

Child Maintenance Service:

Call to drop the charges to use it for victims of domestic abuse

Mothers' Union is concerned by changes to the way child maintenance payment arrangements are made between separated parents. **The Child Support Agency (CSA)** is gradually closing existing cases, and separated parents will have to alter the way that they arrange child maintenance.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is encouraging parents to work out arrangements between themselves, through a 'family-based arrangement', where there is no intervention or administration by a third party.

Where parents are unable or unwilling to make these arrangements between themselves, they have the option to use the newly created **Child Maintenance Service (CMS)**, which can mediate between parents and take money directly where necessary. There is, however, a one-off fee for using the Child Maintenance Service of £20, as well as a continual collection charge of 4% for the resident parent receiving money, as well as 20% for the non-resident parent paying the money. A parent using the CMS who has experienced domestic abuse from their former partner is exempt from the one-off fee of £20 but they will still be required to pay the collection levy.

Mothers' Union is calling on the Government to drop the collection levy for those parents with care who have experienced domestic abuse from their former partner, because:

1. Using the Child Maintenance Service may be the only safe way for those who have experienced domestic abuse from the parent of their children to receive essential financial support for their children. The DWP acknowledges this, and their **Child Maintenance Options Helpline** will not recommend family-based arrangements as an option if they are aware that the relationship has been abusive.
2. Ultimately it is children who lose out on money that is intended to support them, which can exacerbate child poverty and prevent children from accessing opportunities which their peers enjoy.

Mothers' Union is also calling on the DWP to ensure that the exemption from the one-off fee for survivors of domestic abuse is clearly communicated in all literature being sent to parents about it.

Mothers' Union launched a petition about the issue of child maintenance during 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence 2015, and this can be found and signed at: <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/p/stopcharges>

For further information, please contact the Policy Team at Mothers' Union on 020 7222 5533 or at policy@mothersunion.org