

## **PROCEDURAL JUSTICE INFORMED ALTERNATIVES TO CONTEMPT (PJAC)**

### **CUSTODIAL PARENT INTERVIEWS**

#### **Consent to Participate in the PJAC Evaluation – PJAC Custodial Parents**

Hello, may I please speak to [CP NAME]? This is [INTERVIEWER NAME]. I'm calling from MDRC, a nonprofit research organization, as part of a study about child support. We would like to interview you to learn more about your experiences with the child support program in [PJAC County]. This conversation will take about one hour of your time and we will mail you a \$40 gift card as a thank you when you finish the interview.

The reason for these interviews is to learn how to improve parents' experiences with the child support program, about the different ways to help parents make regular child support payments, and about changes resulting from the coronavirus pandemic. The study is called Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt, or PJAC for short. The organization I work for, MDRC, leads the study with funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This interview is not in any way related to custody or child support disagreements. Your participation in the interview will not affect your child support case or your chance of receiving public benefits or services in any way.

If you choose to participate, the information you provide will help child support programs in the future. When we are finished, I will mail you the \$40 gift card as a thank you. Do you wish to complete this interview? *[If yes, inquire whether now is a good time for the interview. If it's not, try to, schedule an appointment for a later date.]*

Before we start, I want you to know that what you say will be kept private. The research staff has been trained in protecting private information and neither your name nor your child's name will appear in any written reports from the study. Information from the interview will be used for research only. Your responses to these questions will not affect your child support case or your chance of receiving any kind of public benefits or services. Your participation is completely voluntary. It is up to you whether you participate, you may choose not to answer any questions, or you may stop the interview if

#### PJAC Custodial Parent Interviews

*Your participation in this information collection is voluntary. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB control number for this collection is 0970-0505 and it expires 04/30/2023. If you have comments regarding this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, please send them to Melanie Skemer, 200 Vesey Street 23<sup>rd</sup> Floor New York, NY 10281; Attn: OMB-PRA (0970-0505).*

you wish. Your responses to questions will not be shared with the child support agency, and the agency will not know if you participated in this interview or not.

The study team may have to report information about you to the authorities if you tell us that you or someone else may be in danger of harm.

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Do you have any questions? [Pause, and respond to questions if needed] Do I have your consent to continue?

If any questions come up during the interview, please feel free to ask them. You can also always call MDRC at 212.340.8614 if you think of questions later.

Finally, we would like to record this interview. Do I have your okay to record the interview? If so, if there is ever a time you would like the recorder turned off, please let me know.

*[Turn on recorder, if participant is willing. Record consent and leave recorder on for the remainder of the interview. If participant is unwilling, ask if interview can be scheduled for a later time when a research assistant can join to take detailed notes. Request recording of consent only, for IRB purposes.]*

## CUSTODIAL PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Participant Characteristics [*CP and case background*]

We are talking to people with child support orders to try to understand their real-life experiences with the child support program. We want to learn what is good about the program and what could be improved. We are especially interested in learning about your experiences with the program during the pandemic. First, I'd like to ask some background questions about you and your children.

1. Let's start by confirming your name and age.
2. Since this study is about child support, please tell me a little bit about your children. How many children do you have? How old are they?
3. What are your children's living arrangements? For example, do they live with you, with the other parent, shared custody, with another relative?
  - o Have their living arrangements changed during the pandemic? If so, why?
4. Do you currently have a job? PROBES – *What type of work? Full time or part time? How long have you worked there?*
  - o [If unemployed] are you collecting unemployment?
  - o [If unemployed] Are you looking for work? Tell me about your job search.
    - *How long have you been looking?*
    - *Have you encountered any difficulties finding a job? If so, what were they? How have these challenges affected your job search and your goals for work? PROBES – finding job that interests them or meets their income requirements, required credentials or certificates, criminal record, etc.*
5. Did you experience any changes to your employment status as a result of the coronavirus pandemic? PROBES – *How has this change affected your income? Your work schedule? If unemployed, are you collecting unemployment?*
  - o [If mentions unemployed as result of pandemic] *Did you receive unemployment as a result of the pandemic (through the CARES Act)? If yes, probe about how long they received unemployment and when it ended. How did receiving UI affect your household finances? How did it ending effect your household finances?*
  - o How has your job search been affected by the pandemic? If so, how?
6. Did you receive the expanded child tax credit (through the CARES Act) as a result of the pandemic? If yes, tell me about what was going on with your child support case when you received the tax credit and when it ended. *Probe about whether parent*

*received increased child support payments through unemployment insurance intercepts at the same time; their opinions about child support.*

### **General Beliefs about Child Support**

Now, I'd like to ask about your personal *beliefs* about the child support program in general.

