second month after they begin owing child support), and one subgroup of fathers who initially paid support but began a nonpayment later in their order. Third, we divide subgroups based on whether all children were nonmarital or some children were born inside marriage.[12]

Data, Sample, Measures, and Analysis Plan

As described above, the CSPED evaluation provides information on the use of selected enforcement actions in seven of the eight states (comparable enforcement data for South Carolina were unavailable). For this analysis, we use data from child support records in each of the seven states. There was a common framework for eligibility into CSPED, although there were some differences across states, and states used somewhat different recruitment methods (Noyes et al., 2018). For this analysis we use information on all noncustodial parents in the regular-services group; we have information on enforcement during the first year after enrollment for 4,283 noncustodial parents and for the second year after enrollment for 3,176 noncustodial parents.

Measures of each enforcement action were not available in all seven states, and the definition of an action differs somewhat across states. For example, in California and Ohio, data on whether a hearing was held were not available; instead, in these two states we proxy this with the notice of a hearing being served. After this adjustment, we have information on contempt hearings in all seven states, on license suspensions in three states (Colorado, Texas, and Wisconsin) and on bench warrants in three states (California, Texas, and Wisconsin). We present

[12]This subgroup analysis excludes the 705 individuals missing marital status of children.

simple descriptive information on how often a noncustodial parent had each of these tools within the first year after enrollment and within the second year.[13]

IV. RESULTS

Description of Nonpaying Fathers

Table 1 shows the characteristics of all 21,208 noncustodial fathers in our Wisconsin sample and the 11,783 fathers who have a spell of nonpayment (two or more months without paying support). Among all noncustodial fathers owing support, 24 percent were ever in Milwaukee County, 51 percent were ever in another urban county, and about one-quarter were always in a rural county. Nearly 60 percent of fathers were non-Hispanic white. When the order began, fathers averaged 31 years of age, and over the three years we observed, the sample has an average of 1.6 children. Average formal earnings in the year before the child support order were about $28,000. Sixty-two percent of fathers had only nonmarital children.

Nonpayers were more likely than the full sample of noncustodial fathers to live in Milwaukee, and were less likely to be Non-Hispanic white and more likely to be non-Hispanic black. Nonpayers were more likely to have been incarcerated, and had lower average earnings and less consistent formal employment prior to their child support order. Nonpayers are more likely to have had nonmarital children. The relationships between nonpayment and these demographic, employment, and incarceration history measures are consistent with prior research.

[13]These numbers are quite close, but not identical, to those reported in the impact evaluation (Cancian et al., forthcoming). This is because the numbers in the impact report have been adjusted through a regression; the numbers reported here are unadjusted.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

	All Noncustodial Parents	SD	Nonpayers	SD
Total *N/n*	**21,208**		**11,783**	
County[a]				
Ever in Milwaukee	23.5%		31.7%	
Ever in other urban county (never Milwaukee)	51.4%		48.0%	
Always in rural county	25.2%		20.3%	
Age when order begins	30.7	8.6	28.6	8.0
Race[b]				
Non-Hispanic white	59.0%		47.8%	
Non-Hispanic black	21.8%		30.8%	
Other	19.3%		21.4%	
Age of NCP's youngest child when order begins	3.4	3.8	2.7	3.5
Number of children	1.6	0.9	1.5	0.9
Ever incarcerated in 5 years prior to order	6.3%		10.4%	
Incarcerated in month order begins	1.0%		1.7%	
Total earnings year before order[c]	$27,757	$38,507	$15,074	$28,197
Quarters employed year before order (0–4)[c]	2.6	1.7	2.0	1.7
Year order begins				
2010	32.6%		32.0%	
2011	33.8%		33.6%	
2012	33.6%		34.4%	
Enforcement case type				
Always IV-D	85.8%		87.4%	
Ever observed as not IV-D	14.2%		12.6%	
Paternity type[d]				
Any marital children	38.5%		26.4%	
All children via paternity	61.5%		73.6%	
Initial payment status				
Initial nonpayers	27.7%		50.2%	
Initial payers	72.4%		49.8%	
Months before first spell of nonpayment			7.1	9.1
Total months of payments in first 3 years	26.0	11.8	18.7	11.3

[a] *Missing total* n = *1,159 / Nonpayers* n = *347*
[b] *Missing total* n = *2,869 / Nonpayers* n = *767*
[c] *Missing total* n = *493 / Nonpayers* n = *329*
[d] *Missing total* n = *376 / Nonpayers* n = *283*

Twenty-eight percent (5,864) of the fathers did not pay any support in the first two months after the order was established. Another 16 percent fell into a nonpayment spell later within the first year, and another 12 percent within our three-year window (not shown on table). Thus, a total of about 56 percent of the noncustodial fathers (11,783) had at least one spell of

nonpayment (not paying any support for two consecutive months) within the first three years. Among all nonpayers, the mean time to nonpayment was seven months. Many of the nonpayers make payments at some point in the three-year period; nonpayers made payments in an average of 18.7 months out of our 36-month observation period.

