

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Trial Court
Executive Office of the Trial Court
Boston, Massachusetts

Report of the Task Force for the 2024-2025 Quadrennial Review of the Massachusetts Child Support Guidelines

June 30, 2025



2024-2025 Child Support Guidelines Task Force

In compliance with 45 C.F.R. § 302.56, in June 2024, Chief Justice of the Trial Court Heidi E. Brieger appointed the 2024-2025 Child Support Guidelines Task Force (“Task Force”) to conduct the quadrennial review of the Massachusetts Child Support Guidelines (“guidelines”) and make recommendations for changes as appropriate. The guidelines are promulgated by the Chief Justice of the Trial Court and used by the justices of the Massachusetts Trial Court in determining child support orders and in deciding whether to approve agreements that set a child support order. The comprehensive review began on June 25, 2024 and continued through June 2025 and included an examination of the assumptions, principles, and methodology that formed the basis of the current guidelines.

The Task Force was co-chaired by the Hon. Katherine Field, First Justice of the Bristol Division of the Probate and Family Court, and Denise M. Fitzgerald, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel of the Probate and Family Court. Task Force members were:

Holly Hinte, Esq., Lee & Rivers LLP, Boston, MA
Marc Moccia, Esq., Kazarosian Costello LLP, Haverhill, MA
Dolores O’Neill, Esq., Massachusetts Department of Revenue
Arron Pridgeon, Probation Officer, Worcester Division of the Probate and Family Court
Anna Richardson, Esq., Co-Executive Director, Veterans Legal Services, Boston, MA
Jamie Sabino, Esq., Deputy Director of Advocacy, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Hon. Claudine Stoudemire, Hampden Division of the Probate and Family Court
Jennifer Walsh, Esq., Assistant Judicial Case Manager, Bristol Division of the Probate and Family Court
Kelly Zawistowski, Esq., Assistant Judicial Case Manager, Hampden Division of the Probate and Family Court

The economic consultant for this Task Force was The Brattle Group, led by Mark Sarro, Ph.D., with Christine Polek, Ph.D., and Shastri Sandy, Ph.D., M.B.A. The Task Force was supported by Karl Ching, Esq. of the Executive Office of the Trial Court and Kari Southern, Esq., Deputy Legal Counsel of the Probate and Family Court.

2024-2025 Child Support Guidelines Task Force Review

During its review, the Task Force considered federal and Massachusetts statutory requirements, oral comments submitted at three virtual public forums, written comments submitted to the Trial Court email address established for public comments, survey results from judges and staff of the Probate and Family Court and the Massachusetts Probation Service, as well as the comments and experience of the members of the Task Force. The Task Force reviewed deviation statistics, economic models and data, and information on child support in other states.

The Probate and Family Court used data from MassCourts to calculate the rate of deviation for all divisions of the Probate and Family Court by determining the number of case dispositions for

domestic relations and paternity cases filed from October 4, 2021 through September 30, 2024 and the number of Findings and Determinations for Child Support and Post-Secondary Education forms entered during that same time period. The average deviation percentage across all divisions of the Probate and Family Court for this period was 26%. The median deviation rate was 24%. More information about the deviation rate and all other economic considerations can be found in the Economic Review of the Massachusetts Child Support Guidelines 2024-2025 prepared by The Brattle Group.

In making its recommendations for the 2025 guidelines, the Task Force seeks to build upon the work of prior task forces while taking into consideration current economic, legal, and policy factors, and to update the guidelines so the guidelines can continue to be applied consistently.

Economic Review of the Child Support Guidelines

During the 2024-2025 review, the Task Force worked with the economic consultant, The Brattle Group. The Brattle Group was selected after the Trial Court published a Request for Proposals through the Commonwealth's official online procurement record site, COMMBUYS. The team from The Brattle Group included Mark Sarro, Ph.D., Christine Polek, Ph.D., and Shastri Sandy, Ph.D., M.B.A. The economic consultant provided analysis and professional advice on current economic data and information on child costs, economic concepts and principles as they relate to the guidelines, potential revisions that the Task Force discussed, and any other economic information the Task Force requested. They also responded to questions asked by members of the Task Force. The Task Force in this review, as in prior reviews, considered many factors and sources of economic data on child costs. However, as the economic consultant notes in their report, there are limitations to the economic data available. Notwithstanding these limitations, and in consideration of the public policies of Massachusetts, the guidelines recommended by the Task Force seek to reflect appropriate amounts of child support for children in Massachusetts.

