



News Release

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SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES PENALISED BY NEW MAINTENANCE RULES

Single parent families will be penalised by new rules on child maintenance payments, according to Cheshire solicitor Stephen Lawson, a nationally-recognised child support expert.

Stephen, who is head of litigation at Cheshire legal firm FDR Law, says new regulations which come into force on Monday 30 June, will mean that most parents making a new application to the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) will have to pay a £20 application fee.

And if the CMS continues to act as a go-between for parents to collect child maintenance payments, a 20% administration fee will be added to every amount collected. This means that for every £100 assessed, the non-resident paying parent will actually have to hand over £120. From this sum, the Government takes an administration fee of £24, leaving only £96 for the receiving parent.

To avoid the charges, parents can make their own private agreements or only use the CMS service to determine the level of maintenance. If they then set up 'Direct Pay' arrangements to their former partner or spouse, they will not be charged an administration fee.

Existing cases handled by the Child Support Agency will be transferred to the CMS over the next few years. The Government is giving people registered on the new CMS system just over a month to opt into the new scheme and clear any arrears. However if

non-resident parents still choose to use the CMS's 'Collect and Pay' service or fail to settle arrears, the new fee will be added to every maintenance payment.

Stephen Lawson believes these new rules will hurt those people who need the service most. "Brought in by the Department for Work and Pensions, these rules are designed to make people take responsibility for their own finances. Parents can avoid administration charges by making private agreements and paying every instalment on time," he said.

"However in the real world, we know 'paying parents', for a wide variety of reasons, sometimes fail to make regular payments to support their children. Many struggle financially after the breakdown of a relationship and these new rules will make the task of supporting their children that much harder.

"Their former partners, usually mothers, will also suffer. They will receive less maintenance support and will now be penalised for a situation which is outside their control. The very parents who need extra help will be let down by a system designed to support them."

Stephen Lawson is a member of the Law Society's Civil Justice Committee and fights for the rights of parents badly treated by the Child Support Agency. He is based at FDR Law's Frodsham office. Tel 01928 739300. Email Stephen.lawson@fdrlaw.co.uk.
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EDITOR'S NOTES:

About FDR Law

- FDR Law, formerly Forshaws Davies Ridgway LLP, is a full service legal practice with offices in Warrington, Stockton Heath and Frodsham.
- 16 Partners
- Over 100 staff
- Services include: Commercial Law, Conveyancing, Criminal, Family, Litigation, Wills & Probate.

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On behalf of FDR Law