Nonpayment Spells

An analysis of spells shows substantial volatility in payment patterns, with many noncustodial parents cycling between fairly short spells of any payment and no payment. Those who have at least one nonpayment spell average two spells during our 36 months. Two nonpayment spells could include beginning as a nonpayer, then paying, then falling into nonpayment again; or could result from beginning as a payer, then falling into nonpayment, then paying again, and then falling into nonpayment again. Among nonpayers—who have at least two consecutive months of nonpayment—27 percent begin to pay in the third month, and more than two-thirds begin to pay within a year of the initial nonpayment. If we then follow the noncustodial parents who began paying after a nonpayment spell, about one-third stop paying again within five months. Finally, in second nonpayment spells more than half (58 percent) make at least one payment within six months.[14]

Use of Enforcement Tools

Table 2 focuses on nonpayers and shows the extent to which various enforcement tools are used within a nonpayment spell. The table also shows how long it takes for an action to be used, following fathers from their first month of nonpayment until either the tool is used, or the father begins paying, or the observation period ends. Three-fourths of nonpaying fathers

[14]Because we follow fathers for 36 months, we observe a second nonpayment spell only for nonpayers who begin paying, and then stop paying again, within 36 months.

experienced at least one enforcement action after their nonpayment spell began. The most common was a general enforcement letter (those not related to licenses), occurring for 71.5 percent of the nonpayers, so nearly all those who experienced an action had at least one general letter during the nonpayment spell. The next most common action was a court hearing, occurring for 21.5 percent of nonpayers. More than 1 in 10 had a notice of intent to suspend a license, with fewer than 5 percent experiencing license suspension. Being placed in contempt was also relatively rare, occurring for 7.9 percent of nonpaying fathers.

Appendix – shows the use of these enforcement tools across the 23 counties with the largest sample of nonpaying fathers in Wisconsin (we include any county with at least 100 nonpaying fathers). There are differences in the use of tools across counties, as recorded in KIDS. For example, only half of nonpaying fathers in Washington County experienced an enforcement action, while the seven counties with the highest proportions have 80 to 90 percent of nonpaying fathers all receiving at least one enforcement action (Barron, Dodge, Fond du Lac, Kenosha, Marathon, Rock, Wood counties). General letters follow this same pattern. Three counties sent notice of intent to suspend licenses to more than 20 percent of the nonpayers (Manitowoc, Marathon, Walworth counties); in contrast, three counties were below 2 percent (Dodge, Rock, Winnebago counties). Dodge County has the highest proportion of nonpayers with court hearings (44.2 percent); Brown County has the lowest (5.8 percent). Four counties place more than 1 in 5 nonpayers in contempt (Dodge, Eau Claire, La Crosse, Sauk counties); in Milwaukee county, the comparable figure is less than 1 percent.

Table 2. Use of Enforcement Tools among Nonpaying Fathers (*n* = 11,783)

	n	Percent
No enforcement action	**2,959**	
Any enforcement action (TO NCP)	**8,824**	74.9%
% w/ enforcement action by month:		
End of first nonpayment month		15.8%
End of next month (2nd month)		40.9%
End of next month (3rd month)		58.3%
End of 6th month		72.1%
Enforcement letter (general)	**8,421**	71.5%
% w/ enforcement action by month:		
End of first nonpayment month		15.0%
End of next month (2nd month)		39.1%
End of next month (3rd month)		55.9%
End of 6th month		67.9%
Notice of intent to suspend license	**1,270**	10.8%
% w/ enforcement action by month:		
End of first nonpayment month		0.1%
End of next month (2nd month)		0.4%
End of next month (3rd month)		0.9%
End of 6th month		5.0%
License suspension	**515**	4.4%
% w/ enforcement action by month:		
End of first nonpayment month		0.0%
End of next month (2nd month)		0.0%
End of next month (3rd month)		0.0%
End of 6th month		0.1%
Court hearings	**2,535**	21.5%
% w/ enforcement action by month:		
End of first nonpayment month		0.8%
End of next month (2nd month)		2.1%
End of next month (3rd month)		4.2%
End of 6th month		19.4%
Placed in contempt	**932**	7.9%
% w/ enforcement action by month:		
End of first nonpayment month		0.1%
End of next month (2nd month)		0.2%
End of next month (3rd month)		0.7%
End of 6th month		3.5%

Note: Percent with enforcement action comes from a life table in which fathers are followed from the first month of nonpayment until they either have the action, pay, or the end of the observation period is reach.

Table 2 shows not just the likelihood of an enforcement action, but also shows its timing. When letters occurred, they tended to occur quickly, with 56 percent of nonpayers receiving a general letter within three months of the start of their nonpayment spell (note that if the nonpayment spell was proceeded by partial payments, a letter may have been sent prior to the spell that we do not observe).[15] The other actions were much slower to occur, as well as being less frequent. Less than one percent of fathers received a notice of intent to suspend their license, an actual license suspension, or being placed in contempt, within three months of their nonpayment spell. Court hearings were slightly more common, occurring to 4 percent of nonpaying fathers within three months.

