

# The Columbian

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## Mobile firm Pacific Perks moves into franchising



Matt Newcombe, left, co-owner of International Graphics and Nameplate, grabs a coffee as his dog, Gracie, 7, enjoys a Puppuccino from Natalie Fairchild of Pacific Perks Jan. 11. Born out of a family crisis, Pacific Perks has been serving coffee at Southwest Washington's businesses and events for 16 years. Now, the company has awarded its first franchise in Arizona.

### Arizona woman to open franchise coffee service in Phoenix area

By SARAH WOLF  
The Columbian

Elaine Evans, an Arizonan, spent a cold January day serving up lattes at a manufacturing company in Salmon Creek. Before that week, she'd never made fancy coffee drinks. But within days, she'd be going back to Arizona to make her Pacific Perks franchise territory her own.

The mobile café business, Pacific Perks Coffee, has grown from its founders whipping up drinks at local events to employing nearly 30 people. Now the company has reached a new milestone, awarding its first franchise territory.

When she got started, Natalie Fairchild was living in Colorado with her husband and daughter



Elaine Evans of Pacific Perks puts the finishing touches on a fresh coffee for an employee of International Graphics and Nameplate.

Her now-former husband was facing health struggles.

"The world was kicking his rear-end," she said.

The couple decided they needed better work-life balance and jobs where they could work together to support their family.

They had friends who owned a similar type of mobile café business in Denver. The couple later bought their friends' business plan and trained with them.

Sixteen years ago, they brought their family back to the Pacific Northwest, where Fair-

child was from, and launched Pacific Perks.

"We bought one cart and enough beans for six months," Fairchild said. "We dialed for dollars."

Pacific Perks offers its services to local schools, companies and event organizers wanting to provide specialty coffee drinks to employees or event attendees for a single fee paid in advance by the hosting organization.

The company grew and grew, now having 28 employees most of whom are "Perkologists," or baristas.

Last year, Pacific Perks became a million-dollar company.

The company had its biggest grossing month in December, with 22 event bookings going out on a single day.

The company has other locations in the Portland metro area, but Evans got the company's first franchise award.

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## President: U.S. 'shall respond' to fatal strike

### 3 U.S. troops killed in drone strike in Jordan

BY ZEKE MILLER  
and LOLITA C. BALDOR  
Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — President Joe Biden said Sunday that the U.S. "shall respond" after three American troops were killed and dozens more were injured in an overnight drone strike in northeast Jordan near the Syrian border. Biden blamed Iran-backed militias for the first U.S. fatalities after months of strikes by such groups against American forces across the Middle East amid the Israel-Hamas war.

Biden, who was traveling in South Carolina, asked for a moment of silence during an appearance at a Baptist church's banquet hall.

"We had a tough day last night in the Middle East. We lost three brave souls in an attack on one of our bases," he said. After the moment of silence, Biden added, "and we shall respond."

With an increasing risk of military escalation in the region, U.S. officials were working to conclusively identify the precise group responsible for the attack, but they have assessed that one of several Iranian-backed groups was behind it.

Biden said in a written statement that the United States "will hold all those responsible to account at a time and in a manner (of) our choosing." Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said "we will take all necessary actions to defend the United States, our troops, and our interests."

Iran-backed fighters in east Syria began evacuating their posts, fearing U.S. airstrikes, according to Omar Abu Layla, a Europe-based activist who heads the Deir Ezzor 24 media outlet. He told The Associated Press that the areas are the strongholds of Mayadeen and Boukamal.

According to a U.S. official, the number of troops injured by the one-way attack drone rose to at least 34. Another official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details not made public,

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## Wash. takes millions in child support for low-income families

### In 2022 state kept \$41M meant for kids living in poverty

By BRANDON BLOCK  
Crosscut.com

Amy Roark logged in to the U.S. Bank app to check the balance on the prepaid debit card where the state delivers her monthly child support payments. Nothing had come through. Roark has two teenagers at home, and at the time — May 2018 — a legal order required one of their fathers to pay Roark \$400 a month. State records show the father paid \$235 that month, but

none of it was deposited in Roark's account.

For nearly three more years after that, the 45-year-old Vancouver mother scraped by without those monthly child support payments. What happened, as Roark explained to a legislative committee last year, was that the government took her money.

