

# JOINT STATE GOVERNMENT COMMISSION

General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

## **GREATER FATHER INVOLVEMENT:** *Fostering Engagement of Fathers in Improving the Well-being of Their Children*

A Report of the  
Advisory Committee on Pennsylvania Greater Father Involvement

January 2024



*Serving the General Assembly of the  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Since 1937*

**REPORT**

*Act of November 3, 2022 (P.L. 1747, No.114)  
Greater Father Involvement: Fostering Engagement of Fathers  
in Improving the Well-being of Their Children*

<b>Project Manager:</b>	Yvonne Llewellyn Hursh, Counsel
<b>Project Staff:</b>	Stephen J. Kramer, Esquire, Staff Attorney Wendy L. Baker, Office Manager/Executive Assistant Brian O’Loughlin, Legal Intern (May-December 2023)
The report is also available at <a href="http://jsg.legis.state.pa.us">http://jsg.legis.state.pa.us</a>	

<b>JOINT STATE GOVERNMENT COMMISSION</b>	
Room 108 Finance Building 613 North Street Harrisburg, PA 17120	<b>Telephone:</b> 717-787-4397 <b>Fax:</b> 717-783-9380 <b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:jntst02@legis.state.pa.us">jntst02@legis.state.pa.us</a> <b>Website:</b> <a href="http://jsg.legis.state.pa.us">http://jsg.legis.state.pa.us</a>

The Joint State Government Commission was created in 1937 as the primary and central non-partisan, bicameral research and policy development agency for the General Assembly of Pennsylvania.<sup>1</sup>

A fourteen-member Executive Committee comprised of the leadership of both the House of Representatives and the Senate oversees the Commission. The seven Executive Committee members from the House of Representatives are the Speaker, the Majority and Minority Leaders, the Majority and Minority Whips, and the Majority and Minority Caucus Chairs. The seven Executive Committee members from the Senate are the President Pro Tempore, the Majority and Minority Leaders, the Majority and Minority Whips, and the Majority and Minority Caucus Chairs. By statute, the Executive Committee selects a chairman of the Commission from among the members of the General Assembly. Historically, the Executive Committee has also selected a Vice-Chair or Treasurer, or both, for the Commission.

The studies conducted by the Commission are authorized by statute or by a simple or joint resolution. In general, the Commission has the power to conduct investigations, study issues, and gather information as directed by the General Assembly. The Commission provides in-depth research on a variety of topics, crafts recommendations to improve public policy and statutory law, and works closely with legislators and their staff.

A Commission study may involve the appointment of a legislative task force, composed of a specified number of legislators from the House of Representatives or the Senate, or both, as set forth in the enabling statute or resolution. In addition to following the progress of a particular study, the principal role of a task force is to determine whether to authorize the publication of any report resulting from the study and the introduction of any proposed legislation contained in the report. However, task force authorization does not necessarily reflect endorsement of all the findings and recommendations contained in a report.

Some studies involve an appointed advisory committee of professionals or interested parties from across the Commonwealth with expertise in a particular topic; others are managed exclusively by Commission staff with the informal involvement of representatives of those entities that can provide insight and information regarding the particular topic. When a study involves an advisory committee, the Commission seeks consensus among the members.<sup>2</sup> Although an advisory committee member may represent a particular department, agency, association, or group, such representation does not necessarily reflect the endorsement of the department, agency, association, or group of all the findings and recommendations contained in a study report.

---

<sup>1</sup> Act of July 1, 1937 (P.L.2460, No.459); 46 P.S. §§ 65–69.

<sup>2</sup> Consensus does not necessarily reflect unanimity among the advisory committee members on each individual policy or legislative recommendation. At a minimum, it reflects the views of a substantial majority of the advisory committee, gained after lengthy review and discussion.

Over the years, nearly one thousand individuals from across the Commonwealth have served as members of the Commission's numerous advisory committees or have assisted the Commission with its studies. Members of advisory committees bring a wide range of knowledge and experience to deliberations involving a particular study. Individuals from countless backgrounds have contributed to the work of the Commission, such as attorneys, judges, professors and other educators, state and local officials, physicians and other health care professionals, business and community leaders, service providers, administrators and other professionals, law enforcement personnel, and concerned citizens. In addition, members of advisory committees donate their time to serve the public good; they are not compensated for their service as members. Consequently, the Commonwealth receives the financial benefit of such volunteerism, along with their shared expertise in developing statutory language and public policy recommendations to improve the law in Pennsylvania.

The Commission periodically reports its findings and recommendations, along with any proposed legislation, to the General Assembly. Certain studies have specific timelines for the publication of a report, as in the case of a discrete or timely topic; other studies, given their complex or considerable nature, are ongoing and involve the publication of periodic reports. Completion of a study, or a particular aspect of an ongoing study, generally results in the publication of a report setting forth background material, policy recommendations, and proposed legislation. However, the release of a report by the Commission does not necessarily reflect the endorsement by the members of the Executive Committee, or the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Commission, of all the findings, recommendations, or conclusions contained in the report. A report containing proposed legislation may also contain official comments, which may be used to construe or apply its provisions.<sup>3</sup>

Since its inception, the Commission has published over 450 reports on a sweeping range of topics, including administrative law and procedure; agriculture; athletics and sports; banks and banking; commerce and trade; the commercial code; crimes and offenses; decedents, estates, and fiduciaries; detectives and private police; domestic relations; education; elections; eminent domain; environmental resources; escheats; fish; forests, waters, and state parks; game; health and safety; historical sites and museums; insolvency and assignments; insurance; the judiciary and judicial procedure; labor; law and justice; the legislature; liquor; mechanics' liens; mental health; military affairs; mines and mining; municipalities; prisons and parole; procurement; state-licensed professions and occupations; public utilities; public welfare; real and personal property; state government; taxation and fiscal affairs; transportation; vehicles; and workers' compensation.

Following the completion of a report, subsequent action on the part of the Commission may be required, and, as necessary, the Commission will draft legislation and statutory amendments, update research, track legislation through the legislative process, attend hearings, and answer questions from legislators, legislative staff, interest groups, and constituents.

---

<sup>3</sup> 1 Pa.C.S. § 1939.

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

---

### Chair

**Jeffrey Scott Steiner, M.Ed.**

Executive Director  
Dads' Resource Center

**Kevin Arrington**

President  
A+ Strategies  
and Corporate Solutions

**Beth Bitler, MSA**

Family Recovery  
and Child Welfare Training  
Certified Allied Addictions Professional  
Certified Family Recovery Specialist  
ACT Raising Safe Kids Master Trainer  
Certified Family Life Educator

**Frederick W. Blankenburg, M.S.**

Independent Contractor  
for the Montgomery County Office  
of Children and Youth  
Supervision Counselor  
for Community Service Foundation

**Carey Harris**

Chief Executive Officer  
Literacy Pittsburgh

**Christopher Meidl, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor  
of Early Level (Pre-k-4) Education  
Duquesne University

**Raymond Edward Petren, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor  
of Human Development  
and Family Studies  
Pennsylvania State University Scranton

**Brandon E. Phillips, B.S., M.S.**

Pittsburgh Public Schools–Take A Father  
to School Day Planning Committee

**Bilal Abdul Qayyum**

President, Father's Day  
Rally Committee

**Lynnore K. Seaton, Esquire**

Counsel, Domestic Relations  
Procedural Rules Committee  
(concluded August 2023)

**Rahsaan Roland Turpin, Ph.D.**

Board Secretary/Treasurer  
The Strong Families Commission

**Stuart A. Wesbury, Jr., Ph.D.**

Professor Emeritus, Arizona  
State University  
Retired Healthcare  
Executive/Community Volunteer

**H. Jean Wright, II, Psy.D.**

Deputy Commissioner  
Behavioral Health and Justice Division  
City of Philadelphia, Department of  
Behavioral Health and Intellectual  
disAbility Services (DBHIDS)





General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
JOINT STATE GOVERNMENT COMMISSION

Room 108 – Finance Building  
Harrisburg, Pa 17120

717-787-4397  
Fax 717-783-9380

<http://jsg.legis.state.pa.us/>

January 2024

***Executive Committee***

Senate Members

**Kim L. Ward**  
President Pro Tempore  
**Joseph A. Pittman**  
Majority Leader  
**Jay Costa, Jr.**  
Minority Leader  
**Ryan P. Aument**  
Majority Whip  
**Christine M. Tartaglione**  
Minority Whip  
**Kristin Phillips-Hill**  
Chair, Majority Caucus  
**Wayne D. Fontana**  
Chair, Minority Caucus

House Members

**Joanna E. McClinton**  
Speaker  
**Matthew D. Bradford**  
Majority Leader  
**Bryan D. Cutler**  
Minority Leader  
**Dan L. Miller**  
Majority Whip  
**Timothy J. O'Neal**  
Minority Whip  
**Michael H. Schlossberg**  
Chair, Majority Caucus  
**George Dunbar**  
Chair, Minority Caucus

Administrative Staff

**Glenn J. Pasewicz**  
Executive Director  
**Yvonne M. Hursh**  
Counsel

To the Members of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania:

We are pleased to release the Advisory Committee report *Greater Father Involvement: Fostering Engagement of Fathers in Improving the Well-Being of Their Children*, as directed by Act 114 of 2023. The Advisory Committee included executive, judicial, and county agencies, university faculty, social service providers, and others, each of whom contributed from their extensive professional, research, and personal experience. The group's objectives were to identify strategies to remove obstacles that separate fathers from their children's lives by any number of situations, whether military service, unemployment, housing, medical or mental health problems, divorce or separation from their children's mothers, or involvement with the criminal justice system.

Nearly every aspect of how fathers benefit their children's lives, and are in turn themselves benefitted, is discussed herein. The Advisory Committee recommends the establishment of a permanent commission on greater fatherhood involvement in DHS, DCED, or as a free-standing commonwealth entity. Further, it makes recommendations to ensure fathers' equal treatment in areas of family leave, judicial proceedings, housing, children & youth agencies' policies and practices, and reform to child support.

On behalf of the Joint State Government Commission, we extend our thanks to the Advisory Committee, fathers, and providers for their vital contributions to strengthening Pennsylvania's families.

The full report is available at <http://jsg.legis.state.pa.us>.

Respectfully submitted,

Glenn J. Pasewicz  
Executive Director



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	3
<b>THE IMPACT OF FATHERS IN THE LIVES OF THEIR CHILDREN</b> .....	7
<i>Academic Performance</i> .....	9
<i>Behavioral, Emotional, and Social Development</i> .....	9
<i>Cognitive Development</i> .....	11
<i>Reduction in Teen Pregnancy</i> .....	12
<i>Career and Economic Impact</i> .....	12
<b>BARRIERS TO GREATER FATHERHOOD INVOLVEMENT</b> .....	13
<i>Societal and Cultural Barriers</i> .....	13
Marriage and Divorce Rates .....	14
Rise of Single Parenthood .....	19
Perceptions of Single Fathers .....	20
<i>Legal Barriers</i> .....	21
Establishing Paternity .....	21
Custody .....	22
Child Support .....	26
<i>Children, Youth, and Family Services</i> .....	33
State and Local Children and Youth Services .....	33
Federal Oversight .....	33
Paternal Participation .....	33
Child and Family Services Review .....	35
Family Engagement Initiative .....	38
Father Engagement Working Group .....	38
Partnerships with Fatherhood Organizations and other Community Groups .....	39
Enhance CYS Capacity to Address Father Mental Health and Auxiliary Support .....	40
Co-parenting Focused Family-Based Interventions .....	40
Re-evaluate Child Support Enforcement Practices .....	40
Implement More Inclusive Language .....	41
Housing Discrimination .....	41
<i>Personal and Financial Barriers</i> .....	43
Relationship Issues .....	43
Low Resource Settings .....	44
Lack of Education and Training .....	45
Parental Incarceration .....	45
Clean Slate Law – Former Incarceration and Employment .....	47
<u>Petition for Limited Access</u> .....	47
<u>Clean Slate Limited Access</u> .....	49
Fair Criminal Record Screening Standards Ordinance .....	50
Military Deployment .....	51
Paternal Mental Health .....	52
Substance Use Disorder .....	56

## CREATING GREATER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN FATHERS

<b>AND THEIR CHILDREN</b> .....	61
<i>Prenatal and Perinatal Connections</i> .....	61
<i>Relationship/Marriage Support</i> .....	64
<i>Co-Parenting</i> .....	66
<i>Financial Stability</i> .....	67
General Employment Assistance Programs .....	67
<u>Apprenticeship.gov</u> .....	67
<u>CareerOneStop</u> .....	68
<u>Employment and Training Administration</u> .....	69
<u>Goodwill</u> .....	70
<u>Job Accommodation Network (JAN)</u> .....	70
<u>Ticket to Work</u> .....	71
Employment Programs for Veterans .....	71
<u>Veteran Readiness and Employment</u> .....	71
Employment-Related Programs to Assist Individuals who were Formerly Incarcerated .....	72
<u>2nd Chances 4 Felons (2C4F)</u> .....	72
<u>Career Planning for People with a Criminal Conviction</u> .....	72
<u>Felony Record Hub</u> .....	72
<u>National Reentry Resource Center</u> .....	73
<u>Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO)</u> .....	74
<u>Restoration of Rights Project</u> .....	74
<i>Participation in Educational Planning</i> .....	75
<b>PERMANENT COMMISSION</b> .....	77
<i>Ohio Commission on Fatherhood</i> .....	77
<i>The Florida Fatherhood Initiative</i> .....	83
<i>South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families</i> .....	85
<b>PROGRAMS AFFECTING FATHERHOOD</b> .....	87
<i>Federal Programs and Funding Initiatives</i> .....	87
Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Grant Program .....	87
Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) .....	92
<u>Fatherhood, Relationships, and Marriage – Illuminating the Next Generation of Research (FRAMING Research)</u> .....	92
<u>REFRAME: Race Equity for Fatherhood, Relationship, and Marriage Programs to Empower Black Families</u> .....	93
<u>Strengthening the Implementation of Responsible Fatherhood Programs (SIRF)</u> .....	93
<u>Testing Identified Elements for Success in Fatherhood Programs (Fatherhood TIES)</u> .....	93
<i>Pennsylvania State Initiatives</i> .....	94
Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) .....	94
<u>Family First</u> .....	94
<u>Pennsylvania Family Centers</u> .....	95
<u>Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Initiative (PRF)</u> .....	95
Home Visiting Programs to Promote Better Parenting .....	95
<u>Early Head Start</u> .....	95
<u>Family Check-Up (FCU)</u> .....	95
<u>Healthy Families America (HFA)</u> .....	96
<u>Parents As Teachers</u> .....	96

Office of Children & Families in the Courts .....	96
<u>Father Engagement Workgroup</u> .....	96
Temple University and the Center for Policy Research .....	97
<u>Fatherhood Research &amp; Practice Network</u> .....	97
<i>Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)</i> .....	97
The Institute for the Advancement of Working Families (IAWF) .....	98
The Father’s Day Rally Committee, Inc. ....	98
The Strong Families Commission .....	98
National Fatherhood Initiative .....	99
National Parents Organization .....	99
The Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center: Fatherhood Resource Hub .....	99
Casey Family Programs .....	100
PostPartum Support International .....	100
Public Health Management Corporation .....	100
<u>Resources for Children’s Health</u> .....	101
<i>Fathers and Sports Programs</i> .....	101
Fathers & Men of Professional Basketball Players .....	101
All Pro Dad .....	102
The Art of Fatherhood .....	102
<i>Local and Regional Programs</i> .....	102
<b>APPENDIX</b> .....	105
Act 114 of 2022 .....	105



## INTRODUCTION

---

Over the past 100 years, the role of fathers has evolved and the perception of their importance in the lives of their children has grown. Conversely, the families of the baby boom generation, with a working dad, stay-at-home mom a la “Leave It to Beaver” and “Father Knows Best” have all but disappeared for lower- and middle-income people. Declining rates of marriage and the increasing ease of divorce since 1950 have led to an increase in the number of single-parent households with one or more children under the age of 18. Most of these households are headed by women. The absence of fathers residing in the same home as their children has lessened the ability of those fathers to fully participate in their sons’ and daughters’ lives, yet the importance of father involvement has been repeatedly identified in social science research for decades. In recognition of the importance of the active involvement of fathers with their children, the General Assembly passed the act of November 3, 2022 (P.L.1747, No. 114) creating the Advisory Committee on Greater Father Involvement within the Joint State Government Commission. The Act is reproduced in the Appendix to this report. In summary, the advisory committee is charged with evaluating the benefits of and barriers to fathers’ involvement in the whole lives of their children. This includes reviewing existing programs and initiatives and laws in areas such as early childhood development, child brain development, healthcare, behavioral health, school, custody, incarceration, children and youth services involvement, homelessness, housing, workforce development and employment opportunities, parenting and co-parenting, adult education and literacy, and conflict resolution training.

The first directive of Act 114 of 2022 is to examine the contributions that fathers make to improving societal outcomes for children and families. Decades of anthropology, psychology, biology, sociology, and gender studies, to name a few, have sought to define what the role of fathers “should” be in modern America. Further, the characteristics of a “good” father can vary based on cultural, religious, and other social norms. Gender identity, genders roles, nature versus nurture and other debates have produced differing viewpoints on the role of fathers; however, this report is focused on encouraging all fathers to seek greater involvement and further connection with their children for the well-being of the children regardless of those norms and statuses.

Opportunities for fathers to become more involved in their children’s lives frequently turn on the legal relationship between the father and the mother. Divorced fathers and fathers who have never had a legal relationship with the mother of their child face greater impediments than married fathers. Consequently, much of the analysis of barriers to greater fatherhood involvement will vary based on the marital/relationship status of the parents. Legal, institutional, societal, and relational barriers will all be examined. Federal, state, and local programs and initiatives that are designed to promote the well-being of children will also be examined to identify barriers to access for fathers and ways to promote successful fatherhood engagement. Programs and initiatives designed to promote fatherhood involvement will also be analyzed.

Finally, recommendations will be made to the General Assembly regarding ways to further promote greater father involvement and reduce barriers to it.

The Advisory Committee has met in person and via Zoom, on June 13, July 18, August 15, September 12, 2023. Due to conflicting schedules, the committee was not able to meet in October through December but engaged in in-depth email exchanges during that time to complete its assignment.

It should be noted that the recommendations contained in this report represent the general consensus of the Advisory Committee. They are not unanimously endorsed and should not be considered the official position of all the organizations represented on the committee.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

---

An important aspect of greater fatherhood involvement revolves around communication and coordination of services for fathers. A vital part of that communication is to increase knowledge and awareness of the valuable role fathers can play in the healthy development of their children. To do so, outreach needs to be tailored to meet fathers where they are currently situated in their lives and assist them to acquire the means and opportunities to participate more fully in the lives of their children. Part of that communication needs to share knowledge of the importance of their role. Part of that communication needs to help normalize fathers' active engagement with all aspects of their children's lives.

Current efforts to improve fatherhood engagement are fragmented and uncoordinated. The approach to encouraging greater fatherhood involvement is two-fold. One, on a broad societal level, the message needs to be conveyed that fathers are vital to the welfare of their children and that their contributions should be respected and applauded. Few people respond well to lectures about how they should conduct themselves. Few young men are going to pay attention to suggestions on how to be a better father when complying with these suggestions when they are a condition of a benefit conferred or a "reward" for compliant behavior. And few young men are going to actively seek "advice" or "therapy" on how to be a better father. Their participation in their children's lives must be voluntary to be genuine. A large part of the more global answer to the question of how to increase fatherhood involvement is to normalize it, to encourage young men to aspire to be more involved father, and feel recognized for doing so. Media portrayals of fathers can play a huge role. Social media, advertising, and visual and performing arts should be encouraged to portray fathers as actively involved in their children's lives. This kind of public media campaign needs to be coordinated and promoted by a group dedicated to spreading the message of greater fatherhood involvement. Accordingly, the first recommendation of this advisory committee is for the establishment of a permanent commission on greater fatherhood involvement within either the Department of Human Services or the Department of Community and Economic Development. There is also support for the creation of the commission as an independent free-standing agency.

The hallmarks of a model commission include a legislative mandate, housing the commission within a state government agency related to social services and family welfare maximize involvement across multiple agencies and organizations, regular meetings, and engagement in policy, education, fatherhood services and promotional events.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Jessican Pearson and Jay Fagan, "State Efforts to Support the Engagement of Nonresident Fathers in the Lives of Their Children," *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services* 100, No. 4 (2019): 392-408, DOI: 10.1177/1044389419874172.

The commission would serve in multiple roles. It should:

- coordinate programs among the various state agencies,
- serve as a navigator to assist individuals in finding services,
- serves as an ombudsman to investigate complaints regarding perceived bias against single fathers in areas such as custody, housing, and employment barriers encountered by the formerly incarcerated,
- help abolish stigma and discrimination against fathers, and shape public opinion regarding the value of single fathers in the lives of their children,
- provide educational and outreach materials,
- provide training to agencies and social service staff on ways to interact with fathers to encourage their greater involvement, and
- promote the positive depiction of father involvement in visual media, including advertising and marketing materials.

The second half of the approach is more prosaic, but equally important. And that is to address barriers to father involvement across various areas of daily living. The following recommendations address those individual areas.

- As a rule, equal parenting time should be the default custody arrangement, regardless of the age of the child.
- While some counties require mediation and co-parenting classes before the parties move to litigation, not all do. Consideration should be given to making these a statewide requirement.
- Paternal family leave should be offered at the same level as maternity leave, at a minimum.
- Flexible family leave should be available to allow fathers to attend parent-teacher conferences, IEP/504 meetings, medical appointments, and other decision-making meetings affecting the welfare of a child.
- Consideration should be given to require mothers to identify the father of a child at the time of birth, unless extraordinary circumstances exist, such as the child is a product of rape. If the identity of the father is uncertain, then genetic testing should be ordered for any potential or putative father.