Table 2 does not provide information on the sequence in which enforcement actions were used. In Tables 3a and 3b, we take up this question. For this analysis we consider only the 10,807 nonpaying fathers who began a nonpayment spell within the first 24 months to ensure we have at least a year of observation of enforcement actions once nonpayment has begun. Table 2 already showed that general enforcement letters were the most common overall type of action; Table 3a shows they are also the most common first action, taken for 67.6 percent of nonpaying parents. Fewer than 5 percent begin with a hearing (4.7 percent) or a notice of license suspension (1.5 percent). Note that in this analysis, we report on enforcement actions that occurred within the first spell of nonpayment. However, actions may have been initiated prior to when the spell began if the father had a single month of nonpayment followed by payment, or a series of partial

[15]Among all nonpayers in our sample, we observe that 89 percent ever receive the first state-generated automatic letter (EN01 in the KIDS system). This is lower than might be expected for an automatic enforcement action. The lack of observed letters may reflect a mix of factors, including that a small portion of nonpayers are not IV-D cases during the whole period we observe, a small portion may have moved in or out of the state during the observation, and some nonpayers may have had extenuating circumstances that would halt the automatic letter (e.g., a known disability).

payments. Thus, for example, the few instances where a notice of license suspension is the first action may reflect a sequence of actions initiated during a period of partial payments.[16]

Among those who first get an enforcement letter, the most common next action type is a hearing (22.3 percent of fathers who received letters first). Nearly two-thirds do not have a second action type observed after an enforcement letter (though they may receive subsequent actions of the same type), either because they began to pay or because the observation period ended. For those who received a letter first and a hearing second, more than one-third (38.4 percent) are held in contempt as the next action.

The last column of Table 3a shows the frequency of the various patterns considering all those who began their nonpayment spell in the first 24 months. The two most common patterns are each experienced by more than one-fourth of nonpayers: a letter followed by no other action (44.6 percent), and no action at all (26.2 percent). The only other sequences that describe at least 4 percent of nonpayers are a letter followed by a hearing and then no other action (8.2 percent); a letter, followed by a hearing, followed by contempt (5.8 percent); and a letter followed by a notice of license suspension and then no other action (4.0 percent).

Overall the table shows some patterns. Letters are not only the most common first action, but they are also a common second action for cases that had a different first action. When noncustodial parents receive a notice that their license will be suspended, suspensions do follow fairly frequently: 37.3 percent of the time when the notice is the first action and 30.7 percent of the time when the notice followed a letter. Finally, contempt generally only follows court hearings, as is expected.

[16]Moreover, cases in which we observe a hearing as the first action in the nonpayment spell may have been preceded by other orders that occurred during a spell of partial payment if it preceded a nonpayment spell. Further, we did not incorporate seek-work orders, which may occur before hearings.

Table 3a. Sequence of Enforcement Action Types among Fathers Whose first Nonpayment Spell Begins before the 25th Month of Observation (*n* = 10,807)

First Enforcement Action			Second Enforcement Action				Third Enforcement Action			
	n	Overall %		*n*	First Type %	Overall %		*n*	Second Type %	Overall %
Letter	7,309	67.6%	Hearing	1,631	22.3%	15.1%	Contempt	626	38.4%	5.8%
							Notice	124	7.6%	1.1%
							None	881	54.0%	8.2%
			Notice	828	11.3%	7.7%	Suspend	254	30.7%	2.4%
							Hearing	134	16.2%	1.2%
							Other	3	0.4%	0.0%
							None	437	52.8%	4.0%
			Other	34	0.5%	0.3%	Other	20	58.8%	0.2%
							None	14	41.2%	0.1%
			None	4,816	65.9%	44.6%				44.6%
Hearing	504	4.7%	Letter	182	36.1%	1.7%	Notice	30	16.5%	0.3%
							Other	12	6.6%	0.1%
							None	140	76.9%	1.3%
			Contempt	70	13.9%	0.6%	Other	22	31.4%	0.2%
							None	48	68.6%	0.4%
			Other	20	4.0%	0.2%	Other	13		0.1%
							None	7		0.1%
			None	232	46.0%	2.1%				2.1%
Notice	158	1.5%	Suspension	59	37.3%	0.5%	Other	36	61.0%	0.3%
							None	23	39.0%	0.2%
			Other	42	26.6%	0.4%	Other	22	52.4%	0.2%
							None	20	47.6%	0.2%
			None	57	36.1%	0.5%				0.5%
Other	5	0.0%	Other	3		0.0%	Other	1		0.0%
							None	2		0.0%
			None	2		0.0%				0.0%
None	2,831	26.2%								26.2%
Total *n*	**10,807**									

Note: Table groups action types with fewer than 30 observations into "Other." Percentages are not shown when the denominator is less than 30.

Table 3b summarizes the number of different types of actions (out of five possible types). In this sample, relatively few people experience multiple types of enforcement actions: nearly three-quarters have either no actions (26.2 percent) or one action type (47.3 percent). Still, there are some nonpaying fathers for whom we observe multiple types of actions: 12 percent have at least three.

