

Guideline Review Committee Minutes September 11, 2025

The Guidelines committee meeting was held via TEAMS on September 11, 2025 starting at 10:00 am.

Welcome to everyone, and self-introductions were completed.

Committee Member Attendees:

Kim Watne	CSSD Guidelines Project Manager
Colleen Timmer	Standing Master
Amy Lord	Family Law Attorney & UM Law School Professor
Ford Hayes	Office of Administrative Hearings Administrator
Brittany Swan	Chippewa Cree Child Support Director
Jessica Hoge	Clerk & Recorder, Clerk of Dist. Court, Election Administrator, Payroll
Miranda Ensey	CSSD Investigator
Kelsey Christensen	CSSD Investigator
Kate Pappe	CSSD Supervisor

Absent Members:

Chad Martin	CSSD Investigator
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Additional CSSD Staff Attendees:

Christie Twardoski	CSSD Administrator
Barb Delaney	CSSD Bureau Chief

Key Discussion Points

The meeting, led by Kim Watne, the Child Support Guidelines Project Manager, was the first in a while and welcomed new members. Kim explained that the GROC (Guidelines Review and Oversight Committee) is an advisory committee that can make suggestions but does not have the final authority to make changes, as this requires authority from the CSSD Division, DPHHS and following proper procedure.

Quadrennial Review and Proposed Changes

A quadrennial review report was completed in December 2024 and submitted to the federal Office of Child Support Services. The report offers nine suggested adjustments to the guidelines, which Kim described as important to create an updated calculation. These suggestions include:

- **Move to Gross Income:** The committee proposes using gross income instead of net income, which would bring Montana in line with many other states. Adjustments will be completed in other areas to compensate for removal of tax information.
- **Increase Personal Allowance:** The personal allowance for parents would be raised from 130% to 135% of the Poverty Index Guideline, leaving more income in each parent's home for basic needs. This also increases the value placed on children in the primary child support allowance, as it is calculated from the personal allowance.
- **Update the Primary Child Support Allowance:** The committee would like to adjust the substantial jump in percentages between the first and second, and second and third children, to create more right-sized orders. We propose keeping the calculation for the first child at .30 of the parent's personal allowance. For two or more children, the personal allowance is multiplied by .10 and added for each additional child.
- **Simplify Parenting Days:** The current system changes the bottom line for every parenting day over 110 days. A new proposal suggests using 10-day blocks, starting at 110 days, to simplify calculations.
- **Remove Other Children's Credits:** The proposal would remove other children and other children's credits from the calculation, focusing solely on the family of the order. This does not eliminate credit for other child support orders.
- **Update Minimum Support Obligations:** The committee proposes a simplified calculation for the minimum obligation. We propose to update the minimum support obligation based on 30% of the Primary Child Support Allowance, with the maximum based on two children.
- **Include Discretionary Retirement:** The committee would like to allow for a set percentage of income credit for discretionary retirement contributions, as the current guidelines only address mandatory retirement.
- **Standard of Living Adjustment (SOLA) :** SOLA percentages will need an adjustment to balance the change to gross income
- **Implement a Self-Support Protection:** This new protection would help prevent extremely high orders for middle-to-lower-income people. In response to federal guidance (45 CFR § 302.56(c)(1)(ii)) to pay special attention to obligated parents with income less than two times the poverty guidelines, the committee proposes to implement a "Self-Support Protection", also known as self-support reserve. This would be set at 40% of net income available for support.

House Bill 352 and Committee Membership

The committee discussed the requirements of House Bill 352. One of the new requirements is to have a member with "lived experience related to child support". The committee has reached out to custodial and non-custodial parents by email but has received no response. Alternative recruitment methods were discussed, and we will continue our search to fill this member vacancy.

Next Steps

- Distribution of the Committee Charter to members.
- Continue recruitment of member with lived experience related to child support.
- Moving forward with the proposed changes from the quadrennial review. This will involve:
 - **Decision Brief:** Creating a decision brief and submitting it for approval.
 - **Possible Administrative Rule Changes:** Drafting appropriate administrative rule changes of approved proposals.
 - **Legislative Notification:** Notifying the legislature about the proposed changes, as required by law.
- An additional goal is to create a single, online, and publicly available child support calculator that is vetted by CSSD. This would be a significant improvement over the current situation where different private programs exist and are not always accurate.
- The committee also agreed that an educational component would be necessary once the changes are finalized to help attorneys, judges, and the public understand the new guidelines and the calculator.

Next meeting date set for Thursday November 13, 2025.

Meeting adjourned at 11:23.