- The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) should maintain data on custody and visitation violation complaints, enforcement, and disposition, including cases processed by non-judicial officers within the courts.
- Consideration should be given to encourage all counties to follow the U.S. Department of Human Services guidance that discourages the collection of child support against parents whose children are in foster care and to dismiss any arrears that may have accrued while the child was in foster care.
- The Unified Judicial System in Pennsylvania should consider adopting the concept of family access motions. A process like one such as enacted in Missouri can serve as an example. Under that law, a parent can proceed *pro se*, the court must issue a summons within five days, and enforcement can include a compensatory period of visitation, custody or third-party custody at a time convenient for the aggrieved party not less than the period of time denied; participation by the violator in counseling to educate the violator about the importance of providing the child with a continuing and meaningful relationship with both parents; assessment of a fine of up to five hundred dollars against the violator payable to the aggrieved party; requiring the violator to post bond or security to ensure future compliance with the court's access orders; and ordering the violator to pay the cost of counseling to reestablish the parent-child relationship between the aggrieved party and the child. Mo. Rev. Stats. § 452.400.
- Although children and youth workers are routinely expected to search for family members when exploring placement options for foster or kinship care, special efforts should be intentionally made to identify paternal relatives of non-resident fathers who have never been married to the child's mother. The Advisory Committee feels it important to remind caseworkers that these individuals frequently exist, though they may not necessarily be identified by the mother in an interview and can be easily overlooked. In general, additional efforts should be made to improve father engagement in the child welfare system.
- Expand prenatal program to include mental health screenings for fathers and provide training to healthcare providers to encourage and welcome fathers into the prenatal process.



## **THE IMPACT OF FATHERS IN THE LIVES OF THEIR CHILDREN**

---

To determine the impact that fathers have in the lives of their children, we must first look at the concept of a “father.” In its most stripped down mode, genetic material from two individuals (biological parents), in the form of a sperm and egg, are needed to create a child.<sup>5</sup> A second, formal route to parentage is by legal adoption. Other relationships can create father-figures, such as stepfathers, fiancées, and boyfriends. Older brothers, uncles, cousins, and grandparents and even sports coaches, teachers, and clergy can also serve as father figures for a child. Generally, this report will discuss “fathers” in the role of progenitor or legally responsible role of adopted father and will specify when additional father figures are intended.

Having a father involved in the life of a child offers many benefits in all areas of the child’s emotional, social and brain development. Conversely, the absence of a father can have detrimental effects. This is not as straightforward as it seems – “absence” does not necessarily occur simply because the father is not residing with the child.

Father involvement is more than mere presence or financial support; it encompasses emotional, psychological, and developmental contributions crucial to a child's well-being. The impact of father engagement manifests in a variety of areas, including academic performance, social and behavioral development, emotional well-being and mental health, the reduction of teen pregnancy and economic prospects. Understanding the dynamics and effects of father involvement has become a pivotal element in comprehending the holistic growth and flourishing of children. Conversely, there are potential risks and negative repercussions in its absence, especially during challenging circumstances such as military deployments, low-resource settings, parenting children with disabilities, and marital separation, to name a few. However, regardless of these differences in circumstances, considerable research has found that a father can profoundly impact various facets of a child’s growth and well-being.

Generally, father involvement encompasses a multifaceted and dynamic participation of fathers in the lives of their children, extending beyond mere presence to active engagement with and influence on his children. This engagement and influence can often forge a strong parent-child bond. Strong bonds between father and child are important for child well-being because fathers who develop such close ties can effectively monitor, teach, and communicate with their children. Contact alone may not be enough for him to make a significantly positive impact.<sup>6</sup> Pushing beyond mere contact is often difficult for many fathers, especially nonresident fathers (fathers who do not live in the same home as their children). When given the opportunity to spend time with their

---

<sup>5</sup> For purposes of this report, cloning, surrogacy, and other creative reproductive methods are not discussed. The assumption is that most children are the product of the procreative activities of two persons with the requisition genetic material.

<sup>6</sup> Valarie King and Juliana M. Sobolewski, “Nonresident Fathers' Contributions to Adolescent Well-Being,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, (2006), 68(3), 537-555, 537, DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2006.00274.x.

children, nonresident fathers typically take their children to restaurants, movies, and other activities. However, in doing so, some fathers neglect to really engage and talk about problems in their child's life or set limits. This may be linked to past findings on nonresident fathers (of primarily divorced fathers) that greater father-child contact was not associated with improved child wellbeing. This is not to say nonresident fathers cannot be highly influential and positively impactful in their children's lives. Despite their absence in the home, many nonresident fathers find ways to "...act like authoritative parents rather than adult companions, and they maintain close, supportive ties to their children, and their children appear to benefit when they can do so..."<sup>7</sup> Simply put, when non-resident fathers are motivated and have the skills to engage positively with their children, their presence can result in healthy child outcomes. Thus, scholars have drawn the inference that the quality of father involvement may be more important than the mere quantity.<sup>8</sup>

Father involvement can also signify the interaction between fathers and their children within multiple spheres, including but not limited to family home life, community, and broader social contexts. Some examples of this include coaching their child's sports teams, attending church with their child, or participating in their child's education. This involvement reflects emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions that contribute to the child's growth and well-being.<sup>9</sup>

A father's level of involvement can also take form in the roles he plays in his family and with his children. Some of these roles include being a provider of emotional support, financial contributions, guidance, and active participation in their child's upbringing, which contribute to the child's emotional and social development.<sup>10</sup>

It is through these various facets of involvement that fathers have been "...significantly associated with children's positive mental, cognitive, social, and physical outcomes."<sup>11</sup> The positive impact of father involvement can begin at very early stages of a child's life. Studies have shown that children as young as 3 months to 24 months, who have experienced positive contributions from their fathers, have shown a higher level of cognitive functioning than those children who do not. The positive impact of a father's involvement has also been demonstrated as the child grows older through adolescence and early adulthood, often leading to the prevention or reduction in a child's involvement in health-risking behaviors, such as substance use disorder.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Marcia J. Carlson and Katherine A. Magnuson, "Low-Income Men and Fathers' Influences on Children?," *The American Academy of Political and Social Science*, (Dec. 15, 2011), 635(1), 95-116, 95, DOI: 10.1177/0002716210393853.

<sup>9</sup> Natasha Cabrera, Hiram E. Fitzgerald, Robert H. Bradley *et al.*, "The Ecology of Father-Child Relationships: An Expanded Model," *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, (2014), 6(4), 336-354, 335.

<sup>10</sup> *Supra*, n. 6 (King).

<sup>11</sup> Jieun Choi, Hyoun K. Kim, Deborah M. Capaldi, *et al.*, "Long-Term Effects of Father Involvement in Childhood on their Son's Physiological Stress Regulation System in Adulthood," *Developmental Psychobiology*, (Sep. 2021), 63(6), DOI: 10.002/dev.22152.

<sup>12</sup> Susan Yoon, Minjung Kim, Junyeong Yang, *et al.*, "Patterns of Father Involvement and Child Development among Families with Low Income," *Children (Basel)*, (Dec. 2021), 8(12): 1164, DOI: 10.3390/children8121164.

These findings broadly highlight the relevance of father involvement in the context of child development across academic performance, behavioral, emotional, and social development, the reduction of teen pregnancy, and the economic impact on children.

### *Academic Performance*

Father involvement significantly influences a child's academic performance. The involvement of fathers in a child's education has been highlighted across various studies and extends beyond mere presence to active participation, guidance, and support. Studies have found a positive correlation between father involvement and enhanced academic outcomes.<sup>13</sup> For instance, fathers can assist with homework, engage in educational activities, and provide guidance in understanding complex concepts which positively contribute to improved academic grades and a stronger educational foundation. The strength of the link between fatherhood and academic performance is described as modest in most research, but it is believed to have a lasting impact on a child's academic outcomes nonetheless.<sup>14</sup>

Fathers also provide emotional support and encouragement associated with increased academic performance. The emotional involvement of fathers plays a pivotal role in shaping a child's attitude towards learning, such as work ethic and prioritization. Emotional encouragement, praise for achievements, and fostering a positive attitude towards education by fathers significantly impact a child's motivation and self-esteem, consequently reflecting in their academic performance.<sup>15</sup>

Having a father actively involved in his children's education is also important because it allows for the collaboration of both parents to offer invaluable support. Studies have found that when fathers actively engage with mothers or co-parents in educational decisions and support systems, the result is a more conducive environment for the child's scholastic achievement. Coordinated efforts between parents offer a holistic approach to a child's educational needs. When parents collaborate and discuss and explain rules and decisions to their children (especially adolescents), cognitive and social competencies are increased, leading to enhanced academic success.<sup>16</sup>

### *Behavioral, Emotional, and Social Development*

A father's involvement has also been shown to have a positive impact on the behavioral, emotional, and social development of children. Children who have an involved father are more likely to be emotionally secure and confident to explore their surroundings at a young age, and, as

---

<sup>13</sup> *Supra*, n. 9 (Cabrera).

<sup>14</sup> *Supra*, n. 11 (Choi).

<sup>15</sup> *Supra*, n. 8 (Carlson).

<sup>16</sup> *Supra*, n. 6 (King).

they develop, have better social connections with peers. These children are also less likely to get in trouble at home, school, or in the community.<sup>17</sup>

Involved fathers also help prevent or reduce a child's involvement in health-risking behaviors during adolescence. For example, father involvement during adolescence was associated with lower levels of alcohol use in adolescent children. Moreover, fathers who engaged in greater supportive father involvement and less authoritarian parenting style "...predicted a reduced risk for the onset of delinquent behaviors and substance use in adolescents."<sup>18</sup> The quality of father involvement during adolescence demonstrated a significant association with fewer alcohol related problems and risk behaviors co-occurring with alcohol use. This positive influence helping to curtail these behaviors can and often does lead to better short term and long term physical and mental health outcomes for children as they mature into adulthood.<sup>19</sup>

Emerging evidence has suggested that father involvement can have a significant and positive impact on the outcomes of children with disabilities and other members within their family. Fathers who maintain positive attitudes on the personal growth and progress of their children, especially those children with disabilities, lowered maternal stress levels in families of children with autism and other disabilities. Mothers of children with disabilities often experienced a reduction in maternal stress when fathers offered support and understanding through active parenting and family roles. Active fathers can also serve as a buffer of the negative consequences of parenting a child with autism and other disabilities on mothers' stress, depression, and parenting quality.<sup>20</sup>

Early high-quality father involvement in families of children with disabilities can also lead to more positive outcomes when children transition to kindergarten according to one relevant study focused specifically on the involvement of fathers in their child's Early Intervention (EI) services.<sup>21</sup> EI services are provided to young children with disabilities or visible delays between birth and three years of age. Authorized pursuant to federal law under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA),<sup>22</sup> EI is a service program administered by each state. Services may include speech therapy, physical therapy, and others based on the needs of the child and family.<sup>23</sup> Pennsylvania's EI program offers coaching support and services to families with children with developmental delays and disabilities from birth to age five.<sup>24</sup> A study on fathers' impact on their child's EI found that involved fathers contribute to their children's positive outcomes, despite the existence of barriers often limiting their participation. Unfortunately, EI services often fail to target fathers and EI service providers lack effective strategies for engaging fathers.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Brent A. McBride, Sarah J. Curtiss, Kelly Uchima, *et. al.*, "Father Involvement in Early Intervention: Exploring the Gap Between Service Providers' Perceptions and Practices," *Journal of Early Intervention* 39, No. 2 (2017): 1-17, DOI: 10.1177/1053815116686118.

<sup>18</sup> *Supra*, n. 8 (Carlson).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Supra*, n. 17 (McBride).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Pub. L. 101-476, 104 Stat. 1142; 20 U.S.C. § 1400 *et. seq.*

<sup>23</sup> "What is Early Intervention?" *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, accessed December 14, 2023, <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/parents/states.html>.

<sup>24</sup> "Early Intervention," *Pennsylvania Department of Education*, accessed December 14, 2023, <https://www.education.pa.gov/Early%20Learning/Early%20Intervention/Pages/default.aspx>.

<sup>25</sup> *Supra*, n. 17 (McBride).

Father involvement with their children can also have a positive impact on the lives of mothers, which in turn benefits the development of their children. When fathers function as a source of practical and emotional support for mothers, they enhance the quality of the mother-child relationship. Mothers are then less likely to develop parenting stress and experience more competence as a parent. Less parenting stress on mothers can translate to a healthier home environment for children to thrive.<sup>26</sup>

### *Cognitive Development*

Positively involved fathers can increase the cognitive skills development of their children. A father's positive impact on cognitive development has been shown to occur early in a child's life. As mentioned previously, children between the ages of 3 months and 24 months, who have experienced positive contributions from their fathers, have shown a higher level of cognitive functioning than those children who do not receive these contributions.<sup>27</sup>

Cognitive skills development is defined by the American Psychological Association as “the skills involved in performing the tasks associated with perception, learning, memory, understanding, awareness, reasoning, judgment, intuition, and language.”<sup>28</sup> Cognitive skills are usually measured by reviewing memory, vocabulary, problem-solving, enumeration, and the competence to form generalizations and classifications. Some studies evaluating cognitive skills have reviewed math and reading skills. Studies have found increases in children's literacy for those whose fathers read to them. Father involvement in his children's school has been positively and directly associated with children's reading, math, and approach to learning. It is important to note, that like other positive developmental impacts father involvement has on children, an involved father's positive impact on his child's cognitive skills is significant across ethnicity and socioeconomic status.<sup>29</sup>

Alternatively, academic literature has found that non-residential fathers who are completely absent from their children's lives can result in impaired cognitive function and less success in school. However, motivated nonresident fathers who try to involve themselves in their children's affairs can positively affect their development even when they do not live with them. There is also empirical support for the notion that a father who has a mostly harmonious marriage with his child's mother is typically associated with positive parent-child relationships and child adjustment, which has an effect on cognitive skills at an early age.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> *Supra*, n. 12 (Yoon).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Luca Rolle, Giulia Gullotta, Tommaso Trombetta, “Father Involvement and Cognitive Development in Early and Middle Childhood: A Systematic Review,” *Frontiers in Psychology*, (Oct. 25, 2019), DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02405.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

### *Reduction in Teen Pregnancy*

Fathers' active involvement has been associated with a reduction in teen pregnancy rates. This finding underscores the significance of father figures in the lives of their children, particularly daughters, as influential role models in promoting responsible behavior and reducing the likelihood of teenage pregnancies.<sup>31</sup> A similar finding was also found with father involvement in African American families. In many of these families, fathers play a vital role in guiding and supporting their children in making informed decisions regarding family planning and responsible behavior, thus mitigating risks associated with teenage pregnancies.<sup>32</sup>

### *Career and Economic Impact*

Father involvement not only significantly impacts childhood but also extends its effects into adulthood, contributing to better employment opportunities and long-term economic stability for their children. It has been suggested that active fathering provides emotional support and economic stability, which can lead to improved socio-economic outcomes for children. The economic stability fostered through father-involvement contributes to long-term prosperity and stability in the lives of their children.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> *Supra*, n. 8 (Carlson).

<sup>32</sup> Michael C. Lu, Loretta Jones, Melton J. Bond, *et al.*, "Where Is the F in MCH? Father Involvement in African American Families," *Ethnicity & Disease* (Winter 2010), 20(1 Suppl 2), S2-49-61.

<sup>33</sup> *Supra*, n. 6 (King).

## **BARRIERS TO GREATER FATHERHOOD INVOLVEMENT**

---

Impediments to greater fatherhood involvement can arise from a variety of factors, including external forces such as cultural, societal, and legal barriers, as well as hurdles arising from the state of the relationship between the father and mother. Additionally, father involvement can be impacted by the individual struggles of some fathers with behavioral and mental health problems, substance use disorder, justice system involvement, unstable housing, and unemployment. Several of the barriers identified as legal barriers are not engraved in the law, and in some instances, specifically prohibited by law, yet still occur due to stigma and bias toward single fathers. Helping to dispel these misconceptions is another important aspect of the educational function of a permanent commission.

### *Societal and Cultural Barriers*

Historically the relationship of each parent to the child, their roles, their influences, and their involvement vary from culture to culture. However, since Constantine's epiphany in 312 CE,<sup>34</sup> Western civilization, with its roots in Greco-Roman tradition, added Judeo-Christian concepts and norms that spread throughout Europe and ultimately to Western European colonies, including the newly formed American colonies. Among these norms were the assignment of various specific roles to "father" and "mother." After removing those labels, what is left are two individuals who share the responsibility of raising up a child. Frequently, and traditionally, those roles treated the "father" as the protector, provider, and disciplinarian, while the "mother" was the nurturer, caregiver, and teacher. While these roles frequently overlap, and some of these roles are re-assigned between couples based on the personality and aptitude of the parents, these supports are needed for all children to thrive and prosper.

Many of the barriers faced by single fathers are the product of a culture that identifies mothers as nurturers, and that the younger the child, the greater the need for maternal care. Embedded in the foundational assumptions of some of the statutory and legal barriers single fathers face is the thought that mothers have a more important role to play in the early development of their children. As noted below, 22 percent of children live with a single mother, while only six percent live with a single father. Many benefit programs only apply to the custodial parent. Thus, while not always intentional, support for "families" effectively means support for mothers and children.

---

<sup>34</sup> Denova, Rebecca, "Constantine's Conversion to Christianity," *World History Encyclopedia*, last modified May 10, 2021, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1737/constantines-conversion-to-christianity/>.

Marriage in the United States is evolving. Concepts of family have broadened. While some social scientists advocate the advantages of stable, long-term marriages for children, such relationships are not the reality of many in early 21st century America. Permanent and sustained involvement of fathers with their children can be developed outside of marriage; part of this report's function is to suggest ways to encourage active fatherhood involvement regardless of family arrangements. This study is intended to find ways in which to promote the well-being of children in light of these realities.

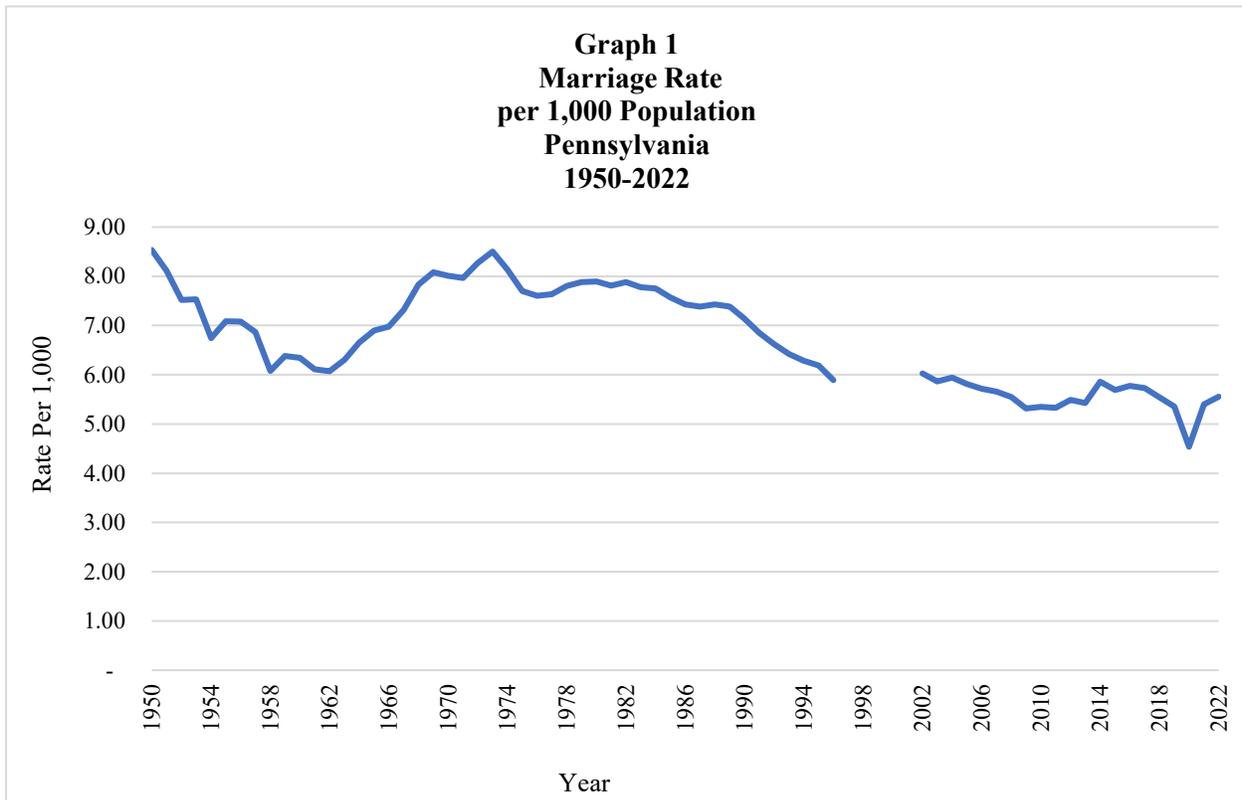
All of these efforts to involve fathers in the lives of their children pre-suppose that the divorce or separation of the parents as a couple was mutual and cordial. Acrimonious relationships have been the source of claims of gatekeeping and parental alienation. Judicial intervention may be necessary, which comes at both an emotional and financial expense, if one parent is determined to keep the other parent out of the child's life. It is imperative that all parties involved (the couple and their extended family and friends) bear in mind that the well-being of the child is paramount. Alienating behaviors and efforts to thwart the relationship between the child and the other parent are both factors that are to be considered by the courts in making both custody and relocation decisions.<sup>35</sup>

### *Marriage and Divorce Rates*

Pennsylvania's marriage rate per 1,000 people has been declining since 1950, dropping from 8.53 per 1,000 in 1950 to 5.55 by 2022. In 1950, there were 89,669 marriages out of a total population of nearly 10.5 million people recorded in the Commonwealth. The number of marriages stood at 72,031 out of a population of 13 million in 2022, which is a decrease of approximately 19.7 percent from 1950 despite an overall population growth of 23.5 percent. After a precipitous 23.1 percent drop from 1950 to 1962, the marriage rate climbed steadily and by 1973 exceeded the 1950 level at 8.55 per 1,000 people. Since 1973, however, the data show a steady decline to the present 5.55 rate, which is 36.2 percent lower than in 1973. The current 5.55 rate is close to the past twenty years' average of 5.57. The marriage rate showed a rebound after an anomalous drop to 4.54 in 2020, the lowest rate recorded for the 1950-2022 period and likely a consequence of COVID-19. See Graph 1. Note: Marriage and divorce data are not available for the years 1997, 1999, 2000, and 2001.