Table 3b. Count of Enforcement Action Types, Maximum Five (*N* = 10,807)

	n	Percent
None	2,831	26.2%
One action type	5107	47.3%
Two action types	1572	14.5%
Three action types	943	8.7%
Four action types	210	1.9%
Five action types	144	1.3%
Total *N*	**10,807**	

Note: Uses the same sample as Table 3A, fathers whose first nonpayment spell begins before the 25th month of observation.

Use of Enforcement Tools in Other States

As described above, the national CSPED evaluation provides some information on the use of various enforcement tools among noncustodial parents who are behind in their payments in seven different states. This table is not directly comparable to the previous analyses, because the Wisconsin parents are from only Brown and Kenosha counties; Appendix – showed that Brown County has a lower proportion of court hearings than other counties, whereas Kenosha County has a higher proportion. Another difference between the previous analyses and this one is timing: the previous analyses examined noncustodial fathers from the beginning of their first order; this analysis examines noncustodial parents who were behind in their payments already (or expected to become behind) and were having employment difficulties. Finally, the timing of

the CSPED analysis begins with enrollment into the program (October 2013 to September 2016), rather than the first month of nonpayment.

Table 4 shows that license suspensions are much more likely in Colorado than Wisconsin and are virtually never used in Texas.[17] No other state provided data on license suspension. We have data from all states on court hearings for contempt. Hearings were much more common in the first year in Texas and Wisconsin than other states (note this reflects, in part, that both states used court hearings to recruit CSPED participants). By the second year, contempt hearings were most common in Wisconsin (21.8 percent), followed by Iowa at 9.5 percent, and California and Texas (both about 7 percent). Bench warrants were less common in Wisconsin than Texas, but they were more common in Wisconsin than in California, and no other state provided data. In summary, then, Wisconsin counties appear to use court hearings more frequently than the other states, but are in between other states in the use of license suspensions or bench warrants.

Table 4. Use of Enforcement Actions in Seven States, Using Data from CSPED

	CA	CO	IA	OH	TN	TX	WI
License suspension							
Year 1 after enrollment	N/A	65.3%	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.0%	9.1%
Year 2 after enrollment	N/A	49.6%	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.6%	8.5%
Contempt hearings[a,b]							
Year 1 after enrollment	8.0%	4.6%	9.0%	7.1%	2.3%	48.7%	32.4%
Year 2 after enrollment	6.9%	2.0%	9.5%	1.7%	1.1%	7.2%	21.8%
Bench warrants							
Year 1 after enrollment	1.7%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	22.5%	5.9%
Year 2 after enrollment	1.2%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	9.0%	5.0%
n							
Year 1 after enrollment	666	750	501	323	751	579	713
Year 2 after enrollment	495	500	453	361	529	333	505

[a]*Hearings proxied by service in CA, OH.*
[b]N*s in CO are 151/151 for hearings (because overwritten for early entrants).*

[17]License suspensions in Colorado include drivers, recreational, and professional licenses. Drivers' license actions are by far the most common (more than 95 percent of these actions); actions dealing with recreational licenses and (especially) professional license actions are uncommon.

The Relationship between Enforcement Tools and Beginning to Pay Support

Table 5 reports our multivariate analysis of whether enforcement tools are associated with beginning to pay support. In this analysis, we consider whether various enforcement actions might have immediate and lagged relationships with beginning payment. The results show that all enforcement actions are associated with beginning to pay support, though the strength of the relationship differs somewhat, as does the strength of the lags. For example, beginning to pay support is more likely in the month in which a general enforcement letter is sent, with payment (the hazard rate) almost twice as likely. There are also lagged relationships: if a father has not yet begun to pay in the month receiving the letter, he is significantly more likely to do so in the months following. The notice that a license will be suspended is also associated with beginning to pay support, but here if payment does not occur within the same month, there is no significance with the lagged relationship. Likewise, license suspensions are associated with beginning to pay support, but only in the month in which they occur, and the coefficient is the least strong of all the enforcement variables. Court hearings and holding a noncustodial parent in contempt are both associated with beginning to pay support, both immediately and as time passes since the action.

The coefficients on the control variables generally reveal expected relationships. Older noncustodial parents, non-Hispanic white parents, those with fewer children, and those with higher previous earnings and employment are all more likely to begin paying support. Those with a history of incarceration are less likely to begin paying, but incarceration in the month the order began does not show a relationship, controlling for prior incarceration. Those with nonmarital children are less likely to begin to pay. Participating in the child support program (those who were always IV-D cases) is associated with an increased likelihood of beginning to pay support.

