

# Letter to the Editor

January 10, 2005

## **Helping parents meet obligations to their children**

The Sun correctly points out the multiple benefits of Baltimore County's efforts to connect parents who owe child support to jobs ("Helping deadbeat dads," editorial, Jan. 4). The state should adopt a similarly prudent approach.

In Maryland, child support debts owed by low-income parents are frequently owed to the state, because custodial parents who receive welfare are required to sign over child support rights to the state.

But current child support enforcement policies, which can involve garnishment of up to 65 percent of an indebted parent's wages, force too many fathers into underground economies and out of their children's lives. This is costly - both to the state in uncollected child support debt and to families in need.

The Job Opportunities Task Force and other groups support a measure to be introduced in the 2005 General Assembly session that would create a statewide debt-leveraging program to foster responsible behavior among low-income parents who owe child support to the state.

Under this program, parents who owe child support would have their debt to the state reduced as long as they stay employed and maintain their current child support payments.

Similar programs are in use in other states, including Iowa, Minnesota and Missouri, to encourage "deadbeat dads" to become turnaround dads.

By promoting mainstream employment and providing an incentive to stay current on child support payments, a state debt-leveraging program would help ensure noncustodial parents meet their obligations to the state, to the custodial parents and, most important, to their children.

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