

Maintenance Enforcement Program

Income Support and the Government's Right to Receive Maintenance Payments

Income Support refers to temporary financial benefits the Alberta government provides for clients of the Maintenance Enforcement Program (MEP). Income Support is also known as social assistance or welfare and was previously known as Supports for Independence or SFI.

If creditors receive Income Support, the government has the right to maintenance payments because the government is supporting those clients. Government staff help creditors obtain Income Support and maintenance orders or agreements. They also register these orders and agreements with MEP.

Once maintenance orders are registered with MEP, debtors pay MEP, which forwards these payments to the government, as long as creditors are on Income Support.

By law, the right to support payments belongs to the government for as long as creditors receive Income Support. Debtors and creditors cannot agree to reduce or give up any maintenance payments due during that time. Debtors also should not pay maintenance directly to creditors. Paying money directly to creditors while files are registered with MEP may result in debtors having to pay twice.

How Payments are Calculated When Maintenance Payments Belong to the Government

Court orders or support agreements set the family support.

- If the maintenance amount is **lower** than Income Support benefits, debtors owe the government the amount of support
- If the maintenance amount is **higher** than Income Support benefits, debtors owe the government the amount paid out in Income Support. MEP forwards the difference directly to creditors when the money is collected

If maintenance payments are not actually made by debtors, arrears accumulate. Debtors are still required to pay these arrears, even if creditors stop receiving Income Support.

When creditors stop receiving Income Support, they should notify MEP immediately. MEP then confirms this with government staff who provide Income Support. Once MEP confirms that Income Support has ended, MEP directs future maintenance payments to creditors.

This document is part of a series of MEP information sheets that can be obtained in the following ways:

- MEP's website at www.albertamep.gov.ab.ca
 - MEP's fax-on-demand service on the *MEP Info Line* by calling 780-422-5555 and using the catalogue number of the information sheet you wish to request
- * **Toll-free** service to all Government of Alberta phone numbers is available from anywhere in Alberta by calling 310-0000 and following the voice prompts