Table 5. Enforcement Actions, Considering Lags, and Beginning to Pay Support

	Coefficient	Standard Error	Hazard Ratio
General letter			
This month	0.63***	0.03	1.88
Last month	0.25***	0.04	1.28
2 months ago	0.19***	0.04	1.21
3 or more months ago	0.16***	0.04	1.17
Notice of intent to suspend			
This month	0.68***	0.07	1.98
Last month	0.16	0.10	1.18
2 months ago	0.07	0.13	1.07
3 or more months ago	0.07	0.08	1.08
License suspension			
This month	0.33*	0.14	1.39
Last month	0.16	0.18	1.17
2 months ago	-0.20	0.23	0.82
3 or more months ago	0.03	0.11	1.03
Court hearing			
This month	0.99***	0.05	2.69
Last month	0.39***	0.07	1.47
2 months ago	0.43***	0.08	1.54
3 or more months ago	0.36***	0.05	1.43
Contempt			
This month	0.71***	0.06	2.03
Last month	0.38***	0.11	1.46
2 months ago	0.24	0.14	1.27
3 or more months ago	0.29***	0.07	1.34
Demographic controls			
Ever in other urban county [vs ever Milwaukee]	0.11***	0.03	1.12
Always rural county [vs ever Milwaukee]	0.09*	0.03	1.09
Age at start of order	0.01***	0.00	1.01
Black non-Hispanic [vs White non-Hispanic]	-0.38***	0.03	0.68
Other race [vs White non-Hispanic]	-0.21***	0.03	0.81
Number of children at start of order	-0.03*	0.01	0.97
Youngest child's age at start of order	0.00	0.00	1.00
Ever incarcerated in 5 years before order	-0.25***	0.04	0.78
Incarcerated in month order begins	0.03	0.09	1.04
Total earnings (in $10,000) year before order	0.01*	0.00	1.01
Number of quarters employed year before order	0.16***	0.01	1.18
Ever observed as not a IV-D [vs always IV-D]	-0.28***	0.03	0.76
All nonmarital children [vs any marital]	-0.19***	0.03	0.83
N	**11,783**		
Log likelihood (-2)	**170,892**		

** p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001*

Note: Cox proportional hazard model, with Efron treatment of ties. Model also includes indicator variables for year of order and missing county, race, and marital.

Table 6 considers whether enforcement actions that occur early or later in a nonpayment spell are associated with beginning to pay support. Sending a letter within the first two months of the spell is associated with an increased likelihood of beginning to pay, and even letters first sent later in the spell are associated with payment, though the relationship is weaker. Sending a notice of intent to suspend a license is linked to beginning to pay support, whether it occurs early in the spell or later. Actually suspending a license is not associated with beginning to pay support when it occurs early in the spell, and then is negatively associated with beginning to pay later. Court hearings and holding noncustodial parents in contempt are both associated with an increased likelihood of payment, whether they occur early in the spell or later.

Is the Relationship between Enforcement Tools and Beginning to Pay Support Stronger for Some Noncustodial Parents?

As reported in Table 5, we find that enforcement actions are associated with beginning to pay support, though whether the relationship is immediate or lagged (or both) differs somewhat by action. These results were confirmed by the analysis shown in Table 6, which shows that each enforcement action (except a license suspension) is associated with beginning to pay support, whether the action occurs earlier or later in the period of nonpayment. We now turn to exploring whether the relationships between enforcement actions and payments also hold for different subgroups. We estimate whether enforcement actions have immediate and lagged relationships with beginning payment—replicating the analysis shown in Table 5 for three sets of subgroups. In Table 7a, we examine those who earned less than $20,000 in the year prior to their order and those who earned $20,000 or more. (The models are the full model with demographic controls; for parsimony we show only the enforcement variables.) For both groups of fathers, general letters, notices of intent to suspend licenses, court hearings, and holding parents in contempt are all significantly associated with beginning to pay support (though similar to our base results,

Table 6. Enforcement Actions, Considering Timing of Actions, and Beginning to Pay Support

	Coefficient	Standard Error	Hazard Ratio
General letter			
Early in spell (w/in 2 months)	0.58***	0.03	1.79
Not early	0.19***	0.03	1.21
Notice of intent to suspend			
Early in spell (w/in 6 months)	0.38***	0.07	1.46
Not early	0.33***	0.06	1.39
License suspension			
Early in spell (w/in 9 months)	-0.19	0.11	0.83
Not early	-0.24**	0.09	0.79
Court hearing			
Early in spell (w/in 6 months)	0.58***	0.04	1.78
Not early	0.74***	0.05	2.09
Contempt			
Early in spell (w/in 6 months)	0.37***	0.06	1.45
Not early	0.50***	0.06	1.64
Demographic controls			
Ever in other urban county [vs ever Milwaukee]	0.11***	0.03	1.12
Always rural county [vs ever Milwaukee]	0.11**	0.03	1.12
Age at start of order	0.01***	0.00	1.01
Black non-Hispanic [vs White non-Hispanic]	-0.40***	0.03	0.67
Other race [vs White non-Hispanic]	-0.22***	0.03	0.80
Number of children at start of order	-0.03*	0.01	0.97
Youngest child's age at start of order	0.00	0.00	1.00
Ever incarcerated in 5 years before order	-0.25***	0.04	0.78
Incarcerated in month order begins	0.02	0.09	1.02
Total earnings (in $10,000) year before order	0.01*	0.00	1.01
Number of quarters employed year before order	0.17***	0.01	1.18
Ever observed as not a IV-D [vs always IV-D]	-0.30***	0.03	0.74
All nonmarital children [vs any marital]	-0.19***	0.03	0.83
N	**11,783**		
Log likelihood (-2)	**171,209**		

** p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001*

Note: Cox proportional hazard model, with Efron treatment of ties. Model also includes indicator variables for year of order and missing county, race, and marital children.