Washington, like almost every other state, intercepts millions in child support payments from custodial parents who receive cash benefits from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, historically known as welfare.

Federal data shows

Washington kept more than \$41 million intended for children in poverty in 2022. The state diverted some 80 percent of child support payments away from parents receiving TANF that year, according to data from the state Department of Social and Health Services. The state splits that revenue with federal agencies to cover the cost of services.

Advocates and legislators on both sides of the aisle have likened the practice to a tax that specifically targets the poor. House Bill 1652, currently under consideration in the state Senate, would redirect a significant portion of future

payments back to families.

"It just doesn't make a whole lot of sense," said Rep. Travis Couture, a Mason County Republican co-sponsoring the bill. "If we're trying to help you get back on your feet again, it's detrimental to take ... money that is meant to help support your children."

While the vast majority of child support — 96 percent or \$29.3 billion nationally in 2022 — gets to parents, federal data shows that states skimmed more than \$1 billion from current and former TANF families that year, capturing roughly two-thirds of payments

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KRISTINA BARKER FOR CROSSCUT  
Amy Roark, center, spends time with two of her children, GracieLynn Rich, left, and Kayden Wake, right, at her home in Vancouver on Jan. 21. Roark was on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families for several years during which time the state intercepted thousands of dollars of child support payments meant for her children.

### Iran launches 3 satellites into space as tensions rise

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Danny Westneat: Washington no longer worst in taxation  
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### Niners rally by Lions, will face Chiefs in Super Bowl

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# Perks

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Fairchild's team has been working on franchising for two years now, looking for an ideal franchisee.

They loved Evans. Evans' territory will include Phoenix's east valley, encompassing towns such as Scottsdale, Tempe and Mesa.

She encountered Pacific Perks at a franchise expo last spring.

"I love what they were all about," Evans said. "I love that their model is creating experience and appreciation and recognition for people."

Perkologists are allowed to set their own schedules — a benefit of their company culture. With the varying schedules, there is a large pool of Perkologists to work at local events.

Many Perkologists have outside responsibilities — parents whose kids are in school and people aiming to start their own businesses.

But Fairchild said the goal is for employees to have a strong work-like balance.

"My dream is to have many more franchises," Fairchild said. "I really want



AMANDA COWAN/The Columbian

Elaine Evans of Pacific Perks, second from left, takes an order from Justin Kostecki of International Graphics and Nameplate, with red beanie, on Jan. 11.

to be able to give the opportunity to people to thrive, have success and balance a life.

"That's my mission in life," she added.

Fairchild finds joy in seeing her business grow — getting trademarks, becoming a franchise, awarding the first franchise territories.

Like with many busi-

nesses, Pacific Perks sees ebbs and flows. Business is booming in December when companies are having holiday parties. Come January, things slow down considerably. Fairchild has had to get comfortable with it.

"You can get really freaked out a little bit," she said.

To balance the slow coffee times, Pacific Perks of-

fers sundae bars and other services.

Taking risks and moving her business up to the next level can be scary, Fairchild said.

"You hope that your risk will pay off," she said. "We've been very lucky in that."

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# Mideast

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said a large drone struck the base, which two other American officials identified as an installation in Jordan known as Tower 22. It is along the Syrian border and is used largely by troops involved in the advise-and-assist mission for Jordanian forces.

The small installation, which Jordan does not publicly disclose, includes U.S. engineering, aviation, logistics and security troops. Austin said the troops were deployed there "to work for the lasting defeat of ISIS." Three officials said the drone struck near the troops' sleeping quarters, which they said explained the high casualty count.

The U.S. military base at al-Tanf in Syria is 12 miles north of Tower 22. The Jordanian installation provides a critical logistical hub for U.S. forces in Syria, including those at al-Tanf, which is near the intersection of the Iraq, Syria and Jordan borders.

Jordanian state televi-

sion quoted Muhaanad Mubaidin, a government spokesman, as insisting the attack happened across the border in Syria.

U.S. troops long have used Jordan, bordering Iraq, Israel, the Palestinian territory of the West Bank, Saudi Arabia and Syria, as a basing point. Some 3,000 U.S. troops typically are stationed in Jordan, but the number at Tower 22 wasn't immediately known and isn't routinely disclosed.

