



Department
for Work &
Pensions

PAUL MAYNARD MP
Minister for Pensions

26 March 2024

Nigel Mills MP

Delivered electronically

Dear Nigel,

Thank you for your valuable contributions at the Backbench Business debate on the Child Maintenance Service, in Westminster Hall on 27 February 2024. I was pleased to see such a well-attended debate. I committed to writing to you on any points raised that I did not have time to cover in my closing remarks. This letter is intended to fulfil that commitment.

I will first just reiterate the overall context of the issues we were discussing in the debate. Child maintenance payments can help to keep children out of poverty. Payments through both private and Child Maintenance Service arrangements were estimated to be on average £2.6bn a year in the financial years ending 2020 to 2022, helping keep 160,000 children out of poverty annually.

We've recently taken action to widen access to the Child Maintenance Service, and ensure more children get the best start in life. In February, we removed the £20 application fee so that more families, including the poorest, can access the support available through the Child Maintenance Service. We've also enabled the Child Maintenance Service to write off debt worth less than £7 in inactive cases, so it can focus on parents who owe larger sums.


We plan to bring in new powers to significantly speed up enforcement action so the Child Maintenance Service can recover unpaid maintenance through administrative liability orders, rather than go through a lengthy court process. We published our response to the consultation on 12 February 2024 and will bring forward legislation at the earliest opportunity.

This change will reduce the time taken to obtain a liability order from twenty-two weeks to as few as six weeks and ensure that existing tough action, such as forcing the sale of property or commitment to prison, can be considered much sooner.

You raised the issue of where Child Maintenance Service deductions sit within the hierarchy for deductions from Universal Credit. Child maintenance is just one of many deductions which can be made from Universal Credit. We must balance the need to make child maintenance deductions with other deductions, such as for rent arrears, Council Tax, energy arrears, and more.

There are currently no plans to alter the sequence by which deductions from benefits are ordered. Government debts such as benefit overpayments are only considered if there is room within the standard 25% cap (total deductions reach 25 per cent of Universal Credit Standard Allowance), after advances and third-party deductions, including child maintenance, have been considered.

A copy of this letter has been deposited in the Libraries of the House.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul Maynard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'P' and 'M'.

Paul Maynard MP
Minister for Pensions