Table 7a. Likelihood of Beginning to Pay, Separate Analyses by Earnings

	Low-Income (earned < $20,000 in year prior to order)			Not Low-Income (earned >= $20,000 in year prior to order)			
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Hazard Ratio	Coefficient	Standard Error	Hazard Ratio	Total
General letter							
This month	0.73***	0.04	2.08	0.35***	0.06	1.41	†
Last month	0.33***	0.04	1.39	-0.02	0.07	0.98	†
2 months ago	0.24***	0.05	1.27	-0.03	0.09	0.97	†
3 or more months ago	0.21***	0.04	1.23	-0.08	0.08	0.93	†
Notice of intent to suspend							
This month	0.68***	0.08	1.97	0.63***	0.14	1.88	
Last month	0.16	0.12	1.17	0.10	0.23	1.11	
2 months ago	0.01	0.14	1.01	0.17	0.28	1.19	
3 or more months ago	0.07	0.09	1.07	0.09	0.22	1.09	
License suspension							
This month	0.31*	0.16	1.36	0.45	0.30	1.57	
Last month	0.08	0.19	1.09	0.52	0.45	1.69	
2 months ago	-0.22	0.24	0.81	-0.32	0.74	0.72	
3 or more months ago	-0.02	0.11	0.98	0.13	0.40	1.14	
Court hearing							
This month	1.01***	0.05	2.75	0.96***	0.10	2.62	
Last month	0.40***	0.08	1.49	0.38*	0.17	1.46	
2 months ago	0.48***	0.09	1.61	0.27	0.22	1.31	
3 or more months ago	0.38***	0.05	1.47	0.12	0.17	1.13	†
Contempt							
This month	0.66***	0.07	1.93	0.75***	0.14	2.12	
Last month	0.37**	0.12	1.45	0.33	0.30	1.40	
2 months ago	0.17	0.15	1.19	0.52	0.37	1.68	
3 or more months ago	0.21**	0.07	1.23	0.86**	0.27	2.36	†
n	**8,680**			**2,774**			**11,454**
Log likelihood (-2)	**121,225**			**35,218**			**167,141**

** p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001*

† subgroups significantly differ from each other at p<.05

Note: N=329 missing information on earnings are excluded from this subgroup analysis. Cox proportional hazard model, with Efron treatment of ties. Model also includes demographic controls.

different actions have different lags). Suspending licenses does not have a significantly different relationship between the two subgroups, though it is only significantly associated with beginning to pay for low-income fathers, for whom the standard error is smaller. While letters are associated with beginning to pay for both groups of fathers, the relationship is significantly stronger for low-income fathers.

Table 7b examines separate relationships for those who were initial nonpayers compared to those who paid initially but then fell into nonpayment. All enforcement tools are significantly associated with beginning to pay for both groups except for license suspensions (which is significant for initial payers only, though relatively large standard errors and the small incidence means there is no significant difference between the subgroups). Relationships between letters and beginning to pay are significantly stronger for the initial nonpayers than the initial payers, otherwise there is no difference in the strength of the association.

Table 7c shows results for those with any marital children contrasted with those who have only nonmarital children. Again there are relationships between all enforcement tools and beginning to pay support for both groups, though license suspensions are significant only for those with any marital children. There are again very few statistically significant differences between the two groups in the relationship between enforcement variables and beginning to pay, suggesting the relationship between enforcement tools and payment is similar for those fathers with and without marital children.

Table 7b. Likelihood of Beginning to Pay, Separate Analyses by Initial Payment Status

	Initial Nonpayers (i.e., no payment in first or second month of order)			Initial Payers (i.e., nonpayment spell begins after first month of order)			
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Hazard Ratio	Coefficient	Standard Error	Hazard Ratio	Total
General letter							
This month	0.81***	0.05	2.25	0.48***	0.04	1.61	†
Last month	0.29***	0.06	1.34	0.16***	0.05	1.17	
2 months ago	0.20**	0.07	1.22	0.10	0.06	1.11	
3 or more months ago	0.17***	0.05	1.18	0.07	0.05	1.08	†
Notice of intent to suspend							
This month	0.75***	0.10	2.11	0.61***	0.09	1.85	
Last month	0.31*	0.14	1.36	0.02	0.15	1.02	
2 months ago	-0.11	0.19	0.90	0.21	0.17	1.23	
3 or more months ago	0.04	0.10	1.04	0.07	0.14	1.07	
License suspension							
This month	0.29	0.21	1.34	0.43*	0.19	1.53	
Last month	0.31	0.22	1.36	-0.02	0.29	0.98	
2 months ago	-0.28	0.30	0.75	-0.03	0.34	0.97	
3 or more months ago	0.05	0.13	1.05	-0.01	0.20	0.99	
Court hearing							
This month	1.00***	0.07	2.71	1.00***	0.06	2.73	
Last month	0.41***	0.10	1.51	0.41***	0.10	1.51	
2 months ago	0.47***	0.11	1.59	0.47***	0.12	1.61	
3 or more months ago	0.42***	0.06	1.52	0.33***	0.09	1.40	
Contempt							
This month	0.84***	0.10	2.32	0.58***	0.09	1.79	
Last month	0.57***	0.15	1.77	0.15	0.17	1.16	
2 months ago	0.42*	0.18	1.52	-0.01	0.21	0.99	
3 or more months ago	0.33***	0.09	1.40	0.20	0.12	1.22	
n	**5,864**			**5,919**			**11,783**
Log likelihood (-2)	**75,302**			**81,752**			**170,307**

** p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001*

† subgroups significantly differ from each other at p<.05

Note: Cox proportional hazard model, with Efron treatment of ties. Model also includes demographic controls.