---

<sup>35</sup> 23 Pa.C.S. §§ 5328 and 5337.



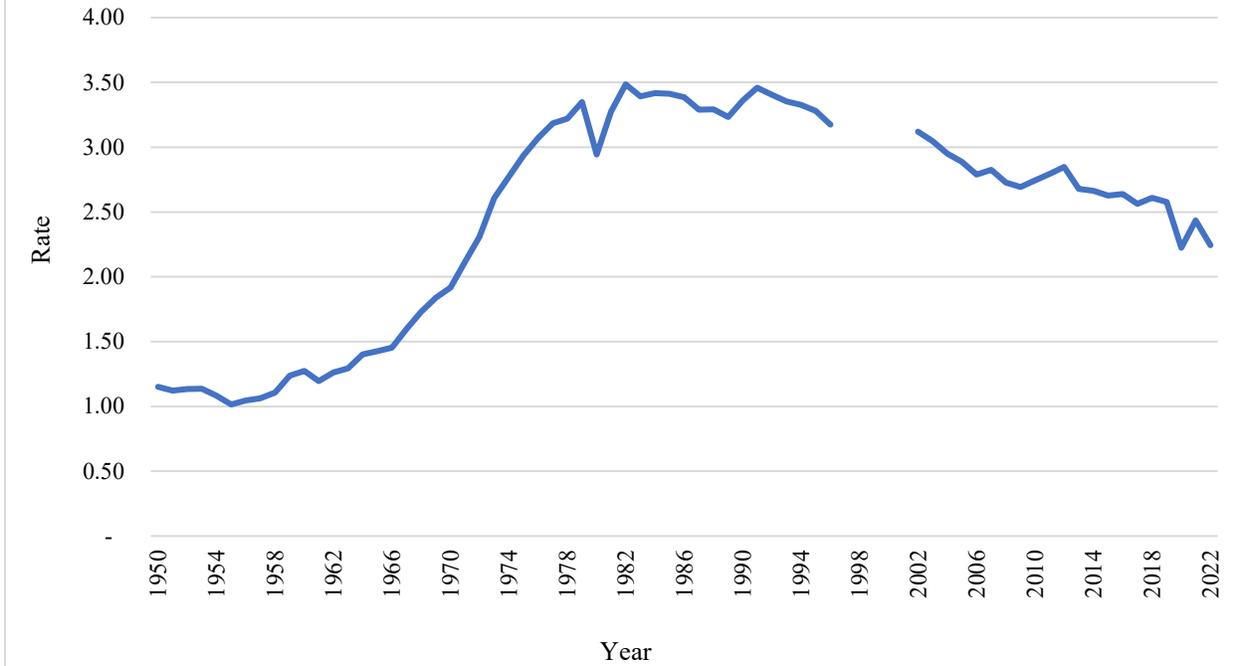
Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, “Marital Status,” January 24, 2024, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S1201?t=Marital%20Status%20and%20Marital%20History&g=040XX00US42&y=&tid=ACSST1Y2012.S1201>.

Analysis of marriage rates requires some background explanation. Marriage rates are calculated per 1,000 people but do not take into consideration factors that might influence whether or not people marry. For example, it does not control the predominant ages of the population.

Looking at the same period, 1950-2022, reveals very different trends for the rate of divorces and annulments (henceforth referred to as divorces). The overall number of divorces in Pennsylvania in 1950 was 12,096. Marriages outnumbered divorces by more than 7 to 1 with the divorce rate slightly above 1 per 1,000 at 1.15. The divorce rate remained relatively stable for the next several years but began a marked increase in 1962, with the growth beginning with a jump to 1.26 per 1,000. The next 20 years saw a rapid increase in the divorce rate as it grew by about 5.35 percent per year. At its peak in 1991, the divorce rate had reached 3.48 when there were 41,280 divorces.

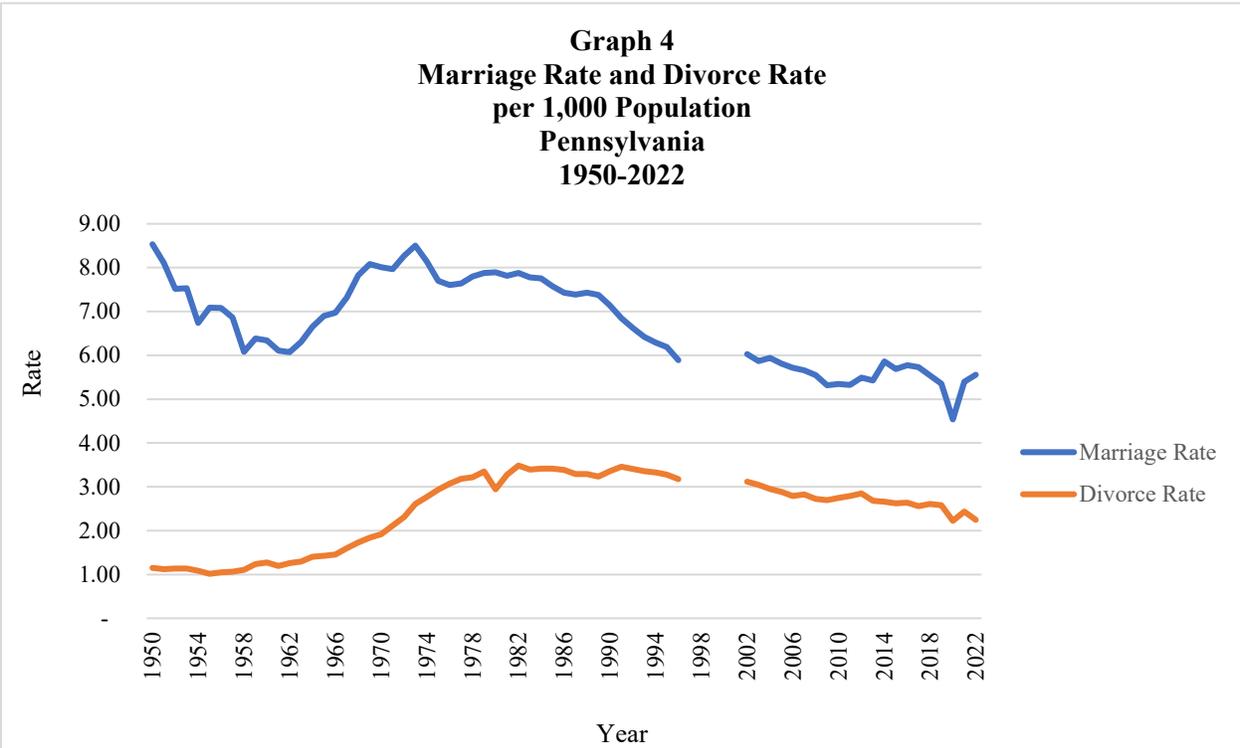
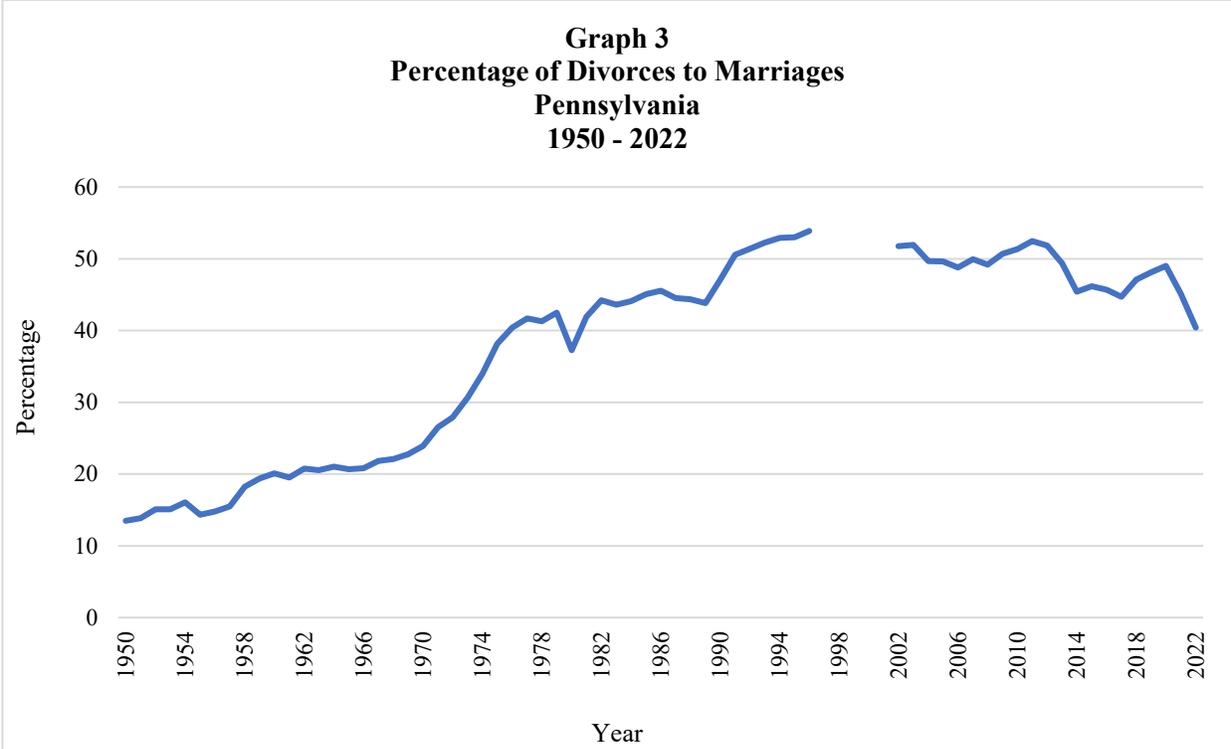
Aside from a near-record peak rate of 3.46 in 1991 when the Commonwealth registered 29,101 divorces, which is a rate of 2.24 per 1,000 people. See Graph 2.

**Graph 2  
Divorce and Annulment Rate  
per 1,000 Population  
Pennsylvania  
1950-2022**



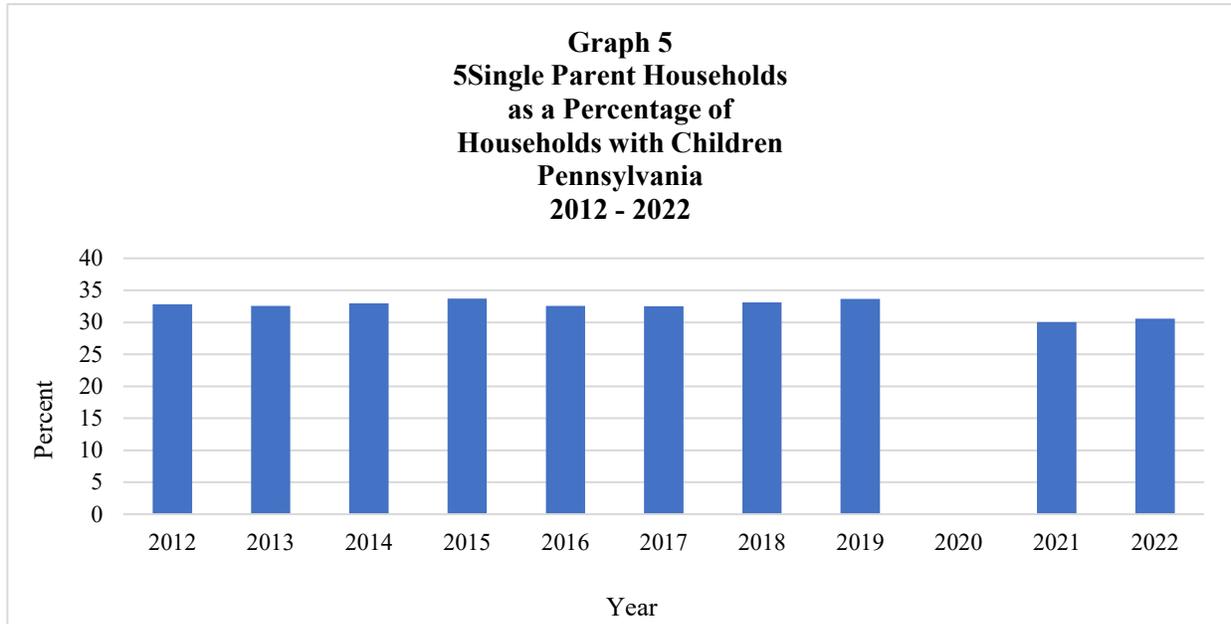
Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, “Marital Status,” January 24, 2024, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S1201?t=Marital%20Status%20and%20Marital%20History&g=040XX00US42&y=&tid=ACSST1Y2012.S1201>.

Rather than making comparisons with overall population numbers, it can be helpful to look at the number and rate of divorces as a portion of the number and rate of marriages. In 1950, there were approximately seven times as many marriages as divorces. There were nearly 90,000 marriages and slightly more than 12,000 divorces. In other words, divorces totaled about 13.5 percent of marriages. For the next 46 years, the divorce rate grew closer and closer to the marriage rate by 3.2 percent per year until the divorce rate peaked at 53.9 percent of the marriage rate in 1996. In other words, in 1996 slightly more than half of marriages ended in divorce. There were 70,929 marriages and 38,217 divorces in 1996. The ratio of divorces to marriages remained fairly stable at slightly above or below half of the marriage rate over the next several years. In 2013 the relationship between the divorce rate and the marriage rate began to slide downhill. The 2013 ratio of divorces to marriages was 4.7 percent lower than in 2012. The rate dropped by another 7.9 percent from 2013 to 2014. The ratio decreased by its largest amount over the 1950 to 2022 period, when it dropped 10.5 percent from 2021 to 2022. In 2022, the divorce rate was about 40.4 percent of the marriage rate. There were 72,031 marriages and 29,101 divorces in 2022. See Graphs 3 and 4.

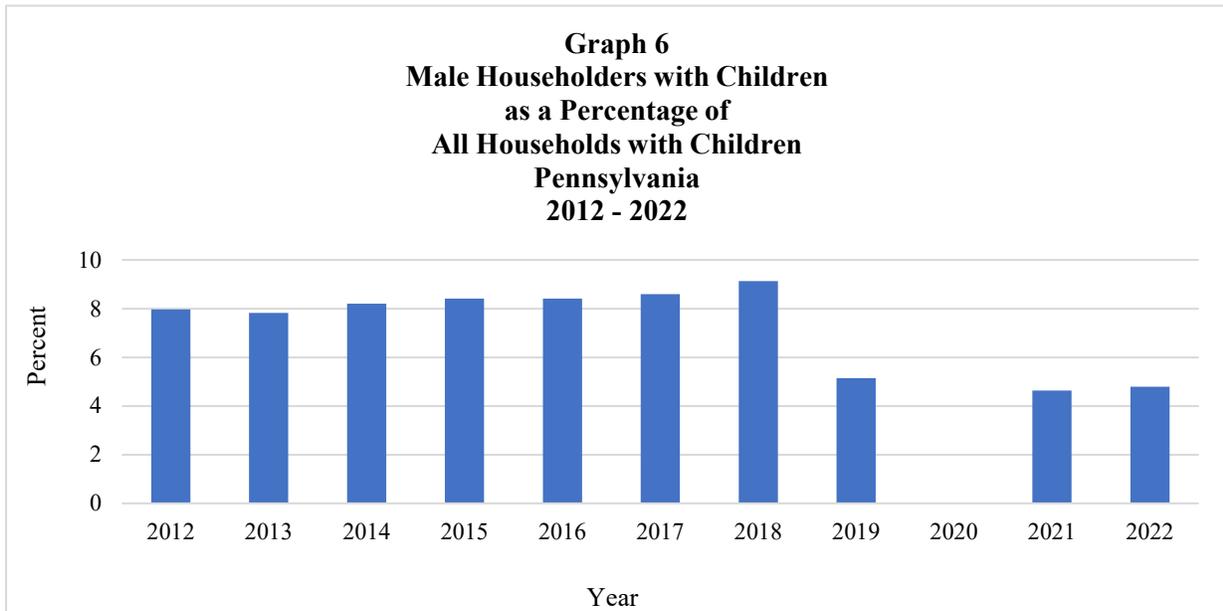


Graphs 3 and 4 Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, “Marital Status,” January 24, 2024, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S1201?t=Marital%20Status%20and%20Marital%20History&g=040XX00US42&y=&tid=ACSST1Y2012.S1201>.

Over the period of 2012 to 2022, the number of single parent households has remained at approximately 33 percent of the overall number of households with children under the age of 18. No data were reported for 2020. See Graph 5.



The number of male householders with children where no wife was present, as a portion of all households, similarly remained steady for most of the years 2012 to 2022 at between 8 and 9 percent. The portion dropped to 5 percent and lower for the years 2019, 2021, and 2022. See Graph 6.



Graphs 5 and 6 Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, “Selected Social Characteristics in the United States,” January 24, 2024, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP1Y2012.DP02?q=single%20parent%20pennsylvania&tid=ACSDP1Y2022.DP02>.

## *Rise of Single Parenthood*

The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (Forum) was established in April 1997 via Executive Order. The Forum produced a report in 2023 that collates and organizes data across agencies that affect child well-being. The report confirms that although marriage may not be as common as it once was, most children in the United States in 2022 continue to reside with two married parents:

- In 2022, 70 percent of children ages 0–17 lived with two parents (65 percent with two married parents and 5 percent with two unmarried cohabiting parents), 22 percent lived with their mothers only, 5 percent lived with their fathers only, and 4 percent lived with no parent.
- Among children living with two parents, 92 percent lived with both of their biological or adoptive parents, and 8 percent lived with a stepparent.
- About 6 percent of children who lived with two biological or adoptive parents had parents who were not married.
- Seventy-five percent of White-alone, non-Hispanic children lived with two married parents in 2022 compared with 60 percent of Hispanic and 38 percent of Black-alone children.

As the report noted, about the same number of children live with their fathers only who live with two unmarried parents. The Forum derived this information from the U.S. Census website under the heading “America’s Families and Living Arrangements detailed tables,” at <https://www.census.gov/topics/families/families-and-households.html>.<sup>36</sup>

The Pew Research Center conducted a study in June 2019 to tap into the feelings of Americans regarding the changing family structure that has been occurring in the past 10 years, comparing data from a separate survey conducted in 2010.<sup>37</sup> The research indicated that three percent of U.S. adults surveyed believed that the growing variety of family living arrangements was a positive occurrence. Another 16 percent found it to be a negative development. But the largest share of those surveyed did not think it made a difference. Across age ranges, adults 65 and older, one in five persons found these changes to be a good thing; as age decreased, the approval increased, reaching 34 percent of those 18 to 29.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> “America’s Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2023, Family Structure and Children’s Living Arrangements,” *ChildStats: Forum on Child and Family Statistics*, <https://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/family1.asp>.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Taylor, editor, “The Decline of Marriage and the Rise of New Families,” *The Pew Research Center: A Social and Demographic Trends Report*, November 18, 2010. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2010/11/18/the-decline-of-marriage-and-rise-of-new-families/#ii-overview>

<sup>38</sup> Deja Thomas, “As family structures change in U.S., a growing share of Americans say it makes no difference,” *Pew Research Center*, last modified April 10, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/04/10/as-family-structures-change-in-u-s-a-growing-share-of-americans-say-it-makes-no-difference/>.

In many ways, these attitudes are generational. A Pew study on marriage, childbirth and living arrangements among millennials (23–38-year-olds for purposes of the Pew study) indicated that fewer millennials are marrying or are delaying marriage and childbirth and more are cohabiting than previous generations at the same age. They are less likely to live with a family of their own, and “Millennial men are less likely to be living in a household with their own children than was the case for previous generations of men at a comparable age.”<sup>39</sup> In a report released in 2023, looking at 2021 data from the 2020 Census, another Pew study found that a quarter of millennial men reaching the age of 40 have never married. “While many unmarried 40-year-olds are living with a romantic partner, most are not. In 2022, 22% of never-married adults ages 40 to 44 were cohabiting.”<sup>40</sup>

### *Perceptions of Single Fathers*

While it may seem obvious to some, perception is often reality for individuals who are stigmatized and discriminated against. It is worth noting that not all single fathers are “deadbeat dads” nor are all single mothers “welfare queens.” Yet, single fathers often feel that they are diminished and ignored due to stereotypes of various sorts. One of the federal Department of Human Services projects, the Coparenting and Healthy Relationship and Marriage Education for Dads (CHaRMED) Project, conducted a study of staff and participant experiences in nine fatherhood programs. The study found that some fathers in fatherhood programs experienced stigma and discrimination based on culture and racial identities, their roles as fathers in society, and their history of incarceration. Some of the fathers felt that there was a broad social preference for mothers over fathers, and that cultural and societal expectations of fathers to protect and provide for their families and any perception that they had failed to “measure up” was demoralizing.<sup>41</sup>

A study conducted in Israel in 2015 examined the experiences of non-residential fathers’ seeing their children at visitation centers. The study found that there were two extremes of response: some fathers found the centers a hostile place designed for supervision and limiting their parental role. The opposite response was that the centers were a secure and enabling place that helped them continue their relationships with their children. Yet a third group felt both reactions. While an earlier study in Israel found that most visitation center referrals were because of difficulty arranging visitation (62 percent). The next most prevalent reason was violence toward the partner (26 percent).<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Amanda Barroso, Kim Parker and Jesse Benett, “As Millennials Near 40, They’re Approaching Family Life Differently Than Previous Generations,” *Pew Research Center*, last modified May 27, 2020, [https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/05/PDST\\_05.27.20\\_millennial.families\\_fullreport.pdf](https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/05/PDST_05.27.20_millennial.families_fullreport.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> Richard Fry, “A record-high share of 40-year-olds in the U.S. have never been married,” *Pew Research Center*, last modified June 28, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/06/28/a-record-high-share-of-40-year-olds-in-the-us-have-never-been-married/>.