7. Do you think that the current rules for the amount of child support that a noncustodial parent pays each month seem appropriate? What do you understand about how the order amount for your case was set? *What, if anything, would make it more appropriate?*
8. Do you think the child support programs makes decisions based on what is best for children?
9. Do you think that people at the child support office treat most people with dignity?

### **Experience in child support (All CPs)**

10. I'd now like to ask you some questions about your experiences with the **[Child support agency name]**, thinking only about the case involving [NCP name]. Are you aware of the case I'm talking about? Can you tell me the name of the youngest child you have with [NCP Name]? Note that for the rest of the interview, we will be focusing on your child support case involving [Child Name].
11. Can you speak a little about your interactions with [NCP Name], specifically related to parenting? For example, how frequently are you in contact with [NCP Name] about parenting matters? PROBES: *What role does [NCP Name] play in [child name]'s life? How frequently does [NCP Name] see [child name]? How has the coronavirus pandemic affected the amount of time [NCP name] sees your child? Do you spend time with [NCP name] and the child(ren) together? If so, what do you do? How often do you and [NCP Name] make decisions about your child[ren] together? What kinds of things do you make decisions about? Tell me about the last decision you made together. How has the coronavirus pandemic affected your relationship with [NCP Name]?*
12. Thinking back to when you first became involved with the child support program for your case with [NCP name], when was your case opened? Did you request it? PROBES: *What prompted it? What did you have to do? How would you describe the experience, for example, was it a positive experience, was it a negative experience, or would you describe it as something else?*

13. Regarding [NCP name]'s current child support obligation, do you feel like you understand it, as far as how that amount was determined? PROBE: *Are there things that you don't understand about the obligation? Can you describe some of the things that you believe helped determine the amount?*
14. Do you think the current order amount is fair? PROBES: *If not, why not? If so, why do you think it is fair?*
15. Have you ever received payments for this case? Interviewer prompt: *follow the yes/no branch below.*
- a. If yes, do you remember how much you were receiving, how often, and how many months/years the payments continued? *Were any of these payments made directly to you?*
  - b. If you never received payments in the last year/once payments stopped being made, do you know why [NCP name] never made / stopped making payments? Were you aware of the child support office taking any actions to enforce the support? PROBE: *Did you contact the child support office to report the nonpayment? Did payments ever start being made again? When did [NCP name] start making payments again? Do you know why they started making payments again? Has [NCP name] ever provided for the child(ren) in other ways? (INTERVIEWER NOTE: depending on the response to this probe, if they don't mention anything about direct payments to the CP, ask about purchasing things like food, diapers, clothes, etc. for the child(ren) and try to understand the frequency with which this happens.*
  - c. Has the coronavirus pandemic affected your receipt of child support payments or arrears payments? PROBE: *Ask about payments through unemployment insurance or economic impact payments through the CARES Act. How has this change affected your household finances?*
16. Have any changes taken place in your case with [NCP Name] in the past year? For example, was the child support amount increased or decreased? Was any back support or interest on back support forgiven? Were any changes made to visitation? PROBES: – *If so, when were those actions taken? How were those decisions made? Were you involved in those decisions or did you have a say? How did you feel about those decisions and the resulting actions? Probe about timing of these changes, and if they were prior to or a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Were any of these changes the result of the pandemic? Probe about changes brought about by unemployment insurance, expanded child tax credit, and/or economic impact payments through the CARES Act.*