Table 7c. Likelihood of Beginning to Pay, Separate Analyses by Fathers with Marital vs Nonmarital Children

	Any Marital Children			All Children Nonmarital			
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Hazard Ratio	Coefficient	Standard Error	Hazard Ratio	Total
General letter							
This month	0.52***	0.06	1.68	0.69***	0.04	2.00	†
Last month	0.08	0.07	1.08	0.33***	0.04	1.40	†
2 months ago	-0.01	0.09	0.99	0.29***	0.05	1.33	†
3 or more months ago	0.00	0.07	1.00	0.22***	0.04	1.25	†
Notice of intent to suspend							
This month	0.74***	0.12	2.09	0.64***	0.08	1.90	
Last month	0.04	0.22	1.04	0.17	0.12	1.19	
2 months ago	-0.18	0.27	0.84	0.14	0.15	1.16	
3 or more months ago	-0.30	0.20	0.74	0.16	0.09	1.18	†
License suspension							
This month	0.58*	0.26	1.78	0.28	0.17	1.32	
Last month	0.73*	0.35	2.07	0.01	0.21	1.01	
2 months ago	-0.03	0.54	0.97	-0.20	0.25	0.82	
3 or more months ago	0.59*	0.26	1.81	-0.10	0.12	0.91	†
Court hearing							
This month	1.17***	0.09	3.23	0.96***	0.05	2.61	†
Last month	0.52***	0.15	1.68	0.35***	0.08	1.42	
2 months ago	0.53**	0.18	1.69	0.39***	0.10	1.48	
3 or more months ago	0.43***	0.12	1.54	0.37***	0.05	1.44	
Contempt							
This month	0.52***	0.13	1.68	0.75***	0.08	2.11	
Last month	0.37	0.22	1.45	0.42**	0.13	1.53	
2 months ago	0.10	0.30	1.11	0.33*	0.16	1.39	
3 or more months ago	0.39*	0.17	1.47	0.25**	0.08	1.29	
n	**3,034**			**8,466**			**11,500**
Log likelihood (-2)	**38,743**			**115,720**			**165,884**

** p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001*

† subgroups significantly differ from each other at p<.05

Note: N=283 missing information on marital status are excluded from this subgroup analysis. Cox proportional hazard model, with Efron treatment of ties. Model also includes demographic controls.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this paper we have presented new descriptive information on the use of enforcement actions and the relationship between these enforcement actions and the likelihood of beginning to pay support among nonpayers. Our analyses indicate that nonpayment spells are fairly common: of the 21,208 noncustodial fathers who had their first order in 2010 to 2012 and owed support consistently for three years, nearly 12,000 experience at least two consecutive months of nonpayment.

We find that an enforcement action occurs for a majority of noncustodial parents who do not pay for two months. These actions are primarily letters, although court hearings occur for about one-fifth of nonpayers. Notices to suspend licenses and license suspensions are less common, as is being placed in contempt. Our results also suggest substantial cross-county differences in the extent to which these tools are used. Limited cross-state research suggests that states vary in the use of tools and, tentatively, that Wisconsin is generally not an outlier in how often enforcement tools are used. Variation in usage across jurisdictions opens the possibility of using this cross-county (or cross-state) variation to learn something additional about the effectiveness of different approaches; future research might be useful.

Our results do suggest that warning letters, notices of intent to suspend licenses, court hearings, and holding noncustodial parents in contempt of court, are all associated with a statistically significant increase in the likelihood of making at least one payment among nonpayers. Our results cannot be given a *causal* interpretation, because the types of cases that get letters (for example) may differ from cases that do not in ways the model does not measure. However, results do suggest that a system in which letters, in particular when sent early in a spell of nonpayment, may be effective. While letters and court hearings show the strongest relationship with beginning to pay support among nonpayers—both in the month given and in

the months that follow, and whether used early or late in a spell—hearings are substantially more expensive than letters. While a full benefit-cost analysis of these two enforcement mechanisms is beyond the scope of this paper, it seems likely that additional letters or other attempts to contact noncustodial parents would be cost-efficient. A more detailed cost analysis, and an approach that used county or other variation to potentially identify causal relationships, would be needed before recommending additional hearings.

On the other hand, suspending licenses does not consistently show a positive relationship with payments, and is sometimes statistically related to a lower likelihood of beginning to pay. Moreover, sending a notice of intent to suspend a license is associated with payments, but much more weakly than other tools. This might reflect an underlying causal relationship—for instance, if suspending licenses reduces a father's ability to work, this may actually make beginning to pay even harder. Or it might simply reflect that the people for whom caseworkers initiate a license suspension are in particularly intractable circumstances relative to other nonpayers, where no matter what tool is used, collection is difficult. Again, an approach that used county or other variation to potentially identify causal relationships, would be needed to evaluate the utility of this approach.