<sup>41</sup> April Wilson, Andrea Vazzano, Isabel Griffith, *et al.*, *Understanding Fathers’ Experiences of Stigma and Discrimination to Better Deliver Health Relationship Education in Fatherhood Programs*, (OPRE Report 32022-136, Washington D.C.: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), [www.acf.hhs.gov/opre](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre).

<sup>42</sup> Eli Buchbinder, “Fathers Under Scrutiny: Nonresidential Fathers’ Perceptions of Visitation Centers,” *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 56, No. 2 (2014): 155-169, DOI: 10.1080/10502556.2014.959108.

## *Legal Barriers*

### *Establishing Paternity*

Establishing paternity in Pennsylvania can be a byzantine process governed by both statutory law and common law (court opinions). The rules overlap and contradict one another and can be extremely frustrating. In the prenatal stage, fathers, married or unmarried, residential or not, have no legal rights to make any decisions about the pregnancy.<sup>43</sup> Two theories of law are implicated in determining paternity – the concepts of the presumption of legitimacy and paternity by estoppel.

The Pennsylvania Superior Court summarized these two concepts in a 1997 case:

These cases set forth the fundamentals of the law of presumptive paternity: generally, a child conceived or born during the marriage is presumed to be the child of the marriage; this presumption is one of the strongest presumptions of the law of Pennsylvania; and the presumption may be overcome by clear and convincing evidence either that the presumptive father had no access to the mother or the presumptive father was physically incapable of procreation at the time of conception. However, the presumption is irrebuttable when a third party seeks to assert his own paternity as against the husband in an intact marriage.

The legal identification of a father, however, even in a case involving the presumption of paternity, may also involve the question of estoppel. One or both of the parties may be prevented from making a claim based on biological paternity because they have held themselves out or acquiesced in the holding out of a particular person as the father. In Trojak this court stated that:

under certain circumstances, a person might be estopped from challenging paternity where that person has by his or her conduct accepted a given person as the father of the child. . . . [T]he doctrine of estoppel will not apply when evidence establishes that the father failed to accept the child as his own by holding it out and/or supporting the child. . . . Only when the doctrine of estoppel does not apply will the mother be permitted to proceed with a paternity claim against a putative father with the aid of a blood test. Trojak, 535 Pa. at 105-06, 634 A.2d at 206.

The presumption of paternity and the doctrine of estoppel, therefore, embody the two great fictions of the law of paternity: the presumption of paternity embodies

---

<sup>43</sup> Some Pennsylvania courts have allowed a person to establish paternity prior to the child's birth based on contract principles and intent-based parentage in cases involving assistive reproductive technology (such as in-vitro fertilization where the couple not only evidenced their mutual intent to conceive and raise the child, but they also participated jointly in the process of creating a new life. This is not a common occurrence. *Glover v. Junior*, 2023 WL 8534891 (Pa. Superior, December 11, 2023).

the fiction that regardless of biology, the married people to whom the child was born are the parents; and the doctrine of estoppel embodies the fiction that, regardless of biology, in the absence of a marriage, the person who has cared for the child is the parent.

The public policy in support of the presumption of paternity is the concern that marriages which function as family units should not be destroyed by disputes over the parentage of children conceived or born during the marriage. Third parties should not be allowed to attack the integrity of a functioning marital unit, and members of that unit should not be allowed to deny their identities as parents. Estoppel is based on the public policy that children should be secure in knowing who their parents are. If a certain person has acted as the parent and bonded with the child, the child should not be required to suffer the potentially damaging trauma that may come from being told that the father he has known all his life is not in fact his father.<sup>44</sup>

The court found that when there was no marriage (i.e., the parties had separated before the birth of the child and subsequently divorced), the policies in support of marriage underlying the presumption would not be advanced by its application, and therefore it is inapplicable in those circumstances.

These rules affect both married and unmarried fathers. They make it harder for a married father (even after divorce) to deny paternity and harder for an unmarried father to prove paternity.<sup>45</sup> In order to claim paternity, an unmarried man must either have the cooperation of the mother or be able to convince the courts that he is the biological father. The father of a child born out of wedlock may file an acknowledgment of paternity, but only with the birth mother's consent. If she fails to consent, he must petition the court for a determination of paternity and request genetic testing.<sup>46</sup> While an unmarried father can pursue a claim of paternity, it may be blocked and prevented by the presumption of legitimacy or the paternity by estoppel doctrines. Conversely, if he attempts to deny paternity, but has supported the child and held himself out as the child's father, his denial may be blocked by estoppel.

Suffice to say, a father who was never married to the mother of his child faces multiple hurdles in asserting paternity. Finally, in light of all the factors, doctrines, and counter-doctrines, the courts will ultimately decide paternity on a case-by-case basis with the "the best interests of the child" trumping all other arguments.

### *Custody*

The first hurdle for any single father seeking custody is establishing paternity. Once paternity has been established, there are multiple ways custody can be established. A common misconception that the legal consequences associated with custody matters are generally decided

---

<sup>44</sup> *Brinkley v King*, 549 Pa. 241, 701 A2d 176 (1997). See also, *V.L.-P v. S.R.D.*, 288 A.3d 502 (2023 Pa. Super.2, January 6, 2023).

<sup>45</sup> 23 Pa.C.S. § 5104(g).

<sup>46</sup> 23 Pa.C.S. §§ 4343, 5103 and 5104.

in court by a judge after the mother and father present their cases. However, very few family law cases are resolved this way. In Pennsylvania, only 35.7 percent of child custody/partial custody/visitation cases were processed by a judge in 2021, while 46.5 percent were processed by a non-judicial officer, and 17 percent were resolved by another undesignated method.<sup>47</sup> Undesignated methods include informal and formal custody arrangements worked out between the mother and father without court involvement, or alternative dispute resolution processes. The majority of cases processed by non-judicial officers require an agreement by the parties, and functions similarly to the alternative dispute resolution process but is provided by the courts.

Family litigation can be complex, costly, time-consuming, and mentally taxing to all parties involved, including children thrust into the middle of it. Many fathers find themselves saddled with arduous court proceedings when they cannot agree with their child's mother on issues such as parental separation and divorce, or paternity (where the father and mother were never married), parental visitation, child support, and child custody interests. Custody litigation has been shown to have a significant negative impact on children. Studies have shown that children caught in the middle of contentious family-related litigation are prone to increased school dropout rates and behavioral health problems.<sup>48</sup>

In Pennsylvania, custodial actions between the parents of a child or children, there is no presumption that custody should be awarded to a one parent over the other parent.<sup>49</sup> In fact, Pennsylvania law requires courts to base their determinations on a comprehensive review of 16 factors in consideration of the best interest of the child. Some of those factors include which party is more likely to encourage and permit frequent and continuing contact between the child and the other parent, parental duties performed on behalf of the child by each parent, present and past abuse committed by a parent or a member of the parent's household, the child's sibling relationships, availability of extended family, the need for stability and continuity in the child's education, family, and community life, well-reasoned preference of the child based on the maturity and judgment of the child, and several other factors.<sup>50</sup> However, there is a strong perception by many fathers that family law judges and courts tend to unfairly show greater deference to mothers, especially related to child custody. It is difficult to conclude one way or another whether this perception is accurate, though data from 2018 has shown that in Pennsylvania, fathers' median custody percentage was only 28 percent. According to the same source, the national average for the same year was 35 percent for fathers.<sup>51</sup>

There may be some reasonable explanations for some of the disparity in custody data between mother and father such as cultural norms, work obligations, or the decision to not be involved by some fathers. However, it has been opined that one reason could be related to some of

---

<sup>47</sup> Geoff Moulton, Court Administrator of Pennsylvania, "Court of Common Pleas Caseload Statistics for 2021, *Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, AOPC Research*, accessed December 8, 2023, <https://www.pacourts.us/Storage/media/pdfs/20221206/195603-statewide2021.pdf>, 7.

<sup>48</sup> Amy Cynkar, "Cooperating for Kids' Sake," *American Psychological Association* 38, No. 7 (2007): 38, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/jun07/cooperating>.

<sup>49</sup> Act of November 23, 2010 (P.L. 1106, No. 112), § 2; 23 Pa.C.S. § 5327(a). Courts are required to consider the factors and are in error if they fail to do so. *J.R.M. v J.E.A.*, 2011 Pa. Super. 263 (Pa. Super. Ct. 2011)

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid* § 2; 23 Pa.C.S. § 5328(a).

<sup>51</sup> "How Much Custody Time Does Dad get in Your State?" *Custody Xchange*, accessed December 8, 2023, <https://www.custodyxchange.com/topics/research/dads-custody-time-2018.php>.

the language within the 16 factors concerning the best interest of the child. Some believe the language provides an unfair advantage to mothers. For example, one factor requires a judge to look at which parent can provide a more “nurturing” environment for the child. While this is a very rational factor to consider for the best interest of the child, many believe fathers are not typically viewed as “nurturers” and many presume mothers are more skilled in nurturing. Consequently, this viewpoint could make the factor seem prejudicial to fathers when considered in a custody hearing.<sup>52</sup> Even if a father believes the custody decision was legally deficient, appealing a legally deficient court determination takes additional time and money, as well as the education to know about the right to appeal and how.<sup>53</sup>

Alternative mediation and conflict resolution methods (also commonly referred to as Alternative Dispute Resolution “ADR”) are becoming an increasingly popular way to avoid the cantankerous pathway through litigation. ADR can provide fathers with the opportunity to work with the mother of their children to avoid costly, time-consuming court proceedings and to assert their own decision-making power in matters involving their children. Many ADR methods can assist parents to agree on a parenting strategy and visitation schedule to settle their case outside of the court and with a more personalized approach. In utilizing this process, fathers will not have to worry about the perceived unfairness of the family courts. Instead, they can play an integral role in determining the outcome of their case.

Another approach that may be beneficial for fathers faced with marital separation, which undoubtedly can lead to child custody uncertainty down the road, is the Collaborative Divorce Process. The process is typically initiated by each spouse hiring their own attorney, willing to engage in the process. Both parties sign a collaborative agreement that generally includes a provision that the attorneys will withdraw representation if the matter ends up heading to court. Both parties consult with their attorneys confidentially, then the four individuals (the parties and their attorneys) meet and work to reach agreements on important issues. Like ADR, the collaborative process can help families avoid a lengthy court process. It also puts the parents in the driver’s seat and allows them to come to an agreement regarding major issues involving their separation and their family, instead of leaving it up to a judge’s determination. The process is by and large more cooperative and less adversarial, sparing both parties and their children the stress and emotional trauma of custody litigation. It can also help facilitate an ongoing co-parenting relationship.<sup>54</sup>

Though the collaborative process has many benefits, it should be noted that it may not always be the best option. For example, couples who are unable or unlikely to come to an agreement on the more significant issues in their divorce or separation may not benefit from the process. It is also typically unsuitable for couples with a history of domestic violence or substance use disorder.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Discussion of the Advisory Committee Meeting held on July 18, 2023.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> “Collaborative Divorce & The Legal Process,” *Justia*, last modified July 2023, <https://www.justia.com/family/divorce/the-divorce-process/collaborative-divorce/>.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

Finding alternative conflict resolution processes can be beneficial not just to fathers, but their families in general. Most fathers want what is best for their children. They also want to be a significant part of their children's lives. As mentioned previously, selecting these less adversarial alternatives can avoid the negative impacts of divorce, separation, and custody disputes on their children and themselves. These alternatives can also allay the common perception among many that fathers are not guaranteed a fair opportunity to obtain meaningful custody and visitation of their children.

The breadth of legal representation in family law matters can vary greatly and be very expensive. Some individuals will choose to proceed with some aspects of divorce, property settlements, and custody on their own, especially if both spouses are in general agreement to save on attorney fees and hire an attorney to represent them on a "limited scope" or "unbundled" basis, that is, the attorney is engaged only to perform specific aspects of the matter and not the whole case. Pennsylvania's Rules of Professional Conduct permit such representation under Rule 1.2(c): "A lawyer may limit the scope of the representation if the limitation is reasonable under the circumstances and the client gives informed consent."<sup>56</sup> While this is both legal and cost-effective, it may not be appropriate in all circumstances, particularly in acrimonious situations. It is very important that the client's informed consent is comprehensive and that they understand and acknowledge the limits of the representation.

Enforcement of custody and visitation rights can also be a barrier to father involvement. While both civil and criminal actions are possible, Commission staff were unable to find data on the number of filings and their dispositions.

Family courts essentially have one tool to enforce visitation, which is to find the person violating a custody or visitation order to be in contempt of court.

23 Pa.C.S. §5323(g). Contempt for noncompliance with any custody order.--

(1) A party who willfully fails to comply with any custody order may, as prescribed by general rule, be adjudged in contempt. Contempt shall be punishable by any one or more of the following:

- (i) Imprisonment for a period of not more than six months.
- (ii) A fine of not more than \$500.
- (iii) Probation for a period of not more than six months.
- (iv) An order for nonrenewal, suspension or denial of operating privilege under section 4355 (relating to denial or suspension of licenses).
- (v) Counsel fees and costs.

(2) An order committing an individual to jail under this section shall specify the condition which, when fulfilled, will result in the release of that individual.

If a parent removes a child from the custody of the other parent without permission or conceals the location of the child, two possible criminal proceedings may be initiated. "Interference with custody of children" could involve failure to return a child from a scheduled visit.<sup>57</sup> Generally, a parent in violation of this statute commits a misdemeanor of the second degree,

---

<sup>56</sup> 204 Pa.Code § 81.4.

<sup>57</sup> 18 Pa.C.S. §§ 106(b)(7) and 2904.

subject to up to two years imprisonment. “Concealment of the whereabouts of a child” is a felony of the third degree, subject to up to seven years imprisonment.<sup>58</sup> Several of the advisory committee members reported that, anecdotally among fatherhood groups they were engaged with, it was believed that these sanctions were rarely used.

House Bill 1684, Printer’s No. 1992, was introduced and referred to the House Committee on Children and Youth on September 19, 2023. The bill substantially revises the custody provisions of the Domestic Relations Code. The bill would create a presumption that shared physical and legal custody and equal parenting time is in the best interest of the child. Additionally, the bill would eliminate the 17 factors currently to be considered in custody determinations and replace it with consideration of past abuse committed by a party or member of the party’s household, the level of conflict between the parties, and the willingness and ability of the parties to cooperate with one another.

### *Child Support*

Child support is an important resource for many separated families. It can raise children and adults out of poverty. For families receiving it, child support provides 41 percent of income; for lower income families, it provides 65 percent of family income.<sup>59</sup> However, it can also serve as another significant legal barrier to fathers desirous of being involved in their children’s lives. It has been found that fathers see their children less often if they owe child support.<sup>60</sup>

Child support typically refers to the financial sum that a noncustodial parent must pay to the custodial parent. Child support is supposed to signify a parental contribution for the child’s basic living expenses, such as food, clothing, shelter, health care, and education. A noncustodial parent subject to a court ordered obligation of child support must pay the support directly to the child’s custodian usually until the child has reached the age of 18.<sup>61</sup> In Pennsylvania, the basic obligation for child support applies to unemancipated children up to age 18 or when they graduate from high school, whichever is later. In some cases where a child remains unemancipated due to a disability, child support may be indefinite.<sup>62</sup> Pennsylvania’s child support guidelines provide for adjustments with respect to amount of custodial time, low-income circumstances, and multiple support obligations.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> 18 Pa.C.S. §§ 107(b)(4) and 2909.

<sup>59</sup> Jessica Pearson and Rachel Wildfeuer, “Policies and Programs Affecting Fathers: A State-by-State Report,” *Fatherhood Research & Practice Network*, (2022), p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Denise Marie Ordway, “Fathers See Their Kids Less Often If They Owe Child Support,” *The Journalist’s Resource*, (Feb. 17, 2017), <https://journalistsresource.org/economics/child-support-debt-father-involvement-research/>, Last accessed on January 17, 2024.

<sup>61</sup> Legal Information Center, “Child Support,” Cornell Law School, [https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/child\\_support](https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/child_support), Last accessed on January 17, 2024.

<sup>62</sup> 42 Pa.C.S. § 4321 and its judicial interpretations.

<sup>63</sup> 231 Pa. Code, Pa. R.C.P. No. 1910.16-2(e), 1910.16-4(c), and 1910.16-7.

Failure to pay court ordered child support can lead to fines and even imprisonment. Federal requirements for state child support require that state guidelines, must, at a minimum:

- Base child support orders on the noncustodial parent’s earnings, income, and other evidence of ability to pay that:
  - Takes into consideration all earnings and income of the noncustodial parent (and at the State’s discretion, the custodial parent);
  - Takes into consideration the basic subsistence needs of the noncustodial parent (and at the State’s discretion, the custodial parent and children) who has a limited ability to pay by incorporating a low-income adjustment, such as a self-support reserve or some other method determined by the state; and
  - If imputation of income is authorized, takes into consideration the specific circumstances of the noncustodial parent (and at the state’s discretion, the custodial parent) to the extent known, including such factors as the noncustodial parent’s assets, residence, employment and earnings history, job skills, educational attainment, and other factors.
- Address how the parents will provide for the child’s health care needs through private or public health care coverage and/or through cash medical support;
- Provide that incarceration may not be treated as voluntary unemployment in establishing or modifying support orders; and
- Be based on specific descriptive and numeric criteria and result in a computation of the child support obligation.<sup>64</sup>

As part of its review process, a state must publish its child support determination guidelines and, among other things, provide a meaningful opportunity for public input, including input from low-income custodial and noncustodial parents and their representatives.<sup>65</sup>

The federal government also has a partial role in child support enforcement. In 1975, the Child Support Enforcement Program (CSEP) was enacted to procure continuous support from noncustodial parents to serve as reimbursement to federal and state authorities for the cost of public assistance to recipients. In addition, the joint federal-state CSEP program was intended “...to secure financial support for children and promote family self-sufficiency, child well-being, and parental responsibility.”<sup>66</sup> The program covers locating parents, establishing paternity, establishing support obligations, modifying support obligations, and enforcing child support obligations. In 2020, the CSEP served 13.8 million children and collected \$34.9 billion in child support

---

<sup>64</sup> 45 C.F.R. § 302.56(b)-(c).

<sup>65</sup> 45 C.F.R. § 302.56(h)(3).

<sup>66</sup> *Supra*, n. 59 (Pearson).

nationwide.<sup>67</sup> This amount of collected support grew from \$32.4 billion in 2015.<sup>68</sup> However, it is worth noting that the amount of child support collected fell to \$30.5 billion in fiscal year 2022, with 12.8 million children served.<sup>69</sup>

Fathers are most commonly the noncustodial parent subject to child support obligations. Of the overall child support debt, which has swelled to \$115 billion, 70 percent is owed by noncustodial fathers earning under \$10,000 annually. It has been reported that child support has resulted in the "...impoverishment of 200,000 low-income fathers and their new families..."<sup>70</sup> In fact, it is estimated that one-fourth of noncustodial fathers are living in poverty with an annual income of less than \$12,760. It has been alleged that part of the problem is that child support enforcement policies are designed to enforce orders and collect payments from noncustodial fathers with stable jobs and income. The very same policies are used against unmarried, unemployed, or underemployed noncustodial fathers living in poverty, resulting in a growing child custody debt. Some argue that common symptoms of these policies are the creation of too lofty orders; harsh, expensive, and ineffective enforcement tactics; and the generation of an uncollectable debt.<sup>71</sup>

The economic challenges faced by noncustodial parents (again, typically fathers) can contribute to nonpayment of child support, as well as the inability to support themselves and in some cases, their new families. Nonpayment can set into motion a difficult cycle starting with various enforcement actions, including the suspension of driver's licenses and warrants for arrest. Child support that is too expensive for a father to pay can also disrupt a father's involvement with his children in a couple of ways. For one, it can force a father to have to work longer hours or multiple jobs to afford payment, and consequently, fathers have less available time to spend with their children. In addition, suspending the driver's license of a father who cannot meet their child support obligations can severely hamper his ability to travel to see his children, while imprisonment can make meaningful father involvement near impossible. The frustrating impact of costly child support and the severity of the consequences of non-payment aggravates the already growing belief of noncustodial fathers that the system is working against them instead of with them. Even worse, children lose out not only on financial support from their fathers, but also the emotional support that comes from being able to interact with their father.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Services, "FY 2015 Annual Report to Congress, (Jan. 12, 2017), <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/css/report/fy-2015-annual-report-congress>, Last accessed on January 18, 2024.

<sup>69</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Services, "FY 2022 Annual Report to Congress, (June 15, 2023), <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/css/policy-guidance/fy-2022-preliminary-data-report-and-tables#:~:text=Here%20are%20national%20data%20highlights,were%20served%20by%20the%20program>, Last accessed on January 18, 2024.

<sup>70</sup> *Supra*, n. 59 (Pearson).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* at p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> Maria Cancian, Daniel R. Meyer, and Robert Wood, "Final Impact Findings from the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED)," *Institute for Research on Poverty* (University of Wisconsin, Madison), *Mathematica Policy Research*, (2019), p. xv.

Recognizing several of these challenges, the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) within the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), pursuant to § 1115 of the Social Security Act<sup>73</sup> established the National Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED) in 2012. The CSPED examined “...the effectiveness of child support-led employment programs for noncustodial parents.”<sup>74</sup> The CSPED focused on improving the child support enforcement system by providing noncustodial parents falling behind on support payments with an integrated set of services, such as child support, employment, and parenting services, through a child-support-led program.<sup>75</sup> The program would essentially provide grant money to state child support enforcement programs conditioned on the state instituting several service guidelines prescribed by the CSPED.