17. Have any enforcement actions been taken on your case with [NCP Name] in the past year? PROBES: *What about things like license suspensions, passport denials, or property liens?*
- o *If so, can you talk some more about that process? Were you involved in it at all? Do you remember when this took place? Did it result in a payment?*
18. Do you know if [NCP Name] has been referred to the court for your child support case with them in the past year? PROBES:
- o *If so, can you describe what you know about that process? When did it happen? Why did it happen? How were you informed by child support? Was it something that you requested? How were you involved in the process? What was the end result? Did you feel like you understood the process and what was happening? How did you feel about the case going to contempt?*
  - a. Did you attend any hearings with the courts, in person or virtually? PROBES – *If so, can you describe a bit about why you interacted with the courts, and how that experience was? Was a judge or magistrate involved? Lawyers? Did you feel like you understood the process and what was happening? Did you have a lawyer or representation?*
    - a. *Can you tell me a bit about how you were treated at the court? Did you feel that the court [judge, lawyers] listened to you and treated you with dignity? What made you feel that way? What, if anything, would have you made differently?*
    - b. *How long did it take for your case to get seen in court? Did you experience any delays? If relevant, how did any delays effect you? How easy was the court was easy to access? Did you encounter any challenges in accessing the court, such as transportation or internet access?*
    - c. *What was the outcome? Did you feel that the outcome was fair? Did you feel that the judge was neutral in their decision making? Why?*
  - b. Do you know if [NCP Name] has had any warrants related to your child support case?
    - a. *If so, can you describe what you know about the warrant? When was it put in place? Why? Were you involved in the decision, or did you have a say? How did you feel about the warrant?*
    - b. *Do you know if [NCP Name] has been picked up on a child support warrant? Did they go to jail? How, if at all, did this affect you?*
19. Have you ever been referred to or been provided with any additional services through [CHILD SUPPORT AGENCY NAME], either at the child support office or at another organization? Services might include things like mediation or counseling sessions, or employment and housing services. PROBES – *If so, can you describe those services? When were you involved in them? How did you find out about them?*

*Where were they located? Did you find them beneficial? How has the coronavirus pandemic affected your ability to access these services?*

**Experience in PJAC Services (PJAC Treatment Group CPs Only)**

20. The next questions are still specific to your case with [NCP name]. These questions relate to the program that we are studying called Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt, or PJAC, that we described earlier. . Your case is part of this program, but you may not have heard the name before [or know it as PASS (Michigan) or New Directions (Franklin/Stark)]. You may have been contacted by a caseworker around [RAMY - Random Assignment MM/YY] when you became part of the program. This program is studying different approaches to help families pay and receive child support. How did you first find out about the PJAC services? PROBES: *Did a caseworker first reach out to you? Was it through a phone call, letter, text, other?*
21. How was this new program described to you? PROBES: *Do you remember any details of what was explained?*
22. What did you think about the program when you were first told about it? PROBES: *Were you happy? Unhappy? Indifferent? Did you have questions, and if so, what were they?*
23. Did you ever take part in a meeting or negotiation with the case worker and the other parent? You might have met in person, over the phone, or even had some back and forth communication through the caseworker.
24. Can you describe that meeting or negotiation? PROBES: *Where did it take place? Who was involved? What types of things were discussed? Did you find the meeting helpful? Why/why not? Do you think it was beneficial to have communication between you and [NCP Name]?*
25. a. What things did the caseworker in the new program, called PJAC, do to help with your case? PROBES – *Probe based on what was learned in prior questions about the case history to see if CP attributes what they reported there to the new program. E.g. you mentioned that you had your order adjusted. Do you know why? Probe about if the help from the caseworker has changed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.*
- c. Did [NCP name] begin or resume payments after the case became part of the new program? (*Probe - Do you know why?*)
26. A. Has anything changed since your case became part of the new program in [RAMY]? For example, any changes in how frequently you're in contact with

- [NCP Name]? What role [NCP Name] plays in the child's life? PROBES: *If so, why do you think those changes occurred? How do you feel about those changes?*
- B. Has anything changed about your view of the child support program? PROBES: *If so, what has changed? Why do you think those changes occurred?*

