

Child Maintenance

What Is Child Maintenance?

Maintenance Process at the Family Court

In Belize, maintenance refers to the legal obligation of parents to provide financial support for their children after separation or divorce. This duty continues until the child reaches 18 years old.

APPLYING FOR MAINTENANCE: WHO CAN APPLY FOR A MAINTENANCE ORDER? MAINTENANCE PROCEDURES IN BELIZE CITY

In Belize City, all maintenance applications are made through the Belize Family Court. (For the application procedures in the districts, refer to the section entitled “Maintenance Procedures in the Districts”.) When applying for maintenance, the Applicant must discuss his/her options with an Intake/Welfare Officer of the Belize Family Court.

Types of Maintenance Orders

1. **Maintenance Agreement** – A voluntary, written agreement between parents, often mediated or assisted by the Family Court, outlining payment terms.
2. **Maintenance Order** – A court-ordered payment, issued when parents cannot agree or when one party refuses to pay maintenance.

Applying for Maintenance

- **WHO CAN APPLY FOR A MAINTENANCE ORDER?**

The mother, the father, the guardian

- **Process:**

1. **File a petition** with the Belize Family Court in Belize City or the relevant District Court.
2. **Serve the other parent** with the petition(summons). Done by a bailiff or police officer.
3. **Court hearing:** The court will assess the applicant’s needs, the respondent’s ability to pay, and any other relevant factors.
4. **Order or agreement:** The court may issue a maintenance order or approve a maintenance agreement.
5. **The conditions of a Maintenance Order:** are decided upon by a magistrate.

6. At this hearing, the magistrate will decide the amount of maintenance to be paid, how often it will be paid, and the dates of payment, based on the means of the party required to pay maintenance.

7. The court recommends that the Applicant bring the following documents:

- Valid Social Security Card,
- marriage license, and
- the child's birth certificate
- Active Banking information

. These documents can assist the Court and speed up the process.

8. The Applicant must pay a small fee (\$2.50) to the court for the issuing of a summons to the other parent (the Respondent) to attend a court hearing.

9. After a maintenance order is granted by the court, the respondent is required to pay through the court. The applicant must fill out a vendor form and provide a copy of his/her social security card and banking information so that the money can be deposited into their account.

10. Documents are forwarded to the Treasury Department for processing.

11. After processing of documents:

- Payments are entered into the system
- payments are 1st approved
- payments are 2nd approved
- Treasury Department uploads payments to the account.

Key Considerations

- **Changes in payments:** If circumstances change (e.g., income, child's needs), the court order or agreement can be reviewed and adjusted.
- **Non-payment consequences:** Failure to comply can result in legal action or imprisonment in severe cases.