Core services required or encouraged by the CSPED for use of the grant money included the following:

- Case Management. Each CSPED participant was to be assigned a case manager to assess needs, assist in obtaining services, and monitor progress.
- Enhanced Child Support Services. Grantees were required to provide expedited review of child support orders, order modification if appropriate, and temporary abeyance of certain enforcement. CSPED grantees were encouraged to negotiate reductions in past-due amounts owed to the government (state-owed arrears).
- Employment. All state programs receiving CSPED grant money needed to include job search assistance, job readiness training, job placement services, job retention services, and other services immediately following job loss of a support payor.
- Parenting. CSPED grantees were to provide 16 hours of parenting classes with peer support that covered personal development, responsible fatherhood, parenting skills, relationship skills, and domestic violence.<sup>76</sup>

After the grant program was formally established, the OCSE competitively awarded CSPED grants to child support agencies in eight states - California, Colorado, Iowa, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin. States receiving the grants chose a total of 18 implementation sites, ranging from one county in some states to five counties in others.<sup>77</sup>

A CSPED impact evaluation was conducted in 2019 and noted some findings from the grant program’s effect on noncustodial parents. The report found modest effects. One area of positive impact was noncustodial parent satisfaction. The findings revealed that 67.6 percent of surveyed noncustodial parents “agreed” they were satisfied with the services from the new program versus 46.2 percent who “strongly agreed.” The report also found that participants utilizing the extra services in the program were more likely to agree or strongly agree that:

---

<sup>73</sup> The Social Security Act, Pub. L. 74-271, 49 Stat. 620; 42 U.S.C. § 1115.

<sup>74</sup> *Supra*, n. 72 (Cancian).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vi.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

- the child support program treated them fairly (68.2 percent versus 53.0 percent)
- the child support program helped them provide support to their children (57.2 percent versus 44.4 percent) helped their relationship with their children (50.8 percent versus 33.7 percent)
- the child support program helped in their relationship with the custodial parent (37.7 percent versus 25.5 percent).<sup>78</sup>

Another area of improvement in connection with the CSPED program was noncustodial parent earnings. It was concluded that the CSPED program increased participant noncustodial parent earnings by 4 percent in the first year, through its employment initiatives. The programs also led to a small reduction in monthly child support orders (about \$15-16 per month).<sup>79</sup>

These positive impacts were viewed as a result of CSPED's "...new approach to working with noncustodial parents, offering them employment and other services through a program led by child support agencies."<sup>80</sup> The impact report also concluded that if the "...program staff had had more time to develop and strengthen these new practices and partnerships, the programs may have become more effective."<sup>81</sup> It should be noted that the report also found that few employment interventions increased the earnings of low-income adults and particularly low-income men.<sup>82</sup>

The report also noted some negative findings, many of which still exist in most states. One finding related to the impact state income imputation policies have on low-income fathers. The report concluded that these policies often saddle low-income fathers with child support orders higher than the percentages of income required of moderate and high-income fathers. For example, CSPED participants, randomly assigned to participate in programs to obtain jobs, had an average monthly child support order at \$401 per month, with 58 percent of those with earnings owing at least half of their earnings in child support. Noncustodial parents in most states with monthly gross incomes of \$2,097 had child support orders that comprised on average 18 percent of their earnings. Conversely, higher earning parents with gross monthly incomes of at least \$7,100 retained average child support orders that made up only 11 percent of their earnings. The conclusion drawn from this data is that "high orders do not translate to higher payments when the noncustodial parent has limited income."<sup>83</sup>

In Pennsylvania, child support is awarded pursuant to a statewide guideline as established by general rule by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court "...so that persons similarly situated shall be treated similarly."<sup>84</sup> The law requires the guidelines be based on the reasonable needs of the child and the ability of the obligor to provide support. To determine the reasonable needs of the child and the ability of the obligor to provide support, the guidelines must focus on the net incomes and

---

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* p. xii.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* p. xi.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Supra*, n. 59 (Pearson) p. 3.

<sup>84</sup> Act of October 30, 1985 (P.L. 264, No. 66), § 1; 23 Pa.C.S. § 4322(a).

earning capacities of the parties, allowing for deviations if unusual needs, extraordinary expenses, and other factors exist. The guideline must be reviewed at least once every four years.<sup>85</sup> There is a rebuttable presumption, that the awarded support amount, developed using the guideline is the correct amount of support to be awarded. This means that a written finding or specific finding on the record that the guideline would be inappropriate is sufficient to rebut the presumption in a specific case. To rebut the presumption, the finding must be based upon criteria established by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.<sup>86</sup>

State law provides that unless Department of Human Services (DHS) procedures for the Pennsylvania State Collection and Disbursement Unit provide otherwise, a support order must direct payment to be made payable to or payment to be made to domestic relations for transmission to the support recipient or for transmission directly to an agency whenever the care, maintenance and assistance of the recipient is provided for by the agency.<sup>87</sup>

A person who willfully fails to comply with their support order may be adjudged in contempt, which is punishable by any one or more of the following:

- Imprisonment for a period not to exceed six months
- A fine not to exceed \$1,000
- Probation for a period not to exceed one year<sup>88</sup>

The Pennsylvania Bureau of Child Support Enforcement (BCSE) is responsible for enforcing child support orders within the Commonwealth. The BCSE is within the Pennsylvania DHS and works collaboratively with the County Courts of Common Pleas and the Domestic Relations Sections within Pennsylvania's 67 counties.<sup>89</sup> The BCSE assists with the following duties:

- Locating noncustodial parents
- Establishing paternity
- Establishing support orders
- Enforcing support orders
- Reviewing and adjusting support orders
- Monitoring and distributing child support payments
- Cooperating in interstate enforcement<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> 23 Pa.C.S. § 4322(b).

<sup>87</sup> 23 Pa.C.S. § 4325.

<sup>88</sup> 23 Pa.C.S. § 4345(a)(1)-(3).

<sup>89</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, "Bureau of Child Support Enforcement," <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/contact/DHS-Offices/Pages/OIM-Bureau%20of%20Child%20Support%20Enforcement.aspx>, Last accessed on January 18, 2024.

<sup>90</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, "Child Support Contact Information," <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/contact/Pages/Child-Support-Contact.aspx>, Last accessed on January 18, 2024.

According to DHS, the BCSE typically exceeds the national average for the collection of monthly child support payments and Pennsylvania is the only state in the nation to meet or exceed all five federal performance measure standards in determining effectiveness of state child support enforcement programs. These five standards including the following:

- Determining paternity
- Establishing support orders through local courts
- Collecting current monthly support
- Collecting overdue child support
- Being cost-effective in administering child support collection<sup>91</sup>

Pennsylvania's use of predictive analytics (the process of using data to predict future outcomes) has been identified in the past as one of the reasons for its ability to meet and even exceed federal performance standards. Using its predictive system, the BCSE has been able to adopt a more proactive strategy to collect child support. Instead of waiting to implement enforcement until a noncustodial parent fails to make payments and falls into large arrears, the predictive data prompts earlier intervention and tailored outreach. This intervention can be the BCSE assisting a parent with job placement as well as training services provided by other agencies.<sup>92</sup> Pennsylvania also keeps a large quantity of data on its child support system participants through the Pennsylvania Supreme Court Domestic Relations Procedural Rule Committee, tasked with reviewing the system requirements and making recommendations to improve the system.

While Pennsylvania's child support enforcement is one of the more effective state systems across the country, it is far from perfect. As is the case across the country, fathers in Pennsylvania are typically the noncustodial parent facing child support orders and research has consistently found that fathers with growing support orders often end up interacting with their children less. The result is another legal barrier to noncustodial fathers' involvement with their children. Pennsylvania can improve existing BCSE program services by cooperating more with noncustodial fathers and expanding their assistance in job seeking and job training. While there are employment programs for noncustodial parents with active child support cases in Pennsylvania, they are available only in select counties.<sup>93</sup> Pennsylvania may want to consider adoption of such programs for all counties. Expanding the employment services for noncustodial parents subject to custody orders could help mitigate the barrier effect child support can have on fathers attempting to be more involved with their children. BCSE programs should also draw more attention to the impact child support orders can have on father involvement with their children and work to help ensure that child support orders and enforcement do not have a negative effect on the ability of fathers to see their children.

---

<sup>91</sup> *Supra*, n. 89.

<sup>92</sup> Noelle Knell, "Predictive Data Fuels Child Support Success in Pennsylvania," *Governing*, (Nov. 30, 2012), <https://www.governing.com/archive/gt-predictive-data-fuels-child-support-success.html>, Last accessed on January 19, 2024.

<sup>93</sup> *Supra*, n. 59 (Pearson), pp. 14-16.

## *Children, Youth, and Family Services*

### *State and Local Children and Youth Services*

Every county within the Commonwealth has a Children and Youth Services agency (CYS) that administers, and coordinates services for endangered children. CYS typically becomes involved with families in situations where children need protection from abuse and neglect.<sup>94</sup> They are designed to help children stay safely in their homes and they work to assist families enhance their capacity to provide adequate care for their children’s physical, behavioral, and educational needs. CYS can also provide substitute care in foster family homes and childcare facilities for children coming from abusive homes. County services are available to children from birth to 18 years of age. However, in certain circumstances, a youth can continue to receive some services and assistance until age 21.<sup>95</sup>

### *Federal Oversight*

CYS agencies are a component of Pennsylvania’s Child Welfare System and are supervised by Pennsylvania’s Department of Human Services (DHS).<sup>96</sup> State CYS programs also must comply with broad federal mandates, which are monitored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).<sup>97</sup> Federal regulations require that state child protection programs be designed to ensure that “[c]hildren have permanency and stability in their living situations...[and] [t]he continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.”<sup>98</sup> In addition, federal regulations require that programs work to ensure that “[f]amilies have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs; [c]hildren receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs; and [c]hildren receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.”<sup>99</sup> These federal requirements have been interpreted as a mandate for CYS agencies to “...document reasonable efforts to coordinate community services and ensure that parents, including fathers, can access prompt and adequate services.”<sup>100</sup>

### *Paternal Participation*

While child welfare agencies like CYS are extremely important and even necessary to protect children and serve families during challenging situations, there has been widespread agreement for quite some time that there is a lack of paternal participation within their services.<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>94</sup> “Overview of Children and Youth Services,” *PA Families Inc.*, accessed January 4, 2024, <https://pafamiliesinc.org/understanding-systems/office-of-children-youth-and-families/overview-of-bureau-of-child-welfare-services>.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> “Child Welfare Services,” *Department of Human Services*, accessed January 4, 2024, <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Children/Pages/Child-Welfare-Services.aspx>.

<sup>97</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 1320a-2a.

<sup>98</sup> 45 C.F.R. § 1355.34(b)(ii)(A)-(B).

<sup>99</sup> 45 C.F.R. § 1355.34(b)(iii)(A)-(C).

<sup>100</sup> Derrick M. Gordon and Arazais Oliveros, “Engaging Fathers in Child Protection Services: A Review of Factors and Strategies Across Ecological Systems,” *Child Youth Services Review* 34, No. 8 (Aug. 1, 2012): 1399-1417, DOI: 10.1016/j.chilyouth.2012.03.021.

<sup>101</sup> Discussion of the Advisory Committee Meeting held on June 13, 2023.

The DHHS Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has encouraged all human services agencies, including child welfare agencies like CYS and state courts to prioritize father engagement to strengthen families. Moreover, the ACF recommended that said agencies and courts implement strategies to enhance paternal involvement in family support and child welfare programs.<sup>102</sup>

This encouragement to increase paternal involvement makes sense for many reasons. Fathers play a key role in children’s permanency plans during involvement with agencies like CYS. Their active participation in and fidelity to a child’s case plan often increases the likelihood of a child having a briefer stay in foster care and makes the possibility of reunification with their birth family more likely, as well.<sup>103</sup> Engaging fathers in child welfare services can also positively impact a child’s externalizing behaviors, cognitive and academic development, and familial support. Though few studies have analyzed the benefits of involving paternal relatives, there is evidence that support from extended family can have a positive effect on a child’s well-being and protection.<sup>104</sup>

While some have argued that it is incumbent upon fathers themselves to engage with these agencies for the good of their family, others have suggested that there may be more to the reason as to why fathers are typically less involved than mothers. Some factors linked to low paternal involvement include relationship status between the mother and father of the child, mental health issues, level of education, employment status, previous incarceration, and poverty.<sup>105</sup>

Domestic violence and the execution of Protection from Abuse (PFAs) orders can also impede a father’s participation in their child’s life. PFAs are designed to protect individuals from abusive individuals. People often seek PFAs after instances of domestic violence where an individual or individuals fear for their safety. If a PFA order is issued by a judge against a father, it can, among other things, direct him to refrain from abusing the plaintiff or minor and can grant possession to the plaintiff of the residence or household to the exclusion of the father by essentially evicting him.<sup>106</sup> If the father is alleged to be a danger to the mother of his child and/or child, he may lose the ability to have contact with them and may be viewed as a threat by CYS staff providing services to his family. This can result in him being excluded from participation in child welfare services and other activities involving his children.

While there are several reasons as to why there is low paternal participation in these services and programs, some believe that many of the agencies administering these services hold biases against fathers and routinely fail to engage fathers in the same way they do mothers. Many fathers believe that mothers are generally viewed more favorably, and this perception may be reinforced by many of the policies and practices that end up leaving fathers out of the process. Even fathers without a criminal history are often viewed as a threat and face heavier scrutiny from

---

<sup>102</sup> Casey Family Programs, “Issue Brief Strong Families: Why Should Child Protection Agencies Engage and Involve all Fathers,” (Updated January 3, 2024), <https://www.casey.org/father-engagement-strategies/#:~:text=Despite%20well%2Ddocumented%20benefits%20to,children%2C%20specifically%20men%20of%20color.>

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Nickie Fung, Jennifer Bellamy, *et. al.*, “A Seat at the Table: Piloting Continuous Learning to Engage Fathers and Paternal Relatives in Child Welfare,” (Washington, D.C., OPRE Administration for Children and Families, 2021).

<sup>105</sup> *Supra*, n. 102 (Casey).

<sup>106</sup> Act of December 19, 1990 (P.L. 1240, No. 206), § 2; 23 Pa.C.S. § 6108(a).

staff within these agencies.<sup>107</sup> Some reports have found that “... child protection agencies often discount the value of fathers who do not live with their children [nonresidential fathers], specifically men of color.”<sup>108</sup> Moreover, said agencies are less likely to identify and locate Black, Latino, and multiracial nonresidential fathers compared to white fathers.<sup>109</sup>

### *Child and Family Services Review*

In 2017, the ACF conducted a Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for Pennsylvania. The purpose of the CFSRs is to ensure that state child welfare systems are providing quality services to children, youth, and families. Federal law under the Social Security Act requires DHHS to conduct said reviews to determine whether states’ child and family service programs are in “substantial conformity” with state plan requirements of the act.<sup>110</sup> In addition, the CFSRs allow the Children’s Bureau of the ACF to determine what is happening to children and families as they receive services in child welfare programs and assist states in improving the programs and services they provide.<sup>111</sup> The CFSRs have been conducted since 2000. Overall, there are four rounds to the CFSRs and as of June 2023, the Children’s Bureau was still in the process of revising procedural information for round 4.<sup>112</sup>

In the CFSR, state programs go through a two-phase review process. The first phase involves the submission of a statewide assessment developed by the state with the assistance of stakeholders. The second phase involves an onsite review that looks at a sample of cases for the purpose of determining outcome performance related to the following safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes:

#### **Safety**

Outcome 1 – Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

Outcome 2 – Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

#### **Permanency**

Outcome 1 – Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

Outcome 2 – The continuity of relationships and connections is preserved for children.

---

<sup>107</sup> *Supra*, n. 100, p. 3 (Gordon).

<sup>108</sup> *Supra*, n. 102 (Casey).

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 1320a-2a.

<sup>111</sup> *Child and Family Services Reviews: Pennsylvania Final Report 2017*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau, <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/docs/Publications/Documents/Child%20Youth%20and%20Family%20Service%20Plan/PA%20Round%203%20Child%20and%20Family%20Services%20Review%20Final%20Report.pdf>, 1.

<sup>112</sup> “General Information and Overview of the CFSR Process,” *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau*, accessed January 10, 2024, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/monitoring/child-family-services-reviews/overview>; “Child and Family Services Review: History,” *University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center*, accessed January 9, 2024, <https://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/CFSR.htm#:~:text=THE%20REVIEW%20PROCESS,45%20CFR%20%C3%82%C2%A7%201355.33>.

## Well-Being

Outcome 1 – Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.

Outcome 2 – Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

Outcome 3 – Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.<sup>113</sup>

The second phase of the CFSR review process also evaluates the following seven systemic factors:

- Statewide information system.
- Case review system.
- Quality assurance system
- Staff and provider training
- Service array and resource development
- Agency responsiveness to the community
- Foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention<sup>114</sup>

In reviewing these outcomes and factors, CFSRs help states identify both strengths in their child welfare services and areas that require improvement. The CFSRs also help identify system changes that will help improve child and family outcomes.<sup>115</sup> Once the first two phases are complete, the ACF issues a final report providing its findings to the state. This phase is often referred to as “Round 3.” If a state fails to meet substantial conformity with one or more of the seven outcomes or seven systemic factors, the state is required to develop a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) in collaboration with stakeholders and the ACF to address the areas in need of improvement. After the ACF approves the PIP, the state has two years to implement the plan. The ACF and Pennsylvania’s DHS monitor the plan’s progress.<sup>116</sup>

Pennsylvania’s 2017 CFSR final report found that its child and family services were not in substantial conformity with any one of the seven outcomes. Moreover, the report also found that only five out of seven systemic factors were in substantial conformity. Of relevance to this report, the CFSR found that parents were not consistently engaged in case planning and services. The degree of parental engagement varied across counties. The report noted challenges for caseworkers to engage both parents and engagement with incarcerated parents was described as “particularly challenging.”<sup>117</sup> The report found there were notable disparities between the engagement of mothers versus fathers in areas ranging from caseworker engagement of parents, parental involvement in case planning, and parental relationship with their child. To illustrate these shortcomings, the report developed the following data findings based on its sample of cases reviewed in the following areas:

---

<sup>113</sup> *Supra*, note 110 (CFSR).

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, Office of Children, Youth, and Families, *Pennsylvania Round Three Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plan*, (Revised July 2019), <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/docs/Publications/Documents/Child%20Youth%20and%20Family%20Service%20Plan/PA%20Round%203%20Child%20and%20Family%20Services%20Review%20Program%20Improvement%20Plan.pdf> 2.

<sup>117</sup> *Supra*, n. 111, 6. (CFRS 2017).

#### Visiting with Parents and Siblings in Foster Care:

- In **77 percent** of the **26 applicable cases**, the agency made concerted efforts to ensure that both the frequency and quality of visitation between the child in foster care and his or her mother was sufficient to maintain and promote the continuity of the relationship.
- In **67 percent** of the **15 applicable cases**, the agency made concerted efforts to ensure that both the frequency and quality of visitation between the child in foster care and his or her father was sufficient to maintain and promote the continuity of the relationship.<sup>118</sup>

#### In Relationship of Child in Care with Parents:

- In **80 percent** of the **25 applicable cases**, the agency made concerted efforts to promote, support, and otherwise maintain a positive and nurturing relationship between the child in foster care and his or her mother.
- In **71 percent** of the **14 applicable cases**, the agency made concerted efforts to promote, support, and otherwise maintain a positive and nurturing relationship between the child in foster care and his or her father.<sup>119</sup>

#### Needs Assessment and Services to Parents:

- In **63 percent** of the **52 applicable cases**, the agency made concerted efforts both to assess and address the needs of mothers.
- In **43 percent** of the **44 applicable cases**, the agency made concerted efforts both to assess and address the needs of fathers.<sup>120</sup>

#### Child and Family Involvement in Case Planning:

- In **67 percent** of the **43 applicable cases**, the agency made concerted efforts to involve mothers in case planning.
- In **48 percent** of the **42 applicable cases**, the agency made concerted efforts to involve fathers in case planning.<sup>121</sup>

#### Caseworker Visits with Parents:

- In **58 percent** of the **52 applicable cases**, the agency made concerted efforts to ensure that both the frequency and quality of caseworker visitation with mothers was sufficient.
- In **45 percent** of the **42 applicable cases**, the agency made concerted efforts to ensure that both the frequency and quality of caseworker visitation with fathers was sufficient.<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

In July of 2019, Pennsylvania prepared a revised PIP in response to the 2017 CFSR final report. Based on the work of four Pennsylvania Child Welfare Council subcommittees, engagement was identified as an area that impacted Pennsylvania’s performance across multiple CFSR measures. The Permanency and Well-Being subcommittees worked to identify the root causes of inadequate engagement and to establish recommendations for strategies to improve parental engagement. The subcommittee review found three major root causes for engagement failures. First, the committee determined that the culture of engagement varied throughout the Commonwealth, with some jurisdictions not having outreach to non-custodial parents as part of its core values and therefore are not reflected in their day-to-day practice. The subcommittee also found gaps in the knowledge and skills of child welfare staff across Pennsylvania regarding the practice of engagement. The third root cause was a lack of supports in place to effectively monitor engagement practices in the day-to-day interactions between service providers and families.<sup>123</sup>

### *Family Engagement Initiative*

After identifying root causes to its engagement shortcomings, the subcommittee proposed the Family Engagement Initiative (FEI) as a comprehensive strategy to improve the system’s engagement of families and parents. The FEI is a collaborative effort between the Office of Child, Youth, and Families and the courts to bolster family engagement at the local level. It combines evidence-based practices of revised family finding, enhanced legal representation, and crisis/rapid response family meetings. Revised family planning involves engaging, locating, and actively involving family and community to surround the child with support. Enhanced legal representation involves improving the four core Standards of Practice for Lawyers Representing Child Welfare Agencies. The four standards include client relationship and contact, case preparation, advocacy, and feedback. Counties implementing the FEI strategy must choose at least two of the four standards to address in the first year of FEI implementation and will establish their own goals and objectives based on these chosen standards. Crisis/rapid response family team meetings involve gathering family, relatives, and community support expeditiously in response to an emergency event that will likely result in an out-of-home placement for the child. The purpose behind this is to ensure the family can be actively involved in decision-making. In 2019, there were 13 counties within Pennsylvania implementing the FEI strategy.<sup>124</sup> In 2022, there were 18 counties participating in various phases of FEI.<sup>125</sup>

### *Father Engagement Working Group*

A 2019 study conducted by the Dad’s Resource Center (DRC) examined the issue of lack of paternal involvement in child and family service programs, looking at potential bias against fathers within Pennsylvania’s legal system and county and human services agencies. One portion of the study looked specifically at CYS agencies across the Commonwealth. When reviewing the ratio of male-to-female staff and supervisors in CYS offices for every county in Pennsylvania, the DRC found that the overall ratio of staff was 82 percent female to 18 percent male. The study also found that the differential between female to male supervisors was an even larger spread, with 84

---

<sup>123</sup> *Supra*, n. 116, 28-29.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-31.