Since the war in Gaza began Oct. 7, Iranian-backed militias have struck American military installations in Iraq more than 60 times and in Syria more than 90 times, with a mix of drones, rockets, mortars and ballistic missiles. The attack Sunday was the first targeting American troops in Jordan during the Israel-Hamas war and the first to result in the loss of American lives. Scores of U.S. personnel have been wounded, including some with traumatic brain injuries, during the attacks.

The militias have said that their strikes are in retaliation for Washington's support for Israel in the war in Gaza.

# Support

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intended for current TANF parents.

When struggling parents took refuge in government aid during the pandemic, Washington's collections nearly doubled to \$71 million in 2020, as officials garnished expanded unemployment benefits and stimulus checks.

More than half of states have enacted policies that now pass along a greater share of child support payments to parents, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Washington began redirecting a limited portion of payments — up to \$50 or \$100 per month — to parents on TANF after a 2021 law change, but it trails states like New Mexico and West Virginia that pass more money to families.

The latest bill has now twice passed the state House by wide margins. Advocates hope the bipartisan support is an indication that it could earn Senate approval this year, although some late-breaking pushback from the state agency in charge of child support could delay implementation until 2026.

Lianna Kressin, an organizer with the Poverty Action Network, said lawmakers are generally on board with moving away from a practice that snatches money from the neediest precisely because they have asked for help.

"When we talk to legislators," Kressin said, "they're like, 'Why are we even doing this in the first place?'"

## A long-standing practice

Child support serves as an important income source for single parents, often mothers, for whom the government's involvement can be a useful tool to compel noncustodial parents, often fathers, to financially support their children.

Responding to rising divorce rates among middle-class white women who faced a legal system that often favored men, a 1975 federal law expanded and standardized those mecha-

nisms, according to a recent report from the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. It also enshrined the existing practice of siphoning child support payments from poverty aid recipients as a revenue source, referred to by federal law as "cost recovery."

Diana Azevedo-McCaffrey, co-author of the report, traces the roots of these "cost recovery" policies to the "poor relief" and "bastardy" laws of the 19th century, which regarded poverty as an individual failing and treated public assistance as a loan. Those who couldn't repay the debt could be sued, imprisoned or forced into indentured labor.

"You can trace [those laws] to today where the child support program can be quite punitive for non-custodial parents," Azevedo-McCaffrey said. "If they don't pay child support then they accumulate debt to the family and to the government."

Many noncustodial parents may remain unaware that the child support they pay does not reach their children.

The state Department of Social and Health Services, which administers TANF and child support, serves notices when a case is opened to inform noncustodial parents of their legal rights. But those notices do not explain that their payments will be seized by the state if the custodial parent is on TANF.

Jake Hughes, policy chief for the Division of Child Support, said it's hard to know how much information to share about a complicated process.

"The majority of our cases are not currently or formerly associated with TANF," Hughes said. "So it's that question, should we add something in that initial notice that says: 'Should your case become active TANF, this is how the application of your payments will apply.'"

## Child support as revenue source

Under the 1975 law, custodial parents are required to sign over their child support rights to the state when they sign up for TANF. That money is shared between the federal and state gov-

ernments according to a variable formula — in Washington the split is roughly 50/50, according to a legislative staff report — where it can be used to reimburse the costs of providing welfare benefits.

States can choose to "pass through" some or all of the payments to the parents they were intended for, but there are incentives not to.

Because the feds take a cut of the confiscated payments, states continue to owe a portion of that "federal share" even if they pass it through to families. This means states lose a revenue source but must still repay the federal government money they're no longer collecting.

The Legislature has repeatedly modified the "pass through" policy in recent decades. A policy allowing parents to receive \$50 of their child support payments was scrapped in 1997, then brought back and upped to \$100 in 2008 before being repealed again in 2011. The state continued to seize all child support payments from TANF recipients until 2021, when a bill sponsored by Sen. Manka Dhingra, D-Redmond, took effect, again allowing parents up to \$50 of their payments, or up to \$100 for parents with two or more children.

Dhingra wrote in an email to Crosscut that she initially proposed a \$100/\$200 pass-through in 2020, but had to compromise to get the bill passed. Dhingra attributed the back-and-forth changes to cost-cutting during the Great Recession and other periods of budgetary austerity.