2024-2025 Child Support Guidelines Task Force Recommendations

The Task Force retained the format of the guidelines that includes the text of the guidelines with the accompanying commentary that explains the reasoning behind the recommendations of the Task Force. The 2024-2025 Task Force report incorporates the 2025 Child Support Guidelines and the accompanying forms and chart as recommended by the Task Force, and the Economic Review of the Massachusetts Child Support Guidelines 2024-2025.

The Task Force recommends edits for simplification and clarification, as well as substantive changes to the guidelines. In making these recommendations, the Task Force fully considered previous versions of the guidelines and the reasoning behind the prior versions.

Below are highlights of the substantive changes the Task Force recommends. The commentary to the guidelines includes a complete analysis of all of the recommended changes.

1. Preamble

The Task Force recommends emphasizing the need for a guidelines worksheet to be submitted any time child support may be established or modified and a Findings and

Determinations for Child Support and Post-Secondary Education form whenever the form may apply in a case.

2. Principles

The Task Force recommends changes throughout the guidelines to reflect the change in G. L. c. 209C which now specifically allows for a child to have more than two legal parents. These changes are first reflected in the Principles section. The Task Force recommends changes to Principle 11 to clarify the need of parties to submit proof for child support to be determined. The Task Force recommends the addition of Principle 12 to explain the role the guidelines have in facilitating resolution.

3. Section I – INCOME DEFINITION

The Task Force recommends few changes to Section I. The Task Force recommends including a reference to Cavanagh v. Cavanagh, 490 Mass. 398 (2022) to Section I. A. 30., the catch-all income provision.

4. Section II. – FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED IN SETTING THE CHILD SUPPORT ORDER

a. Section II. A. 3. – Relationship to Alimony or Separate Maintenance Payments

The Task Force recommends including the language from Cavanagh v. Cavanagh, 490 Mass. 398 (2022) regarding the interplay between alimony and child support.

b. Section II. C. – Minimum and Maximum Levels

Consistent with federal requirements, the Task Force examined self-support levels for payors. In Section II. C. 1., the Task Force recommends adjusting the two tranches at the minimum level in Table A of the guidelines worksheet. The first tranche includes payors with incomes up to \$301 per week and the second tranche includes payors with incomes up to \$391 per week. The presumptive orders will be no more than \$33 per week.

In Section II. C. 2., the Task Force recommends increasing the maximum level to \$450,000 of combined available income. The Task Force considered the maximum income levels in other states' guidelines and the higher levels of income and costs in Massachusetts relative to other states. The Task Force recommends six tranches between \$392 and \$8,654 in weekly combined available income, for a total of eight tranches.

Also in Section II. C. 2., the Task Force recommends providing further guidance on how to calculate child support when combined available income exceeds the maximum level. Any percentage applied to the payor's income above the maximum level, as listed in Line 8b of the guidelines worksheet, should be below the 10% applied to the highest income level listed in Table A of the guidelines worksheet, appropriately adjusted for the number and ages of the children.

c. Section II. D. – Parenting Time

The Task Force recommends the addition of Section II. E. 4. and 5. Section II. E. 4. addresses considering a deviation when parenting time is substantially more than one-third but less than one-half for the parent who is not the residential parent. Section II. E. 5. applies when there are more than two legal parents and instructs the Court to consider the financial circumstances and parenting time of the legal parents when determining child support.

ci. Section II. E. – Child Care Costs

In Section II. E. 1., the Task Force recommends that parents share the actual out-of-pocket costs of child care actually paid in proportion to their income, up to a benchmark amount of \$430 per week, per child.