<sup>125</sup> “Family Engagement Initiative Counties,” *Office of Children and Family Courts*, last modified Jan. 2022, <https://ocfcpcourts.us/childrens-roundtable-initiative/family-engagement-initiative/fei-counties/>.

percent female to 16 percent male. These significantly disproportionate percentages, at the very least, tend to aggravate the concern that fathers may not receive the same favorable treatment that mothers do with CYS agencies and staff.<sup>126</sup> It may also fuel the perception by fathers that they will not be viewed as important to the process as the mother, leading many of them to avoid involvement altogether.

Resolving the disproportionality of female and male staff itself at child welfare agencies may not be a realistic solution. However, DRC has recommended the creation of a working group composed of CYS supervisors and staff. The purpose of the working group would be to develop best practices of successful offices that ensure children are getting the opportunity to have access to both their parents in their lives. The working group could create proposed policies that county offices would use to establish a more father-engaging environment. The DRC suggested that each office should have staff who would specifically serve as “fatherhood specialists” who would receive additional training and resources “...to more effectively work to engage disaffected fathers and assist disenfranchised fathers.”<sup>127</sup>

### *Partnerships with Fatherhood Organizations and other Community Groups*

Another way to strengthen the engagement of fathers and paternal relatives with their children in child welfare services is through fatherhood programs and community partnerships. One example of this is the Fathers and Continuous Learning in Child Welfare Project (FCL). Initiated by Mathematica and the University of Denver, the FCL project began in 2019 and involves child welfare staff and leadership among their partners working to develop and test father and paternal relative engagement strategies using Breakthrough Series Collaborative and Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles.<sup>128</sup> The FCL project found that partnering with fatherhood programs helped improve father engagement in child welfare programs. In many cases, child welfare programs often struggle in identifying or locating fathers. Partnerships with fatherhood programs helped address this struggle for child welfare programs by identifying, recruiting, and enrolling fathers who are eligible for program participation and services. Fathers tended to have more trust in fatherhood programs than child welfare programs and as such, they were more motivated to work with fatherhood programs to then become involved in local child welfare programs. In the process, the fatherhood programs were able to serve as an information resource hub for fathers, and helped fathers navigate the legal system.<sup>129</sup>

The FCL project also included partnerships with other services organizations in addition to fatherhood programs including community organizations. The FCL concluded that in order to successfully form effective partnerships that improve fatherhood engagement, the following six considerations should be made:

---

<sup>126</sup> “CYS Study,” *Dad’s Resource Center*, last modified February 4, 2021, <https://dadsrc.org/cys-study/>.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> Sheila Cavallo, Jennifer Bellamy, *et. al.*, “The Power of Partnerships: What Fatherhood Programs Can Learn from Child Welfare,” *Fathers and Continuous Learning in Child Welfare*, *Mathematica*, (Aug. 2023), 1. BSC is a collaborative learning approach for testing and spreading promising practices to help improve organizations improve in a specific topic area of operation. According to the Minnesota Department of Health, PDSA is an iterative, four-stage (plan, do, study, and act) problem-solving model used for improving a process or carrying out change. The process includes internal and external customer feedback.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-4.

- Work with father-serving entities.
- Collaborate with partners to promote a tailored network of resources.
- Commit to an ongoing quality improvement approach to build from existing quality of services and support through active engagement of partners.
- Be intentional about collaborative efforts and prioritize partnerships.
- Focus on reciprocity and mutual benefit to ensure partnerships last.
- Keep in mind that organizational partnerships are relationships between people.<sup>130</sup>

#### *Enhance CYS Capacity to Address Father Mental Health and Auxiliary Support*

Another possible way to increase paternal participation with CYS agencies and services is by requiring said agencies to establish strategies and interventions that address some of the external factors connected to a father’s low participation, such as “...mental health needs, strengthening capacity to parent, providing auxiliary support, improving fathers’ functioning on multiple levels, and identifying nurturing strengths.”<sup>131</sup>

#### *Co-parenting Focused Family-Based Interventions*

Studies have also recommended family-based interventions that focus on co-parenting as opposed to cohabitation. To be effective, one study opined that such interventions would have to primarily focus on enabling clear communication between all family members regarding the level at which a father should be involved. Acknowledging that sometimes mothers can be seen as gatekeepers to their children and protective services and resources, the study emphasized the need for even extended family to play an active role in facilitating paternal involvement.<sup>132</sup>

#### *Re-evaluate Child Support Enforcement Practices*

Child support enforcement often impacts fathers. Some stakeholders have opined that child support enforcement measures can have unintended consequences of negatively impacting father involvement with their children. When fathers fall behind on child support payments, they are penalized in a few ways including driver license suspension or incarceration. In 2022, the ACF’s Children’s Bureau advised that states should no longer initiate child support enforcement proceedings against parents when their children are residing in foster care. The reason behind the recommendation was that child support enforcement in these situations can delay a child’s reunification with his or her parents and are not cost-effective.<sup>133</sup> Many believe states need to reevaluate their enforcement policies to avoid disrupting parental (often father) involvement with his or her children and further delaying a child’s reunification with their parents.

---

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>131</sup> *Supra*, n. 100 (Gordon).

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Supra*, n. 102.

### *Implement More Inclusive Language*

To improve father involvement in child welfare services, agencies throughout the Commonwealth should also try to create a more inclusive environment for fathers. This can be accomplished through using more father-inclusive language within service programs. Programs and services that focus solely on mothers can contribute to the common belief among many fathers that they will not be viewed or treated the same as their child's mother. Program materials should avoid excluding fathers by name and should stress the importance of father involvement on their child's development and well-being.<sup>134</sup>

### *Housing Discrimination*

In general, the federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in the sale, rental, or financing of dwellings based on race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status or national origin.<sup>135</sup> However, single fathers can still struggle to find housing that will be safe and adequate for custody or visitation of their child. Low-income fathers may be eligible for public housing, either as public housing authority owned properties or through Section 8 rental vouchers. While single fathers in general tend to earn more than single mothers, that advantage can have a negative impact on their financial eligibility to obtain low income or subsidized housing. An additional concern has been that single fathers who have less than 50 percent custody of their children may not be able to count those children in determining family size, which can also affect eligibility.

Of particular concern are those fathers who have been previously incarcerated. Use of criminal history to exclude an individual is significantly constrained in public housing. Public housing authorities and Section 8 landlords in general can only deny housing for convictions for violent criminal activity, drug-related activity or criminal activity that affects the health and safety of your neighbors and management.<sup>136</sup> An intact family relationship between biological parents and a child, may be divided if one parent has a criminal record, as public housing regulations permit exclusion of a household member with a record.<sup>137</sup>

Two activities can result in mandatory denial of admission or eviction. Drug related activity will result in an eviction from public housing and a three-year ban on admission to other public housing.<sup>138</sup> Persons subject to sex offender lifetime registration are also prohibited residency.<sup>139</sup> Public housing authorities may establish preferences for waiting lists, none of which apply to an able-bodied single person.<sup>140</sup> Similar preference provisions apply to Section 8 voucher programs.<sup>141</sup> A specific limitation imposed on single persons is that "a single person who is not an elderly or displaced person, or a person with disabilities, or the remaining member of a resident family may not be provided a housing unit with two or more bedrooms" applies in public housing

---

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 3601 *et seq.*

<sup>136</sup> 24 CFR 5.855 (federally assisted housing); 960.203(c) (public housing authorities); and 982.553(a)(2)(ii) (Section 8 rental vouchers).

<sup>137</sup> 24 CFR 5.852(b).

<sup>138</sup> 24 CFR 5.854, 960.204(a)(1)-(3), and 982.553(a)(1).

<sup>139</sup> 24 CFR 5.865, 960.204(a)(4), and 982.553(a)(2)(i)

<sup>140</sup> 24 CFR 960.206.

<sup>141</sup> 24 CFR 982.207.

authority owned-properties only.<sup>142</sup> This could become an issue for a single father with partial custody of his children.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has begun taking a stronger stance under the Fair Housing Act against private landlords who discriminate based on criminal records. Looking at disparities in the criminal justice system, HUD's Office of General Counsel noted that "criminal records-based barriers to housing are likely to have a disproportionate impact on minority home seekers."<sup>143</sup> Because this potential for disparate treatment exists, the Office of General Counsel issued guidance on when the use of criminal records was unlawful.

Discrimination can occur in two ways. The first, discriminatory intent, is straightforward. Rules that specifically exclude certain protected classes are hard to miss. Discriminatory effects can also lead to liability on the part of a landlord. If a protected class is treated differently during the application process, discriminatory intent can be found. Examples given include notification to one class of prospective tenants about the existence of a screening policy, but not another. Another example is only evicting people convicted of a crime that are in a protected class, but not evicting others who had been convicted of the same crime.

Policies that do not facially discriminate may still fail to meet standards if the practice actually or predictably results in a disparate impact on a protected class. If it does so, it must be necessary to achieve a substantial, legitimate, nondiscriminatory interest, and it must be the least discriminatory alternative.<sup>144</sup> Protecting resident safety and property can sometimes be used an acceptable basis for excluding a potential tenant, but prior arrests not resulting in a conviction alone cannot be used to prove that an exclusion of an individual on that basis actually assists in protecting resident safety or property.<sup>145</sup>

HUD announced in 2023 that new rulemaking that would strengthen efforts to "affirmatively further fair housing by ensuring "that the agency and its program participants will proactively take meaningful actions to overcome patterns of segregation, promote fair housing choice, eliminate disparities in housing-related opportunities, and foster inclusive communities that are free from discrimination."<sup>146</sup>

The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission issued a report in April 2023 looking at the state of fair housing in the Commonwealth. Findings of note include a shortage of affordable housing, long and closed waiting lists for public housing, and the lack of a uniform property

---

<sup>142</sup> 24 CFR 960.206(d).

<sup>143</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Office of General Counsel Guidance on Application of Fair Housing Act Standards in the Use of Criminal Records by Providers of House and Real Estate-Related Transactions*, (April 4, 2016), 2.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*, see also, HUD, Memorandum for Office of Fair Housing & Equal Opportunity, Fair Housing Assistance Program Agencies, and Fair Housing Initiatives Program Grantees, June 10, 2022.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid* (2016 guidance) at p. 5.

<sup>146</sup> HUD, Proposed Rule, "Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing," *Federal Register* 88, No. 27, (February 9, 2023): <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2023-02-09/pdf/2023-00625.pdf>.

maintenance code statewide, all of which make it harder for low-income individuals to find safe, adequate and affordable housing.<sup>147</sup>

## ***Personal and Financial Barriers***

### *Relationship Issues*

Whether married or unmarried, some relationships end. Some end amicably, and others end acrimoniously. If the breakup is not mutually agreed upon, there can be a lot of anger and resentment between the parties. Some people have a hard time separating their views of a person as a partner versus a parent. A lousy spouse can still be a loving parent. Unfortunately, too often, children of a bitter split become the focus of an epic brawl. Accusations of gatekeeping and parental alienation may be made, with one parent accusing the other of trying to prevent the other parents' access to the child, literally or figuratively. It is frequently alleged that false claims of domestic violence and/or child abuse are filed and PFA orders obtained as a tactic in divorce and custody proceedings. While the law provides penalties for doing so, it is hard to find data regarding the number of false reports and how often they are penalized.

When a PFA order is issued, previously determined custody orders are almost always negated, with the accused parent's access to their children significantly or completely limited for what could be an extensive period of time. This can deprive the children of emotional and psychological support of the parent who is the subject of the order and may lead to confusion over what they know and believe about that parent.

While a PFA may only limit or prohibit contact between the mother and the father, it may become more difficult to arrange no-contact custody exchanges. Parents under a PFA order may find themselves restricted to supervised visitation, incurring costs to pay for these visits, in addition to hiring legal representation. If there are no county providers available or there is no agreement on a suitable supervisor, access may be even harder to obtain, and the disruption to the parent-child relationship even further drawn out.

The Crimes Code prohibits false reports to law enforcement authorities.<sup>148</sup> Any person who knowingly gives false information to any law enforcement officer with the intent to accuse another commits an offense. Generally, this offense is a misdemeanor of the second degree, punishable with up to two years in prison. False reports of child abuse are treated similarly.<sup>149</sup> Additionally, the protection from abuse provisions of the law state nothing in it precludes an action for wrongful use of civil process or criminal prosecution for falsification and intimidation.<sup>150</sup> While criminal charges against the false reporter may inhibit some people from making false

---

<sup>147</sup> Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission, *The State of Fair Housing in the Commonwealth of PA*, (April 2023), [https://www.phrc.pa.gov/Complaints/Documents/White%20Paper\\_Final\\_4.3.2023.pdf](https://www.phrc.pa.gov/Complaints/Documents/White%20Paper_Final_4.3.2023.pdf).

<sup>148</sup> 18 Pa.C.S. § 4906.

<sup>149</sup> 18 Pa.C.S. § 4906.1.

<sup>150</sup> 23 Pa.C.S. § 6122.

reports, unfortunately, the making of the report alone has already done damage to the accused person's reputation and potentially the nature of their relationship to their child.

In disputed custody proceedings (are part of a divorce or as a separate proceeding) the courts have additional actions they can take to attempt to intercede in disagreements. Each parent can be ordered to produce a parenting plan which must include the following:

- The schedule for personal care and control of the child, including parenting time, holidays and vacations
- The education and religious involvement, if any, of the child
- The health care of the child
- Child-care arrangements
- Transportation arrangements
- A procedure by which proposed changes, disputes and alleged breaches of the custody order may be adjudicated or otherwise resolved through mediation, arbitration or other means
- Any matter specified by the court
- Any other matter that serves the best interest of the child<sup>151</sup>

The court may also direct the parties to attend informational programs concerning parental duties<sup>152</sup> or require the parties to attend counseling sessions.<sup>153</sup> Additionally, the court may on its own motion or the motion of a party appoint a *guardian ad litem* to represent the child in the action. The *guardian ad litem* must be an attorney at law.<sup>154</sup>

### *Low Resource Settings*

Another circumstance that can limit a father's involvement is low income/low resources. Children residing in the same household as both of their parents have many advantages over children raised in single-parent settings. Among the biggest advantages is that there is the potential for two incomes to support one household. Single, non-residential fathers who are unable to find stable jobs can often struggle to support two households and/or pay child support. Non-custodial fathers are not eligible for many programs that provide economic support for children. Fathers with low income may have to work longer, more unconventional hours and have been found more likely to "...retreat from the father role altogether."<sup>155</sup> However, even in low-income families, father involvement significantly impacts a child's early academic development.<sup>156</sup> In fact, there has been some preliminary evidence demonstrating that the positive impact of father involvement

---

<sup>151</sup> 23 Pa.C.S. § 5331.

<sup>152</sup> 23 Pa.C.S. § 5332.

<sup>153</sup> 23 Pa.C.S. § 5333.

<sup>154</sup> 23 Pa.C.S. § 5334.

<sup>155</sup> *Supra*, n. 3 (Carlson).

<sup>156</sup> Italo López García, Lia C. H. Fernald, Frances E. Aboud, *et al.*, "Father Involvement and Early Child Development in a Low-Resource Setting," *Social Science Medicine* 302 (June 2022, 114933), DOI:10.1016/j.socscimed.2022.114933.

for his child's academic outcomes is more significant for children in families with low-income than those in middle-and upper-income families.<sup>157</sup> This illustrates the adaptability and resilience of father influence across different socioeconomic backgrounds.<sup>158</sup>

### *Lack of Education and Training*

Teen pregnancy and parentage can have a negative effect on the ability of a youth to finish high school and find employment. In 2019, only 44.6 percent of high school dropouts were employed. Lack of a high school degree or GED, or any type of formal training creates additional barriers to full employment and financial stability.<sup>159</sup> High school dropout rates overall were 5.3 percent in 2020. More men (5.69 percent) than women (4.59 percent) dropped out, and the poorest students were the most likely to drop out (9.7 percent).<sup>160</sup> Studies have shown that 27.8 percent of females who dropped out of high school cited pregnancy, while 25 percent cited becoming a parent. Males who dropped out cited that they needed to support family (17.6 percent) while 6.2 percent cited becoming a parent.<sup>161</sup>

Senate Bill 850, Printer's No. 1007, was introduced and referred to the Senate Labor and Industry Committee on July 6, 2023. The bill would establish the Building a Better Future Grant Program in the Department of Labor and Industry. Grants would be available to organizations that host or offer comprehensive education, workforce training and skills development to individuals 16 to 24 years of age who have been disconnected from other educational opportunities. Eligible participants must be a member of a low income family and meet two of 11 criteria, such as previous conviction of delinquency adjudication, high school dropout, pregnant or parenting, or other similar disparate level of youth disconnection.

### *Parental Incarceration*

Racial disparity in the criminal justice system is widely acknowledged and has been the subject of multiple studies. The Interbranch Commission was established by the three branches of Pennsylvania state government in 2005 to implement recommendations from the Report of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court Committee on Racial and Gender Bias in the Justice System and continues to work to eliminate bias in the justice system.<sup>162</sup> Mass incarceration has been identified as a uniquely American problem.<sup>163</sup> It is beyond the scope of this study to extensively review the impact racism has on the ability of Black fathers to be involved in their children's lives, but the

---

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *The Economics Daily*, 44.6 percent of high school dropouts and 72.3 percent of college graduates employed in August 2019 at <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2019/44-6-percent-of-high-school-dropouts-and-72-3-percent-of-college-graduates-employed-in-august-2019.htm>, accessed January 03, 2024.

<sup>160</sup> "High School dropout rates," *USA Facts*, accessed January 3, 2024, <https://usafacts.org/data/topics/people-society/education/k-12-education/high-school-dropout-rate/>.

<sup>161</sup> "Why Students Drop Out," *National Dropout Prevention Center*, accessed January 3, 2024, <https://dropoutprevention.org/resources/statistics/quick-facts/why-students-drop-out/>.

<sup>162</sup> "About," *The Pennsylvania Interbranch Commission for Gender, Racial, and Ethnic Fairness*, accessed January 18, 2024, <https://pa-interbranchcommission.com/>.

<sup>163</sup> Wendy Sawyer and Peter Wagner, *Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2023*, (The Prison Policy Initiative, March 14, 2023), <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2023.html>.

fact that large numbers of Black fathers are incarcerated cannot help but have a chilling effect on their relationships with their children. The National Conference on State Legislatures (NCSL) in a 2022 article reviewed several studies of incarceration rates and reported that while Black and Latinx people make up 30 percent of the U.S. population, they represent 51 percent of the individuals in state prisons.<sup>164</sup> The Sentencing Project reports that the incarceration for Black persons in Pennsylvania is 7.7 Black persons for every one white person, and 2.3 Latinx persons for each white persons<sup>165</sup> The NCSL looked specifically at Pennsylvania, and found:

Pennsylvania's Department of Corrections has an online dashboard providing similar information for the state prison population. The dashboard shows Black people make up 12 percent of the state's overall population but 45 percent of the population in state correctional institutions, while white people make up 74 percent of the state population and 46 percent of the state prison population.<sup>166</sup>

The Joint State Government Commission completed a comprehensive report on the children of incarcerated parents in 2011.<sup>167</sup> Little regarding the needs of children has changed since issuance of that report. An article in the National Institute of Justice Journal in 2017 identified risk factors to children including child criminal involvement, psychological problems and anti-social behavior, educational attainment, and economic well-being. A strong, positive relationship prior to the incarceration of the parent could suggest that a child might benefit from visitation, but the author suggest that more research is needed to identify appropriate circumstances in which visitation could be encouraged.<sup>168</sup> A study released in 2023 looked at the impact of paternal incarceration between African-American fathers and sons. The study involved a very small sample of incarcerated fathers (22) but suggests the need for further study on ways to encourage father involvement despite incarceration considering the benefits that connection provides to children.<sup>169</sup>

A criminal record can negatively impact an individual's ability to build a new life. For instance, individuals with past criminal records struggle to find new jobs, access housing, education, and other beneficial opportunities. This is especially true for many fathers who were recently incarcerated. A 2022 study looked at joblessness rates for persons who were released from federal prisons in 2010 and over the following four years. The study found that 33 percent had found no employment at all over the four years post-release and at any given time, no more

---

<sup>164</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures, "Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Criminal Justice System," last modified May 24, 2022, <https://www.ncsl.org/civil-and-criminal-justice/racial-and-ethnic-disparities-in-the-criminal-justice-system>.

<sup>165</sup> "The Sentencing Project," *U.S. Criminal Justice Data*, accessed December 19, 2023, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/research/us-criminal-justice-data/>.

<sup>166</sup> Pa. Department of Corrections, Dashboard, Racial Disparities, accessed January 30, 2024, <https://dashboard.cor.pa.gov/us-pa/narratives/racial-disparities/1>

<sup>167</sup> Joint State Government Commission, *The Effects of Parental Incarceration on Children: Needs and Responsive Services*, (December 2011), <http://jsg.legis.state.pa.us/resources/documents/ftp/publications/2011-267-children%20of%20incarcerated%20parents.pdf>.

<sup>168</sup> Eric Martin, "Hidden Consequences: The Impact of Incarceration on Dependent Children," *NIJ Journal*, 278, (March 2017), <https://nij.gov/journals/278/Pages/Impact-of-incarceration-on-dependent-children.aspx>.