Three limitations of this work should be considered in drawing conclusions. First, this research generally analyzed enforcement tools independently of each other and explored only the first use of each type of enforcement tool. Future work could examine whether a mix of tools is more effective than any on their own and could explore whether a series of letters or hearings (for example) is more effective than just one. Second, we have analyzed only the relationship between enforcement actions and beginning to pay support following months of nonpayment. Enforcement tools could also be related to partial payers moving to compliance. Future research

could address this. And third, our analysis of the relationship between enforcement actions and beginning to pay only considers whether any payment was made following a nonpayment spell. Our results do not tell us whether enforcement tools help a nonpayer transition to a regular payer or to be in full compliance, or which tools result in the highest payments.

A companion report (Vogel, 2019), drawing on interviews with child support agency staff, suggests that staff aim to use the enforcement actions that they feel will be most effective, and use more punitive enforcement actions infrequently. Our findings, which include a much broader set of cases drawn from across the state of Wisconsin and represent actions that occurred between 2010 and 2015, are largely consistent. Our analysis suggests that enforcement actions beyond letters are used relatively infrequently in most counties, and almost never as a first step. As noted, our results cannot be given a causal interpretation, since, as noted in the companion report, the use of a given action may reflect staff assessment of the actions needed to encourage payment. Thus, our results do not provide strong evidence about whether (and when) various enforcement tools should be used. They do, however, provide more comprehensive and up-to-date information on the use and timing of alternative actions, how this varies across counties, and the extent to which these actions are associated with beginning payments. Together with the findings of the companion report, these estimates provide a basis for considering options for policy and future research.

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Appendix –: Use of Enforcement Tools among Nonpayers, by County

				Percentage of Nonpaying Fathers					
	Total	Nonpaid	Ever Nonpaid	No Enforcement Action	General Letter	Notice of Intent to Suspend License	Suspension of License	Court Hearing	Placed in Contempt
TOTAL	21,208	55.6%	11,783	25.1%	71.5%	10.8%	4.4%	21.5%	7.9%
Barron	201	51.2%	103	13.6%	85.4%	2.9%	1.0%	31.1%	7.8%
Brown	815	55.5%	452	32.5%	66.2%	19.2%	8.2%	5.8%	2.2%
Dane	1,330	56.5%	752	21.9%	75.4%	8.0%	5.3%	27.0%	11.2%
Dodge	268	38.8%	104	18.3%	75.0%	1.0%	1.0%	44.2%	20.2%
Eau Claire	289	50.2%	145	24.8%	74.5%	2.8%	1.4%	28.3%	26.2%
Fond du Lac	361	39.1%	141	17.7%	80.1%	12.8%	5.0%	14.9%	16.3%
Jefferson	314	43.0%	135	25.9%	71.9%	14.1%	3.0%	25.9%	2.2%
Kenosha	808	68.3%	552	18.8%	80.3%	19.6%	12.0%	25.9%	8.2%
La Crosse	338	54.1%	183	24.6%	71.6%	7.1%	4.9%	23.0%	20.2%
Manitowoc	275	45.5%	125	29.6%	64.8%	20.0%	10.4%	16.0%	12.8%
Marathon	447	50.8%	227	19.8%	79.7%	22.9%	14.1%	13.2%	1.3%
Milwaukee	4,621	76.7%	3,546	30.1%	64.8%	12.7%	2.4%	12.7%	0.5%
Outagamie	615	47.2%	290	30.3%	69.0%	4.8%	1.7%	21.4%	10.3%
Racine	891	68.0%	606	22.3%	74.6%	6.6%	3.0%	29.0%	5.9%
Rock	749	57.5%	431	16.2%	81.4%	0.7%	0.5%	34.3%	7.0%
Sauk	291	43.3%	126	20.6%	77.8%	7.1%	4.0%	31.0%	23.8%
Sheboygan	365	45.5%	166	26.5%	73.5%	19.3%	12.7%	18.1%	15.7%
St. Croix	247	44.5%	110	24.5%	70.9%	10.0%	6.4%	23.6%	10.0%
Walworth	386	52.1%	201	20.4%	73.6%	21.4%	12.9%	30.8%	14.9%
Washington	336	34.8%	117	50.4%	46.2%	2.6%	1.7%	10.3%	4.3%
Waukesha	700	47.0%	329	21.3%	77.5%	4.6%	2.7%	27.4%	11.2%
Winnebago	586	54.9%	322	27.0%	69.9%	1.2%	0.9%	21.1%	9.3%
Wood	323	44.0%	142	14.1%	81.7%	3.5%	2.1%	35.2%	2.1%
Other	4,493	46.8%	2,104	20.3%	76.0%	10.3%	5.1%	29.2%	15.7%
Missing	1,159	32.3%	374	33.2%	63.6%	9.6%	2.7%	18.2%	7.2%