



Frequently Asked Questions

(And answers from the
State Court Administrative Office
Friend of the Court Bureau)

FAQ 2020-05

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Friend of the Court Best Practices for Payment Drop Boxes

During the recent pandemic, parents with friend of the court (FOC) cases may have been unable to access the FOC in person or not desired to do so. In response, some FOC offices have considered installing drop boxes to limit in-person contact. This FAQ provides information to consider when using child support payment drop boxes. If you have questions or would like additional information or clarification, please contact Amy Lindholm at LindholmA@courts.mi.gov or 517-373-2167.

1. Q. What should offices experiencing closures tell payers who want to make an in-person payment?

- A. You can refer payers to the Michigan State Disbursement Unit (MiSDU) website to learn about the many other payment options (www.misdu.com/individualpayment). This information can be communicated verbally and by e-mail, posted on your office's website and/or a sign at your office, or provided in a takeaway brochure at your office.¹

Accepting payment at the FOC office, while allowable, is less preferable than other payment methods because: federal regulation requires payment be made to the state's disbursement unit;² it requires staff time, money-handling protocols, and associated risks; and it delays the payment's disbursement to the support recipient.

2. Q. What type of physical structure can we use for a payment drop box? What are the characteristics of such a box?

- A. The box should be made of fire-resistant and, if outside, weather-resistant material and have a tamper-proof opening for depositing items. Consider if you also want to accept documents when selecting the size of the drop box opening. Use a tamper-proof lock (for

¹ If providing the MiSDU information physically at your office, you may want to consider printing a QR code that smart phone users can scan to be automatically directed to the MiSDU's individual payments web page. You can download the QR code [here](#).

² [OCSE-AT-97-13](#) clarifies federal requirements under [Section 454B of the Social Security Act](#) (42 U.S.C. 654b): "Under section 454B, the State disbursement unit must collect and disburse payments under support orders in all IV-D cases, and in non-IV-D cases in which the support order is initially issued in the State on or after January 1, 1994, and in which the income of the noncustodial parent is subject to withholding."

example, avoid a combination padlock that could be removed with bolt cutters) and provide only a select number of staff members access to the combination or key. Drop boxes may be mounted on a wall or pedestal or be free standing.

Some offices have opted for a drop box large enough to act as a writing surface to fill out envelopes, and also provide disposable writing utensils.³ Some offices also provide envelopes and information sheets prompting the payer to provide information.

3. Q. How can we ensure security of a payment drop box and its contents?

A. You might consider installing the drop box near deputies, either at the FOC office or at the courthouse entry. If you are contemplating an exterior drop box or installation in an unmonitored area, consider the risk of something dangerous being left in the drop box or mail slot. Also consider securing the box to a wall or to the ground so that it may not be moved. If free standing, the drop box should be heavy enough to prevent removal. If the drop box is outside, it is also a good idea to provide physical barriers between the parking area or driveway and the box.

4. Q. How can we provide a receipt to payers dropping off payments to the drop box?

A. You may provide an option on the payment information sheet to select if the payer would like a receipt mailed to the address on file, as well as space to provide a current mailing address.

5. Q. What information should we provide on a sign near or on a payment drop box?

A. Consider including on drop box signage:

1. Any drawbacks to using the drop box (for example, no immediate receipt);
2. Alternatives to using the drop box; and
3. Step-by-step instructions about how to use the drop box:
 - Provide advice about what may and may NOT be left in the box (i.e. payments and/or documents, and types of payments accepted – emphasizing no cash).
 - Provide instructions about filling out envelopes and information sheets.
 - Remind parties to include their full name, phone number, and case number(s), if possible.
 - Provide office contact information – phone number, e-mail address, web site.

6. Q. How can we rectify issues in applying a payment if the party provides incomplete or inaccurate identifying information?

A. Contact the party at the phone number or e-mail address provided with the payment and ask for the additional information.

7. Q. How can we set up internal controls to guard against embezzlement or a party disputing the accuracy of the amount credited to their account versus the amount

³ See examples of drop boxes in use at FOC offices [here](#).

allegedly left in the drop box? For instance, what if the party claims to have left \$500 cash, but only \$250 was in the envelope?

- A.** FOC offices must follow internal control protocols provided in the [Trial Court Administration Reference Guide](#) (CARG), Section 6.⁴

Internal controls specific to a drop box might include:

- Empty the drop box and count, log, and reconcile on a daily basis;
- Open payments with someone else present;
- Assign different employees to open envelopes and log contents, versus post payments, and a third employee to reconcile the log of payments against what was posted;
- Open envelopes in front of a video camera when possible/available;
- Post signs warning individuals not to put cash in the drop box.

8. Q. Should staff take certain precautions when handling documents left in a drop box?

- A.** Staff should wear personal protective equipment (PPE)⁵ in the workplace in accordance with [current guidance](#) from the Centers for Disease Control, state health department, local health department(s), and the court’s reopening plan. Staff handling documents left in a drop box should be reminded to: (1) thoroughly wash their hands after handling such documents; and (2) not touch their eyes, nose, or mouth unless they have removed any face coverings and thoroughly washed their hands.

9. Q. How can our office convince our funding unit to allow us to spend funds on a drop box when we never needed it before?

- A.** FOC offices should be eligible for 66 percent Title IV-D reimbursement for the expense. You may bill the drop box as an equipment expense through your Cooperative Reimbursement Contract. Most interior-use drop boxes range from \$100 - \$400. Contact your contract manager with any questions concerning the expense and reimbursement.

⁴ IV-D policy requires FOC offices to follow CARG protocols. [AT 2003-005](#) and [AT 2005-027](#). Federal regulation also requires separation of cash handling and accounting functions. [45 CFR § 302.20](#).

⁵ In this example of handling documents and payments left in a drop box, PPE might include, but is not limited to, face coverings and cleaning supplies. More information regarding PPE and reimbursement is in [IV-D Memorandum 2020-024](#).