<sup>169</sup> Precious Skinner-Ossei, PhD, MSW and Dhiny Mercedes, MSW student, "Collateral Consequences: The Impact of Incarceration on African American Fathers and Their Sons," *Journal of Forensic Social Work* 7, No. 1(2023): 1-13, <https://journals.shareok.org/jofsw/article/view/115/88>.

than 40 percent of the group was employed. Further, their weekly earnings were lower than the general population the year of release, and while they rose somewhat still remained lower after four years, earning 84 cents for every dollar of the U.S. median wage. Additionally, the average person had 3.4 jobs over the four-year period, signifying instability in employment.<sup>170</sup>

### *Clean Slate Law – Former Incarceration and Employment*

In 2018, Pennsylvania enacted the Pennsylvania Clean Slate Law within the Pennsylvania Crimes Code, which allowed individuals who have been convicted of lower-level, nonviolent misdemeanors and who have maintained an otherwise clean record for a period of ten years from the offense to seek court approval through a Petition of Limited Access to seal their criminal record from public view.<sup>171</sup> The law was subsequently amended in 2020 and again in December of 2023, which revised the clean record period requirement from 10 years to 7 for certain misdemeanor convictions. The amendment also expanded the relief to certain felony convictions where the individual has maintained a clean record for 10 years.<sup>172</sup> In addition to filing a petition, there is a second way under the law for certain qualifying individuals to shield their criminal record from the public automatically, without having to file a court petition. This is known as Clean Slate Limited Access.

#### Petition for Limited Access

To receive the limited access relief permitted under the Clean Slate Law, an individual “...who has been free from conviction for a period of 7 years for an offense punishable by one or more years in prison and has completed payment of all court-ordered restitution...” must file a Petition of Limited Access.<sup>173</sup> The petition must be filed in the court of common pleas in the jurisdiction where the conviction occurred. In addition, the individual must also pay the court filing fee associated with the petition. Once the petition is adequately filed and all required fees are paid, the court may enter an order that criminal history record information maintained by a criminal justice agency pertaining to a qualifying misdemeanor or an ungraded offense carrying a maximum penalty of no more than five years be disseminated only to a criminal justice agencies and certain other agencies specified under the law.<sup>174</sup> However, a court order for limited access prohibiting disclosure of a person’s criminal record is not absolute. It prohibits disclosure in most scenarios, but the order does not erase your criminal record entirely.

The criminal record will only ever be released to the following:

- A criminal justice agency
- A state licensing agency, if the record is relevant to the issuance of a professional or occupational license

---

<sup>170</sup> Leah Wang and Wanda Bertram, “New data on formerly incarcerated people’s employment reveal labor market injustices,” *Prison Policy Initiative*, last modified February 8, 2022, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2022/02/08/employment/>.

<sup>171</sup> The Clean Slate Law, Act of June 28, 2018 (P.L. 402, No. 56), § 1; 18 Pa.C.S. § 9122.2(a)(1).

<sup>172</sup> Act of October 29, 2020 (P.L. 718, No. 83), § 2; Act of December 14, 2023 (P.L., No. 36)

<sup>173</sup> *Supra*, n. 171.

<sup>174</sup> *Supra*, n. 171.

- The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services and county children and youth agencies and county children and youth agencies where it is relevant to their duties to child protective services<sup>175</sup>

Pursuant to the 2023 amendment, the law also provides additional criteria for a Petition of Limited Access for qualifying felonies. Specifically, the law provides that a person “...who has been free from conviction for a period of 10 years for an offense punishable by one or more years in prison and has completed payment of all court-ordered restitution [and petition fees]...” may be eligible for a limited access court order upon petition.<sup>176</sup> Upon filing the petition, a court may enter an order that the record maintained by a criminal justice agency related to a qualifying felony be disseminated only to a criminal justice agency, state licensing agency, DHS, and children and youth agencies as permitted by the statute. A qualifying felony under this provision is any of the following or an attempt, conspiracy, or solicitation to commit any of the following, excluding felonies of the first and second degrees:

- An offense relating to criminal mischief under § 3304 of the Crimes Code
- An offense relating to criminal trespass under § 3503 of the Crimes Code
- An offense relating to theft and related offenses under Chapter 39 of the Crimes Code
- An offense relating to forgery and fraudulent practices under Chapter 41 of the Crimes Code
- An offense under § 441 of the Human Services Code
- A qualifying offense<sup>177</sup>
  - 1) An offense under section 3304 (relating to criminal mischief)
  - 2) An offense under section 3503 (relating to criminal trespass)
  - 3) An offense under Chapter 39 (relating to theft and related offenses)
  - 4) An offense under Chapter 41 (relating to forgery and fraudulent practices)
  - 5) An offense under section 481 of the act of June 13, 1967 (P.L.31, No.21), known as the Human Services Code
  - 6) A qualifying offense

Some exceptions to the limited access relief under the law include a conviction for an offense punishable by more than two years in prison for any offense, or an attempt, conspiracy, or solicitation to commit an offense, involving danger to a person. This exception does not apply to misdemeanor offenses under § 2706 relating to terroristic threats. There are also exceptions to the limited access relief for individuals convicted of certain felonies or other offenses under certain criteria related to how long ago the conviction was and the level of prison time punishable for the felony. Some of the felonies and other offenses include crimes relating to offenses against the

---

<sup>175</sup> 18 Pa.C.S. §§ 9122.2(a)(1), 9121(b.1), (b.2).

<sup>176</sup> 18 Pa.C.S. § 9122.1(b)(a.1).

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

family; relating to firearms and other dangerous articles; relating to sexual offenses and tier system and relating to sex offender registration; among other offenses.<sup>178</sup>

### Clean Slate Limited Access

Another way for a qualifying individual to block access to their criminal record from the public is through the law's Clean Slate Limited Access. An individual may be eligible for Clean Slate Limited Access, subject to certain exceptions under the law or if a court has vacated an order for limited access if they were:

- Convicted of a misdemeanor of the second degree,
- Convicted of a misdemeanor of the third degree, or
- Convicted of a misdemeanor offense punishable by no more than two years of imprisonment if a person has been free for 7 years from conviction for any offense punishable by imprisonment of one or more years and if payment of all court-ordered restitution has occurred.<sup>179</sup>

The 2023 amendment expanded eligibility, subject to certain exceptions under the law or if a court has vacated an order for limited access for individuals convicted of a qualifying offense if a person has been free for 10 years from conviction for any offense punishable by imprisonment of one or more years. To be eligible in both scenarios, individuals must have paid all court-ordered restitution and all fees associated with limited access provisions.<sup>180</sup>

Also subject to limited access is, criminal history record information pertaining to charges which resulted in a final disposition other than a conviction, criminal record information pertaining to a conviction for a summary offense when 5 years have elapsed since entry of conviction and payment of all court-ordered restitution has occurred. Criminal record information pertaining to a conviction for which a pardon was granted is also subject to limited access.<sup>181</sup>

The way Clean Slate Limited Access works is as follows. On a monthly basis, the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) is required to transmit to the Pennsylvania State Police central repository the record of any conviction eligible for limited access.

The AOPC must then transmit to the Pennsylvania State Police repository the following:

- The record of charges subject to limited access within 30 days after entry of the disposition and payment of any ordered restitution
- The record of any conviction within 30 days after the record becomes subject to limited access<sup>182</sup>

---

<sup>178</sup> 18 Pa.C.S. §§ 9122.1(b)(1).

<sup>179</sup> 18 Pa.C.S. §§ 9122.2(a)(1).

<sup>180</sup> 18 Pa.C.S. §§ 9122.2(a)(1.1)

<sup>181</sup> 18 Pa.C.S. §§ 9122.2(a)(2)-(4).

<sup>182</sup> 18 Pa.C.S. §§ 9122.2(b)(1)-(2).

If the Pennsylvania State Police central repository determines a record transmitted is not eligible for limited access relief or does not match data held in the repository, it must notify the AOPC within 30 days of receiving the information. Upon the expiration of the 30-day period, the AOPC then must remove from the list of eligible records any record for which it received a notification of ineligibility or nonmatch with repository data. Each court of common pleas is required under the law to issue monthly an order for limited access for any record in its judicial district for which no notification of ineligibility was received by the AOPC.<sup>183</sup>

The 2023 amendments specifically added language to the effect that “Except if required by Federal law, criminal history record information that has been expunged or provided limited access may not be used by any individual or noncriminal justice agency for employment, housing or school matriculation purposes.”<sup>184</sup>

### *Fair Criminal Record Screening Standards Ordinance*

Philadelphia’s Fair Criminal Record Screening Standards Ordinance (FRSSO), commonly known as the “Ban the Box” Ordinance was enacted in 2015 and expanded in 2021 with a similar goal to that of the state’s Clean Slate Law, though more specific. The FRSSO was enacted with the purpose of encouraging the hiring of qualified ex-offenders by reducing the potential for discrimination. The requirements of the ordinance apply to all employers located within the City of Philadelphia, all City employees, and all entities the City contracts with for goods and services.<sup>185</sup>

Since its initial enactment, the ordinance required employers using criminal history screening processes to defer checks on criminal history until after a conditional offer of employment, remove criminal background questions from employment applications, and remove any question in employment documents regarding the applicant’s consent to submit to a background check before a conditional offer. The ordinance also prohibits employers from considering convictions older than seven years (excluding any period of incarceration) and requires them to assess before rejecting an applicant with a criminal record, several factors, including, but not limited to, the nature of the offense, the time passed since the offense, and the duties of the job being sought.<sup>186</sup>

Among other things, the amendments of the ordinance in 2021 expanded the definition of covered “employee” and made the law applicable to job applicants and incumbent employees. The amendment also permitted aggrieved individuals under the act to recover liquidated damages up to a maximum of \$5,000 in addition to punitive damages.<sup>187</sup>

---

<sup>183</sup> 18 Pa.C.S. §§ 9122.2(b)(3)-(5).

<sup>184</sup> 18 Pa.C.S. 9122.5(a)(1).

<sup>185</sup> City of Philadelphia Ordinance, Bill No. 200479.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

The Clean Slate Law and the FRSSO could be beneficial to fathers looking to find a job and adequate housing to reignite their positive involvement in their children's lives. However, to avail themselves of the law's limited access benefits regarding their existing records, they must meet the criteria laid out in the statute and ordinance.

Several pieces of legislation introduced during 2023 are intended to assist incarcerated persons with re-entry into society and finding employment. House Bill 1638, Printer's No. 1922, was introduced and referred to the House Judiciary Committee on August 29, 2023. The bill provides that the period of parole of a parolee may be shortened by 90 days, if, while under parole supervision, the person receives a high school diploma, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, career certificate, vocational certificate, technical certification or high school equivalency diploma.

House Bill 1601, Printer's No.1882, was introduced and referred to the House Judiciary Committee on August 7, 2023. The Department of Corrections, in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and the Department of Transportation, is charged with establishing the Identification Upon Reentry Program. The program would provide eligible offenders with birth certificates, Social Security cards, photo identification cards, driver's licenses, and work permits.

House Bill 1649, Printer's No. 1948, was introduced and referred to the House Judiciary Committee on August 30, 2023. The bill would require each State or county correctional institution to establish an incarcerated people's benefit fund. The fund would be comprised of money collected from the sale of commissary goods, inmate labor, telephone services, internet services or any other funding source related to inmate purchases or labor. The money is to be used solely for the benefit, education, and welfare of inmates, including special requested educational resources and materials not an authorized part of the institution's expenses.

Senate Bill 981, Printer's No. 1209, was introduced and referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee on November 6, 2023. The bill would establish the Prison Industry Enhancement Authority which would oversee a program in which non-violent offenders can voluntarily be employed by private industry while incarcerated. Additionally, the bill amends the Safe Community Reentry Program to require the Department of Corrections or the Pennsylvania Parole Board to provide offenders awaiting release with documents that are necessary to obtain gainful employment after release, including work records, a resume, a birth certificate, career and technical training records, an identification card issued by the Department of Transportation and a Social Security card.

### *Military Deployment*

A father's contributions to his child's success can at times be limited depending on his circumstances. For example, military fathers often face challenges in becoming involved in their child's education. Their unique circumstances can limit their ability to be physically present and accessible for their children.<sup>188</sup> Data from 2015 shows that approximately 2.4 million service

---

<sup>188</sup> Katrin Cunitz, Claudia Dolitzsch, Marcus Koster, *et al.*, "Parental Military Deployment as Risk Factor for Children's Mental Health: A Meta-Analytical Review," *Child Adolescent Psychology Mental Health* 13, No. 26 (June

members were available as active duty or ready reserve members in the U.S., of whom over 877,000 were parents. Out of these parents, 80 percent were married to civilians, 5 percent were married to another military member, and 15 percent were single. Furthermore, between 2001 and 2010, over 2.1 million service members were deployed, with 44 percent of them being parents.<sup>189</sup>

During deployments, children face several challenges such as assuming additional family responsibilities, fears for the safety of the deployed parent, and role confusion due to premature assumption of family duties. The absence of the deployed parent may lead to reduced family involvement, diminished emotional warmth, and increased stress faced by the remaining parent. While some children of deployed parents acquire new skills and autonomy during a parent's deployment, many struggle with higher rates of mental health problems, including increased depression, anger, and stress in the non-deployed parent following deployment. In addition, concerns about the deployed parent's safety and the role of confusion brought on by accepting too-early and potentially age-inappropriate responsibilities can result in additional negative consequences such as physical and mental overload.<sup>190</sup>

A military father's involvement, despite being affected by deployments, has been shown to significantly influence the educational outcomes of his children. Much of this is likely attributable to the fact that while fathers were physically separated from their children, deployed fathers retained a strong sense of responsibility for their children's well-being and remained engaged in their children's lives through online communication and other means. Many fathers found and employed meticulous monitoring and control strategies to remain engaged in their children's activities. These strategies include active involvement in day-to-day routines, decision-making, and maintaining consistent communication channels to bridge the emotional gaps resulting from separation. However, it should be noted that the impact of military service on children's academic performance does identify the potential risk factors that may influence educational achievement.<sup>191</sup>

### *Paternal Mental Health*

Aside from the joy and excitement that often comes with becoming a new parent, is the realization that one's life is changing forever. There is the anticipation of new love, new company, new adventures, and substantially new responsibility and labor. As such, both mothers *and* fathers are at an increased risk of mental health problems once they become a parent. A 2019 global research report found that seven in ten fathers believe their stress levels increased in the 12 months after becoming a father for the first time, with 24 percent saying their stress levels increased significantly.<sup>192</sup> While there is an abundance of literature regarding maternal health, research on paternal health is severely lacking. In fact, it has been suggested that support for new fathers is

---

21, 2019), DOI: 10.1186/s13034-019-0287-y; *see also* Elaine Willerton *et al.*, "Military Fathers' Perspectives on Involvement," *Journal of Family Psychology* 25, No. 4 (Aug. 25, 2011): 521-530, 521, DOI: 10.1037/a0024511.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> November, *Global Research Report of Male Social Connection: Fatherhood and Social Connections*, (IPSOS Public Affairs, 2019),

<https://cdn.movember.com/uploads/images/News/UK/Movember%20Fathers%20%26%20Social%20Connections%20Report.pdf>.

currently “...in the Dark Ages.”<sup>193</sup> This is especially true when it comes to identifying the challenges fathers face regarding perinatal and postpartum mental health challenges.<sup>194</sup>

The neglect of paternal mental health research is troubling, especially today when fathers have become a more pivotal player in parenting their children due in part to more women participating in the workforce and a cultural shift that has prompted growing equality in gender roles.<sup>195</sup> Many experts in the field of behavioral science have recognized the obvious and significant impact a father has on his child’s development. Significant as it may be, a father’s impact can be a positive one, if he has a stable and healthy mental state. Alternatively, if he struggles with mental health issues, a father’s impact on his children can still be significant; however, it may not be positive. Simply put, there needs to be greater investment in paternal mental health research and support.

The limited research that is available on paternal health largely focuses on father depression. The National Institute of Mental Health claims that over six million men across the U.S. suffer from depression each year, with ten percent of fathers struggling from depression. The Future Families and Child Wellbeing Study<sup>196</sup> found some key factors behind father depression, especially in high population, urban areas. These factors included not having stable employment, living apart from their children, having children with two or more women, and having been incarcerated.<sup>197</sup> These factors not only generate mental health issues for fathers, but also serve as barriers for fathers to develop nurturing relationships with their children.<sup>198</sup>

Depression among fathers can occur very early on in the prenatal and postpartum stages. A 2019 meta-analysis of observational studies found that the prevalence of prenatal depression in fathers was 11.67 percent, which was the average for all three trimesters of the pregnancy, with the first trimester being the highest percentage at 13.59 percent. See Table 1.

---

<sup>193</sup> Charles Schaeffer, PhD, “The Mental Health of Dads Matters,” *The Seleni Institute, Women’s Mental Health Matters*, (Mar. 22, 2016).

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> Sheehan D. Fisher, PhD, “Paternal Mental Health: Why Is It Relevant?” *The Med Review* (May/June 2017): 200 DOI: 10.1177/1559827616629895.

<sup>196</sup> “About the Future of Families & Child Wellbeing Study,” *Princeton University*, accessed December 26, 2023, <https://ffcws.princeton.edu/about>. The Future Families and Child Wellbeing Study, formerly known as the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study up until 2023, is a joint effort by Princeton University’s Bendheim-Thoman Center for Research on Child and Family Wellbeing and the Columbia Population Research Center. The study is based on a stratified, multistage sample of 4898 children born in large U.S. urban areas (population over 200,000) between 1998 and 2000, where births to unmarried mothers were oversampled by a ratio of 3 to 1. The study conducted follow-up interviews when children were approximately ages 1,3,5,9,15, and 22, which began in late 2020.

<sup>197</sup> National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, *Depression Among Urban Fathers with Young Children: A Research Report with Tips for Responsible Fatherhood Programs and Stakeholders*, (US HHS, 2016), <https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/depression-among-urban-fathers-young-children-research-report-tips>.

<sup>198</sup> “Promoting Fathers’ Mental Health During Children’s Early Childhood,” *National Institute for Children’s Health Quality*, accessed December 27, 2023, <https://nichq.org/insight/promoting-fathers-mental-health-during-childrens-early-childhood#:~:text=Build%20self%2Defficacy&text=One%20way%20to%20build%20confidence,more%20comfortable%20they%20will%20feel>.

<b>Table 1</b>	
<b>Prenatal Depression in Fathers 2019</b>	
<b>Trimester</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	13.59%
2 <sup>nd</sup>	11.31
3 <sup>rd</sup>	10.12
<b>Average</b>	<b>11.67</b>

Source: Wen-Wang Rao, Xiao-Min Zhu, *et al.*, “Prevalence of Prenatal and Postpartum Depression in Fathers: A Comprehensive Meta-Analysis of Observational Surveys,” *Journal of Affective Disorders*, (Feb. 15, 2020), Vol. 263, pp. 491-499, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2019.10.030>.

The prevalence of prenatal depression for fathers across all three trimesters was 9.76 percent. The same report found that 8.75 percent of fathers suffered from postpartum depression within one year of their child’s birth.<sup>199</sup> It is also worth noting that fathers face an increased risk of suicide during the prenatal period.<sup>200</sup>

An earlier 2016 report claimed that the postpartum depression for new fathers is much higher, estimating that more than 25 percent of new fathers develop depression within the first year of their child’s life. The report noted that this depression is almost always undiagnosed and untreated.<sup>201</sup> A more recent 2023 report found that postpartum depression affects between 8 percent and 13 percent of fathers; however, this prevalence can significantly increase to 50 percent of fathers when their child’s mother is experiencing postpartum depression.<sup>202</sup> Consequently, a father’s depression can have a negative impact on their child’s mental health early on starting at infancy. For instance, studies have found an “...association between paternal postpartum depression and negative infant temperament, which is the foundation for future child internalizing and externalizing behaviors.”<sup>203</sup>

Despite its importance, it has been suggested that primarily focusing on paternal depression regarding paternal mental health is misplaced. The reason being, that “...the focus on paternal depression may not accurately represent the largest risk for paternal psychopathology and the resultant child mental health outcomes because men have an increased likelihood of displaying externalizing behaviors.”<sup>204</sup> In addition, clinicians often struggle more in accurately diagnosing depression in men than women due to what many believe to be a gender bias. Some of the difficulty

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> Zoe Darwin, Jill Domoney, *et al.*, “Assessing the Mental Health of Fathers, Other Co-parents, and Partners in the Perinatal Period: Mixed Methods Evidence Synthesis,” *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 11 (2020), DOI: 10.3389/fpsy.2020.585479.

<sup>201</sup> *Supra*, n. 193. (Schaeffer)

<sup>202</sup> Sam Wainwright, Rachel Caskey, *et al.*, “Screening Fathers for Postpartum Depression in a Maternal-Child Health Clinic: A Program Evaluation in a Midwest Urban Academic Medical Center,” *BioMed Central (BMC) Pregnancy and Childbirth* 23, No. 675 (September 19, 2023).

<sup>203</sup> *Supra*, n. 195. (Fisher).

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

in diagnosing men with depression may also be attributable to the fact that many men are unwilling to candidly admit their symptoms for fear of looking weak.<sup>205</sup>

Fathers can find themselves struggling with many other mental health challenges outside of depression or in addition to it. Some new fathers struggle with manic episodes and depression often associated with bipolar disorder, though there does not appear to be an abundance of data and research on its prevalence in fathers. Bipolar disorder is defined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) as “a serious mental illness that causes unusual shifts in mood, ranging from extreme highs (mania or ‘manic’ episode) to lows (depression or ‘depressive’ episode).”<sup>206</sup> A father struggling with bipolar disorder can negatively impact the stability of interparental and parent-child relationships which can ultimately harm a child’s emotional wellbeing.<sup>207</sup>

Fathers can also struggle with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) both prenatal and postpartum. PTSD is defined by SAMHSA as a “disorder that develops when a person has experienced or witnessed a scary, shocking, terrifying, or dangerous event.”<sup>208</sup> PTSD in fathers can have a negative effect on a father’s ability to function as a parent. Fathers with PTSD are more likely to engage in more externalizing behaviors than mothers and as a result, the negative impact a father with PTSD has on his child’s mental health is often more significant.<sup>209</sup>

Though there is not a large collection of research on paternal PTSD, the bulk of PTSD studies have focused on fathers who have witnessed a challenging birth, traumatic family events (e.g. child with a serious medical illness), and exposure to war. One study found that five percent of fathers experienced severe PTSD symptoms nine weeks following the birth of their child. This was the same rate as mothers at that time. The study found that “[c]omplications with the birth and negative emotions experienced during the birth were the best predictors of PTSD symptoms in fathers.”<sup>210</sup> However, men who are fathers of children suffering from severe medical illnesses are at increased risk for PTSD symptoms. For example, fathers who had children with cancer tend to experience “...prolonged, elevated symptoms which may be a result of fathers witnessing their children endure repeated painful treatments and the aftereffects of the treatments.”<sup>211</sup>

PTSD is also common among fathers who are veterans of war. Their risk of PTSD is high due to the harsh realities they faced during their wartime service. These realities often include having their lives threatened, suffering serious injuries, or witnessing others being seriously injured or killed in action. The trauma from these experiences can transfer to a father’s children and the mother of his children resulting in increased familial stress in the home. Parenting with PTSD can be a challenge, especially since the loud, often chaotic behaviors and busy schedules of

---

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>206</sup> “Bipolar Disorder,” *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*, accessed December 27, 2023, <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/bipolar#:~:text=Bipolar%20disorder%20is%20a%20serious,thinking%2C%20behavior%2C%20and%20sleep>.