### **Perceptions of Child Support (All CPs)**

27. Now I'd like to hear more about your communication with the child support office regarding your case with [NCP Name]. (*INTERVIEWER NOTE: For control group CPs say that we want to talk about your more recent experiences with child support. For PJAC CPs say that we want to talk about experiences since RAMY when they began the new program and provide RAMY to respondent.*) PROBES:
- o *Is there a primary person at the child support office that you normally interact with? Do you always know who to reach out to if you want information?*
  - o *What is the primary way you communicate with the child support office? (Phone, email, text, other)*
  - o *Do they contact you, or do you contact them?*
  - o *Are your communications with the child support offices returned in a timely manner?*
  - o *How responsive are child support offices to your concerns or requests on your case? What actions, if any, do you take to try to get a worker to pay attention to your case? Are these strategies effective? Why or why not?*
  - o *If you have questions, are you able to get the information you need?*
  - o *Probe about if the help from the caseworker has changed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.*
  - o *Did any of your interactions with the (child support agency name) involve a situation where you and [NCP Name] were meeting together? If so, was that in person, by phone, or some other way? How did the interaction go?*

*Note for interviewers: if the parent identified that they had a primary caseworker at the child support office, direct remaining questions as experience with the parent's caseworker. If the parent does not have a primary caseworker, direct questions as experiences with people at the child support office.*

28. Do you feel that you are kept informed when decisions are made by people at the child support office/your caseworker, and how these decisions are made? PROBES
- o *If so, can you give an example of a time you felt well informed? If not, can you give an example of a time when you didn't feel well informed or understand why something was happening? Do you feel that you understand why decisions are made?*



29. Do the people at the child support office/your caseworker make sure that you understand everything that is happening with your case? PROBES –*If so, can you give an example of that? If not, can you give an example of a time when you didn't understand what was happening, or why? How often do you receive written information? How often are you dealing with an automated system like a website or phone recording? How often are you interacting with an actual staff member? How do you prefer interacting with the child support agency – electronically, in writing, in person? Probe about communication regarding any changes to case or payments related to the CARES act.*

In your experiences with the people at the child support office/your caseworker, do you feel like you are treated with dignity and respect? PROBES – *If so, can you give an example of when you thought that you were treated with dignity and respect? If not, can you give an example of when you did not feel that you were treated with dignity and respect?*

30. In your experiences with the people at the child support office/your caseworker, do you feel like your perspective is listened to? Do you feel like what you have to say is considered before decisions are made? PROBES – *If so, can you give an example of a time you felt that your perspective was considered? If not, can you give an example of a time you did not feel that you were listened to or had your thoughts considered?*

31. Do you feel like your caseworker/the people at the child support office takes sides when making decisions about your case? PROBE: *If so, can you give an example of a time when the caseworker/child support office took sides? If not, can you give an example of why you think your caseworker/the child support office is neutral?*

32. Do you feel like the people at the child support office/caseworker has been helpful to you in taking care of tasks related to your child support case? For example, have they been helpful in scheduling appointments and keeping you updated on next steps? PROBE – *If so, can you give an example of when you thought they were helpful? Do they make it easy for you to schedule appointments? Do they provide you with reminders about what the next steps are with your case? (Probe about methods of contact).*

33. Do you feel like the people at the child support office/your caseworker has the facts of your child support case correct? In other words, do you think there are errors in the child support office's records regarding your case? PROBES: *If there are mistakes, do you think the caseworker on your case will work to correct those mistakes? If there were mistakes or difficulties with your case in the past, did your caseworker/child support office acknowledge it? Did they try to correct them?*

34. Thinking about the child support program in general, do you think the child support program has been beneficial for your child(ren)? PROBES – *What do you think has been beneficial? Why don't you think it has been beneficial?*

**Final Wrap-Up Questions (All CP participants)**

35. Is there anything else about your case or experience with the child support program that we didn't cover that you think would be important for me to know?

36. Do you have any suggestions about how to improve the child support program? (and PJAC, if applicable).

Thank you very much for your time. Those are all the questions I have right now. We will mail you a \$40 gift card within the next few weeks. Can you please let me know the best address for me to mail it to? Can you also confirm your name for me? If you have questions at any time about the interview or about your rights as a participant in the research, please contact Melanie Skemer, Project Director at MDRC, toll free at 1-877-311-6372 extension 8614 or by email at [melanie.skemer@mdrc.org](mailto:melanie.skemer@mdrc.org). Thank you for your participation today.