The Task Force recommends adding Section II. E. 3. to provide guidance regarding what costs qualify as child care such that they can be included in Line 2g of the worksheet.

The Task Force also recommends adding Section II. E. 4. to clarify that evidence of the out-of-pocket expenses actually paid for child care may be required to be submitted.

e. Section II. G. – Contribution to Post-secondary Educational Expenses

In Section II. G. 1., the Task Force recommends adding language to emphasize that the Court may award both child support and contribution to post-secondary educational expenses or only child support or only contribution to post-secondary educational expenses. The Task Force further recommends clarifying what is included in post-secondary educational expenses.

In Section II. G. 2., the Task Force recommends including language regarding affordability of post-secondary educational expenses and whether using assets or obtaining loans are required to pay these expenses.

In Section II. G. 3., the Task Force recommends retaining the University of Massachusetts – Amherst as the benchmark for determining the parental share of post-secondary educational expenses. Although not the most expensive Massachusetts state college when these guidelines become effective, the University of Massachusetts – Amherst remains the flagship state college in Massachusetts.

In Section II. G. 4., the Task Force recommends clarifying language regarding consideration of orders for child support and post-secondary educational expenses when both are being ordered.

f. Section II. I. – Dental/Vision Insurance

The Task Force recommends amending Section II. I. 2. to have the same language as Section II. H. 1. with regard to considering whether a deduction may unreasonably “impact” a child support order.

- g. Section II. J. – Routine Out-of-Pocket and Uninsured Medical and Dental/Vision Expenses and Extraordinary Out-of-Pocket and Uninsured Medical and Dental/Vision Expenses

The Task Force recommends adding language in Section II. J. 1. to explain that the Court can consider the percentages of each party’s share of combined available income when determining how these costs are shared by the parents.

- h. Section II. K. – Existing Support Obligations and Responsibility for Children Not in the Case Under Consideration

In Section II. K. 1., the Task Force recommends clarifying when a deduction can be made by a parent who is fulfilling a pre-existing support order.

In Section II. K. 3., the Task Force includes instructions on how to calculate a hypothetical child support order and when a deviation may be considered.

- i. Section II. M. – Contribution to Other Child-Related Expenses

The Task Force recommends clarifying that these expenses are discretionary and the Court must consider whether they are affordable and in the best interest of the child.

3. Section IV. – DEVIATION

- a. In Section IV. B., the Task Force recommends adding two circumstances where deviation may be considered. Section IV. B. 9. and 10. correspond to Section II. D. 4. and 5.
- b. In Section IV.C., the Task Force recommends clarifying that the rebuttable presumption of a substantial hardship is triggered upon reaching 40% of the payor’s available income. This language is consistent with the calculation in the guidelines worksheet.

Child Support Guidelines Worksheet, Child Support Guidelines Chart, and Findings and Determinations for Child Support and Post-Secondary Education Form

The Task Force recommends revising the Child Support Guidelines Worksheet to incorporate the recommendations noted above. Users of the Child Support Guidelines Worksheet are strongly encouraged to use the electronic version of the Child Support Guidelines Worksheet for easier completion. The only official electronic version of the guidelines and the Child Support Guidelines Worksheet are the versions found at.

In accordance with the Trial Court's past practice of publishing a Child Support Guidelines Chart that calculates the dollar orders at incremental income amounts, the Task Force also includes a Child Support Guidelines Chart for the 2025 guidelines.

The Task Force recommends minor changes to the Findings and Determinations for Child Support and Post-Secondary Education form (CJ-D-305). The changes to the form were made to incorporate the recommendations noted above, as well as a reordering of the form sections. A fully fillable form for court use only has been created in addition to a public-facing form that is fillable, except for the section to be completed by the Court.

Appendices

- A. Proposed Child Support Guidelines – 2025
- B. Economic Review of the Massachusetts Child Support Guidelines 2024-2025
- C. Proposed Child Support Guidelines Worksheet – 2025
- D. Proposed Child Support Guidelines Chart – 2025
- E. Proposed Findings and Determinations for Child Support and Post-Secondary Education Form – CJ-D 305