## A new proposal for parents

HB 1652, first introduced in 2023 by Rep. Jamila Taylor, D-Federal Way, would require the state to provide 100 percent of "current" child support payments to families. (The state could still intercept some payments under the new statute, such as ones it categorizes as debt owed to the state.)

The House reaffirmed Taylor's bill on Jan. 10 with just three dissenting votes. It now awaits action in the Senate Law & Justice Committee, where lawmakers have until Feb. 21 to advance it.



KRISTINA BARKER FOR CROSSCUT

Amy Roark of Vancouver is a member of the Poverty Reduction Work Group and an advocate for low-income Washington families that are struggling for financial stability and independence.

Staff from DSHS attended multiple public hearings on HB 1652 last year and offered to answer questions, but did not indicate support or opposition to the bill. A fiscal note attached to HB 1652 estimated it would cost the state about \$30 million per biennium to implement the bill, with most of that money being paid in benefits to families.

Matthew Parascand, government relations senior adviser for the Economic Services Administration at DSHS, told Crosscut a full pass-through of current child support payments is "good public policy" and would be a powerful tool to fight poverty, but stopped short of acknowledging that confiscating payments in the first place is harmful to families.

"It's hard for us to say it's harmful when we're working so hard to collect on this child support debt and support these families with our other programs like TANF," Parascand said. "Is it beneficial for them to have any additional dollars in their household? Absolutely."

The agency has also sought to delay implementation of the bill by 18 months. Parascand emailed Taylor last week asking her to push the bill's effective date to 2026, citing IT system upgrades to the agency's Automated Client Eligibility System.

"Due to current volume and complexity of projects involving ACES, resources are not available to implement this bill until late 2025," Parascand wrote to Taylor.

Taylor told Crosscut she was "dumbfounded" by the

agency's request, which didn't come up when she introduced the bill nearly a year ago.

"I find it difficult to understand why [DSHS] needs two years to figure out how to get money back to people when we've been taking it from them pretty succinctly," Taylor said. "I wasn't here when they started taking the money in 2011, but I can't imagine that they waited two years to start collecting money from people."

## Who pays the cost?

Roark, the Vancouver mom, has two children who live with her, 13 and 16, as well as two adult children. She said she hasn't worked full time since 2010 and relies on child support income to pay the bills, though she supplements that with stipends from multiple volunteer roles. In a pinch, she will sometimes collect cans in black trash bags and drive them across the river, where Oregon pays a recycling fee of 10 cents per can.

The current child support order requires one of her exes to pay \$714 per month, but the order amount has fluctuated over the years — sometimes \$400, sometimes just \$25. She said she applied for TANF in 2017 because her ex stopped paying.

A payment log Roark obtained from DSHS and shared with Crosscut shows that during the nearly four years she received TANF benefits, her ex paid \$4,897 in child support. She said she received \$100 of that money. (Washington's partial pass-through law took effect during her last

month on TANF.)

It can be hard to measure the loss of something you never had. But for Roark, those intercepted payments have cost her time with her children. She would like to take them roller skating or on a road trip to the Grand Canyon, she said — but everything costs money she doesn't have.

Recently she got in a car accident. She can't afford insurance, and expects to lose her license soon, which would mean she can't drive her kids to school anymore.

"I'm trying my hardest to deal with things, like I said, and get them put away and to rise above — but there's still all these barriers," Roark said.

The child support she never received has also created tension between her and her exes, and indebted them to the government. That debt accumulates interest over time, and can lead to having paychecks garnished and driver's licenses revoked, which can reduce their future ability to pay.

"It's not like they're coming to get this money for the kids," she said of the state.

Researchers in Colorado found that after the state implemented a full pass-through policy in 2017, payment rates increased among noncustodial parents affected by the policy.

Couture, the Shelton Republican who co-sponsored the bill with Taylor, said many in his caucus view the current policy as a tax on Washington's poorest families. He also noted that TANF is an important resource in rural communities like his.

Citing Ronald Reagan, Couture told Crosscut he sees TANF as a hand up, helping people in crisis pull themselves out of poverty. To the idea that recipients should repay the government for that help, he wasn't totally opposed, but said the way the system is currently structured makes the least sense of all options.

"Your child support money is not the state's," Couture said. "We shouldn't be saving money on the backs of our poorest."

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