<sup>207</sup> *Supra*, n. 195 (Fisher).

<sup>208</sup> “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD),” *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*, accessed December 27, 2023, <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/post-traumatic-stress-disorder>.

<sup>209</sup> *Supra*, n. 195 (Fisher).

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

small children can have a triggering effect on parents with PTSD resulting from military service. Having PTSD can impact a father's ability to hold down a stable full-time job, which can compound his pre-existing symptoms. While there are many fathers (and parents) who struggle with PTSD linked to their military service, there does not appear to be precise data on the exact number of parents affected. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) does not collect data on parenthood. However, the VA and the Department of Defense partner together on an awareness campaign to address the stigma associated with PTSD while encouraging veterans to seek care for it.<sup>212</sup>

As is discussed in this report, many fathers also struggle with substance use disorder and are more likely than mothers to misuse opioids at the early stages of becoming a parent, when compared to mothers. Often a father's opioid addiction negatively impacts his ability to parent his children. These fathers tend to engage in fewer positive parenting behaviors – such as consistency and positive involvement. They also tend to express lower satisfaction with their parenting role.<sup>213</sup> Pervasive and severe substance use disorder can present a danger to a father's children and can lead to a loss of his custodial rights or even incarceration.<sup>214</sup>

### *Substance Use Disorder*

Fathers are becoming more involved and integrated into parenting roles than ever. Fatherhood significantly impacts the man, his children, and his family unit.<sup>215</sup> As has been discussed, father involvement in his children's lives can positively impact child development, mental health, and potential for success as an adult. For instance, early parental involvement in a child's life is associated with beneficial developmental outcomes for the child and father involvement specifically has been associated with a decreased likelihood of a child engaging in adolescent risk behaviors. Conversely, the absence of a father in his children's lives can have adverse consequences on their psychological development, among other things. Children who do not have a father often develop a lower capacity for defining their sexual role, greater hostility, lower academic success, and increased difficulties in maintaining relationships.<sup>216</sup>

Relatedly, it has been reported that “[o]ne of the most critical problems of the child welfare system is fathers who have little involvement with their children or are altogether absent from their

---

<sup>212</sup> Meghan Holohan, “Veterans with PTSD Struggle to Parent, but Help is Available,” *TODAY*, last modified November 8, 2021, <https://www.today.com/series/veterans/veterans-ptsd-struggle-parent-help-available-t165975>.

<sup>213</sup> Tanya M. Coakley, Jeffrey K. Shears, and Schenita D. Randolph, “Understanding Key Barriers to Fathers’ Involvement in their Children’s Lives,” (2014), Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, DOI: 10.1080/0145935X.2014.972550.

<sup>214</sup> Laura Lander, Janie Howsare, and Marilyn Byrne, “The Impact of Substance Abuse Disorders on Families and Children: From Theory to Practice,” *Social Work Public Health* 28, No. 0 (2013): 194-205, DOI: 10.1080/19371918.2013.759005.

<sup>215</sup> Sheehan D. Fisher, “Paternal Mental Health: Why is it Relevant?” *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* 11, No. 3 (May/June 2017): 200, DOI: 10.1177/1559827616629895.

<sup>216</sup> Pasquale Caponnetto, Chiara Triscari, and Marilena Maglia, “Living Fatherhood in Adults Addicted to Substances: A Qualitative Study of Fathers in Psycho-Rehabilitative Drug Addiction Treatment for Heroin and Cocaine,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, No. 3 (February 2020): 1051, DOI: 10.3390/ijerph17031051.

children’s lives.”<sup>217</sup> According to recent U.S. Census Bureau data, 18.3 million children (roughly 1 in 4) live without a biological, step, or adoptive father in the home.<sup>218</sup> However, the absence of fathers in their children’s lives is not simply isolated to living in a different home as their children, it can mean not being involved in their lives altogether.

There are varying reasons as to why many fathers are not involved with their children. Some fathers are absent due to their own personal choice, while others may be incarcerated. Some fathers lack a stable job and suitable housing, safe enough for their children to reside or visit. However, one commonly cited reason or barrier to father involvement is alcohol and other substance use disorders. Unfortunately, there are not a lot of studies that specifically analyze father involvement for those who struggle with substance use disorder. What’s more, most of the survey data available on the topic is at least a decade old. In fact, research related to motherhood and substance use disorder has received greater attention than the role of parenting and fatherhood for drug-abusing men. Most parenting policy initiatives in the past few decades have been directed at pregnancy and motherhood in the treatment of substance abusing women – these initiatives have incorporated childcare, prenatal care, women-only programs, and workshops addressing women-focused topics.<sup>219</sup>

Substance use disorder can often lead to overall lower levels of parental involvement with their children. It can create barriers to a father’s involvement with his children because parents who do not meet substance use disorder treatment case plan goals prescribed in state child welfare systems risk losing their parental rights. For case-plan compliance, fathers typically must agree to receive substance use disorder treatment and then follow through with said treatment; failure to do so could jeopardize their custody rights and the time spent in treatment can lead to time away from their children.<sup>220</sup>

A father’s substance use disorder can also directly or indirectly harm his children in several ways. Some substance use disorders lead to incarceration for fathers, making involvement with their children nonexistent, and depriving their children of a father figure altogether. Fathers who abuse alcohol or drugs sometimes are under the influence while caring for their children, presenting a clear danger to a child’s well-being and will cause a father to lose custodial rights. Many fathers who struggle with substance use disorder report having fewer positive parenting behaviors and tend to have a higher prevalence of violent behavior toward the child’s mother and sometimes the child. In general, a parent who suffers from substance use disorder is three times

---

<sup>217</sup> Tanya M. Coakley, Jeffrey K. Shears, and Schenita D. Randolph, “Understanding Key Barriers to Fathers’ Involvement in their Children’s Lives,” *Child and Youth Services* 35, No. 4 (2014): 343-364, DOI: 10.1080/0145935X.2014.972550.

<sup>218</sup> “Historical Living Arrangements of Children,” *United States Census Bureau*, last accessed on September 3, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/children.html>.

<sup>219</sup> Carla Smith Stover, PhD; Chelsea Hall; Thomas J. McMahon, PhD, *et al.*, “Fathers Entering Substance Abuse Treatment: An Examination of Substance Abuse, Trauma Symptoms, and Parenting Behaviors,” *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 43, No. 3 (Oct. 2012): 335-343, DOI: 10.1016/j.jsat.2011.12.012.

<sup>220</sup> Camille C. Cioffi and David S. DeGarmo, “Improving Parenting Practices Among Fathers Who Misuse Opioids: Fathering Through Change Intervention,” *Frontiers Psychology* 12 (June 21, 2021), DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.683008.

more likely to abuse their child physically or sexually.<sup>221</sup> They also struggle with regulating their emotions and assessing and attending to their child's emotions. Substance abusing parents also struggle with diminished knowledge of parenting and child development, and preoccupation with drug seeking.<sup>222</sup> In addition, children to a parent with substance use disorder are more likely to develop substance use disorder issues in their life. A father's substance use disorder can lead to antisocial behavior in himself, which may lead to the intergenerational transmission of antisocial behavior to the child.<sup>223</sup> It is also worth noting that fathers who have a history of substance use disorder report higher levels of parenting stress and poorer father-child communication.<sup>224</sup>

As the opioid crisis in the U.S. continues to worsen, more and more men and women find themselves struggling with opioid substance use disorder. While the crisis has significantly impacted both sexes, fathers are more likely to misuse opioids at the early stages of becoming a parent, when compared to mothers. Moreover, a higher number of fathers than mothers enter drug abuse treatment programs. Fathers who struggle with opioid substance use disorder reported "lower parental efficacy, engage in fewer positive parenting behaviors – such as consistency and positive involvement – and report less satisfaction with the parenting role."<sup>225</sup>

Even the road to recovery is fraught with challenges. For example, many fathers in recovery face struggles with detoxification or withdrawal, financial instability, family instability, and sometimes crime.<sup>226</sup> Many fathers whose children are in foster care struggle with alcohol abuse, mental illness, poor parenting skills, domestic violence, and criminal activity. It has been reported that unmarried fathers not residing with their children have a higher probability of struggling with illegal behaviors, like illicit drug use, than married fathers who live with their children.<sup>227</sup>

Given that there is limited research on fathers who grapple with substance use disorder, there needs to be a stronger effort to investigate the creation of father-specific programs and initiatives that can help fathers overcome their substance use disorder. Though there are some beneficial programs in Pennsylvania, they are often not specifically focused on fathers and many that have shown promise have been shuttered or lose funding and support as executive administrations change.<sup>228</sup>

It cannot be ignored that fathers are typically more challenging to engage in assistive programs and more likely than mothers to refuse help. Fathers are also more likely to prematurely drop out of the treatment programs. Many fathers tend to view their acknowledgement of needing help as showing their vulnerability or weakness. They are also typically more unwilling to admit

---

<sup>221</sup> Laura Lander, Janie Howsare, and Marilyn Byrne, "The Impact of Substance Abuse Disorders on Families and Children: From Theory to Practice," *Social Work Public Health* 28, No. 0 (2013): 194-205, DOI: 10.1080/19371918.2013.759005.

<sup>222</sup> Children's Bureau, Office of the Administration for Children and Families, *Parental Substance Use: A Primer for Child Welfare Professionals* (January 2021) <https://cwig-prod-prod-drupal-s3fs-us-east-1.s3.amazonaws.com/public/documents/parentalsubuse.pdf?VersionId=v4euBVU4yf8bb2QQEKblAClxFy3phGJK>.

<sup>223</sup> *Supra*, n. 221.

<sup>224</sup> *Supra*, n.217.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>227</sup> *Supra*, n. 216.

<sup>228</sup> Discussion in Advisory Committee Meeting on Pennsylvania Greater Father Involvement held on August 15, 2023.

they are suffering from depression or other mental health issues. Some literature has indicated that low father participation in parent training and treatment programs is also partly due to the “approaches to engagement and training that are mother-centric.”<sup>229</sup> This may add more support to the notion that more attention must be given to developing more father-centric programs, much like the attention motherhood and substance use disorder has received.

Most fathers want to be involved with their children. A study of fathers in residential substance use disorder treatment discussed in a 2020 report found that 95 percent of participants always thought of their children, while 77 percent expressed a desire to attend paternity and co-parenting sessions as part of their treatment. Moreover, a high percentage of drug-abusing men in methadone maintenance treatment reported concern about their father status and interest in parent intervention.<sup>230</sup> These findings illustrate that men are open to interventions that could improve their relationship with their children, but need the opportunity to participate in a program that appropriately meets their needs.<sup>231</sup>

As mentioned previously, decades of policies and initiatives have focused on mothers that suffer from substance use disorder. Moreover, gender-focused program components that emphasized motherhood were found to be the most effective treatment for substance using women with their children.<sup>232</sup> Studies have shown that these initiatives have led to increased completion of treatment, decreased substance use, reductions in mental health symptoms, and even improved birth outcomes for mothers.<sup>233</sup> This same approach and attention to gender-specific issues that fathers face could yield similarly positive results for substance using fathers. That said, preventive intervention and treatment research on fathers cannot continue to be underrepresented in parenting studies if there is to be a meaningful change in father involvement.

To be beneficial, father-centric programs should focus more on the male-specific causes of substance use disorder, like job and financial instability, and addressing past traumatic events. They should assess the severity and presence of substance use disorder and make treatment recommendations, while exploring a father’s experiences growing up and determining whether he has a personal and intergenerational alcohol and drug use history. Programs should also establish localized, culturally sensitive substance use disorder treatment referral networks.<sup>234</sup>

An ideal father-centric substance use disorder program should raise awareness of fathers’ developmental impact on their children to build father motivation. Such an approach establishes trust and frames the treatment as a partnership working with fathers rather than working on fathers. For example, in clinical treatments with fathers involved with child welfare, these fathers are

---

<sup>229</sup> *Supra*, n. 219.

<sup>230</sup> *Supra*, n. 218.

<sup>231</sup> *Supra*, n. 215.

<sup>232</sup> Carla Smith Stover PhD, “Where’s Dad? The Importance of Integrating Fatherhood and Parenting Programming into Substance Use Treatment for Men,” *Child Abuse Review* 27, No. 4 (Oct. 9, 2018): 280-300, DOI: 10.1002/car.2528.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, *Working with Fathers to Identify and Resolve Substance Abuse Problems* (January 30, 2014).

receptive to interventions highlighting fathers' impacts and while emphasizing the value of fathers responsibly raising their children.<sup>235</sup>

One example of a father-centric individual program (with optional co-parenting components) that has shown promise regarding fathers with substance use disorders is the Fathers for Change (FFC) program. FFC is "designed to be offered individually to fathers who have young children (under 12 years) with a history of intimate partner violence (IPV)."<sup>236</sup> The program intervention includes nine core topics, four co-parent and five father-child topics (some of which address substance use) that are delivered in 60-minute sessions of individual treatment over 16-24 weeks.

The intervention has five primary goals which include the following:

- Cessation of violence and aggression
- Abstinence from substances
- Improved co-parenting
- Decreased negative parenting behaviors
- Increased positive parenting behaviors<sup>237</sup>

The program has sessions designed to enhance motivation by focusing on a man's role as a father to his young children, child development, and the impact of violence and substance use disorder on parenting. The program also focuses on the father's own childhood experiences of substance use disorder and highlights the multigenerational nature of substance use disorder.<sup>238</sup> A review of the program has found that programs like FFC that focus on the father's role and a father's wishes for his children can be a powerful motivator for change. Moreover, the flexibility of providing treatment to men in an individual fashion "...can allow for more specific tailoring of intervention needs, which could result in better outcomes for the men and their families."<sup>239</sup>

It is also important to screen fathers early for potential substance use disorder. One way of accomplishing this would be to incorporate father mental health screenings into prenatal programs, which will be discussed in greater detail later in the report. Pregnancy, especially unplanned pregnancies can add increased stress for both fathers and mothers and can invite unhealthy habits and behaviors such as substance use disorder.

Overcoming substance use disorder through meaningful father-centric programs can help fathers who do desire to be a key part of their children's lives. It can also help combat a significant portion of the growing opioid crisis spiraling out of control in the U.S. In general, more attention drawn to research and inquiry about fatherhood and substance use disorder could also help initiate new worthwhile father-specific treatment programs to help fathers eliminate substance use disorder as a barrier to involvement with their children. Fathers, regardless of whether they are struggling with substance use disorder or not, have significant value to their children.

---

<sup>235</sup> *Supra*, n. 220.

<sup>236</sup> "Fathers for Change," *Yale School of Medicine the Child Study Center*, accessed September 11, 2023 <https://medicine.yale.edu/childstudy/education-and-training/professional-development/fathers-for-change/>.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> Carla Smith Stover PhD, "Fathers for Change: A New Approach to Working with Fathers Who Perpetrate Intimate Partner Violence," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 41, No. 1 (May 1, 2013): 65-71.

# CREATING GREATER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN FATHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN

---

## *Prenatal and Perinatal Connections*

Early parental involvement in a child's life is associated with beneficial developmental outcomes for the child. These beneficial developmental outcomes include improved cognitive and socio-emotional development, among others.<sup>240</sup> One specific example of this has been demonstrated in children between the young ages of 3 months and 24 months. Studies have shown that children between these ages, who have experienced positive contributions from their fathers, have by-and-large shown a higher level of cognitive functioning than those children who lack those father-provided contributions. Moreover, studies have found that greater father involvement has resulted in a small to moderate positive effect on the early learning of a child. There has also been some preliminary evidence indicating that the positive impact of father involvement for his child's academic outcomes is larger for children in families with low-income than for those in middle- and upper-income families.<sup>241</sup>

However, the benefits of father involvement do not have to begin after birth – they can occur during pregnancy. Fathers' prenatal behavior and contributions during pregnancy can benefit both maternal health behaviors and fetal outcomes. For example, when fathers are present and involved during pregnancy, maternal negative health behaviors decrease and the risk of preterm birth, low birth weight, and fetal growth restriction is significantly reduced. It should be noted however, that parental involvement has also been associated with higher infant mortality up to one year following birth.<sup>242</sup>

Few researchers have explored the scope of a father's role during pregnancy and the subsequent development of proper measurements, policies, and interventions to increase his involvement.<sup>243</sup> Moreover, “[v]ery few studies have involved fathers in prenatal parenting interventions that focus directly on parent-child interaction quality.”<sup>244</sup> Recognizing this, a 2021 study sought to determine what this role might look like by surveying mothers and fathers

---

<sup>240</sup> Maggie Redshaw and Jane Henderson, “Father’s Engagement in Pregnancy and Childbirth: Evidence from a National Survey,” *Bio Med Central (BMC) Public Health*, (Mar. 20, 2013), 13(70), <https://bmcpregnancychildbirth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2393-13-70>, last accessed on September 20, 2023.

<sup>241</sup> Susan Yoon, Minjung Kim, Junyeong Yang, *et al.*, Patterns of Father Involvement and Child Development among Families with Low Income,” *Children (Basel)*, (Dec. 2021), 8(12): 1164, DOI: 10.3390/children8121164.

<sup>242</sup> Amina P. Alito, Cindi A. Lewis, Kenneth Scarborough, *et al.*, “A Community Perspective on the Role of Fathers During Pregnancy: A Qualitative Study,” *BMC Pregnancy and Birth*, (Mar. 7, 2013), 13(60), <https://bmcpregnancychildbirth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2393-13-60>, last accessed on September 20, 2023.

<sup>243</sup> Kim Alyousefi-van Dijk, Noor De Waal, Marinus H. Van IJzendoorn, *et al.*, “Development and Feasibility of the Prenatal Video-Feedback Intervention to Promote Positive Parenting for Expectant Fathers,” *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, (Feb. 13, 2021), 352-365, DOI: 10.1080/02646838.2021.1886258.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

themselves. According to men and women alike, the ideal “involved father or male partner” is one who is “present, accessible, available, understanding, willing to learn about the pregnancy process and eager to provide emotional, physical, and financial support to the woman carrying the child.”<sup>245</sup> All of these examples of the ideal involved father often contribute to the beneficial maternal health behaviors and fetal outcomes mentioned above.

Despite a father’s positive impact on maternal and fetal health and development, individual, family, community, societal, and even policy factors have played a role in impeding or reducing his role and involvement during pregnancy.<sup>246</sup> For example, most existing prenatal programs traditionally focus on maternal and infant health and can be effective treatment for women with children when the mother has a substance use disorder.<sup>247</sup> Other existing prenatal sessions have broad focus “...with no or little focus on improving parenting quality.”<sup>248</sup> Other specific barriers include acrimonious relationships between the biological father and the biological mother with men either not knowing their role with the new child or not wanting to accept new responsibilities associated therewith.<sup>249</sup>

Given the important and positive impact fathers can have during the pregnancy, there needs to be a robust effort to increase the involvement of fathers during the prenatal period. Expanding prenatal programs to be more inclusive of fathers is a good place to start. Prenatal programs should expand beyond focusing solely on maternal and infant health to also include educating fathers on their paternity rights and expectations, as well as the pregnancy process. More broadly, prenatal programs can serve as a ripe opportunity for fathers to prepare themselves to play a key role in their child’s life.<sup>250</sup>

Well-informed fathers, who better understand the importance of their role in their child’s future, as well as the issues their child’s mother faces, are likely to become more invested and accessible during pregnancy. Men should understand the importance of their role in the healthy development of their child and learn effective strategies on how they can best support their child’s mother to improve pregnancy outcomes. It has been suggested that fathers should also understand the important biological changes a mother must go through in pregnancy, as well as the surrounding risk factors for infant mortality. More father-inclusive prenatal programs could be a key information resource to fathers on these important issues and could provide them an opportunity to voice their distinctive concerns. Prenatal programs should also be expanded to provide information to mothers on the importance of paternal involvement to infant health outcomes. If mothers are properly informed on all the associated benefits to father involvement at prenatal stages, they may be more inclined to encourage fathers to become more involved and invite them to prenatal visits, regardless of their existing relationship status.<sup>251</sup>

---

<sup>245</sup> *Supra*, n. 241 (Yoon).

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> Carla Smith Stover PhD, “Where’s Dad? The Importance of Integrating Fatherhood and Parenting Programming into Substance Use Treatment for Men,” *Child Abuse Review*, Yale University Child Study Center and the University of South Florida (Oct. 9, 2018); 27(4): 280-300; DOI: 10.1002/car.2528.

<sup>248</sup> *Supra*, n. 242 (Alito).

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>250</sup> Discussion during Act 114 Advisory Committee held on September 12, 2023.

<sup>251</sup> *Supra*, n. 242 (Alito).

Prenatal programs can also serve as a resource hub for fathers. For instance, programs could provide valuable links to resources such as paternity testing and information on child support regulations. Expanded prenatal programs could provide information for second chance programs and employment opportunities, which could provide needed support to fathers with a disability or previous incarceration. Said programs should also focus on providing more support and training to men and women on improving communication skills and strengthening their relationship for the benefit of their child's needs.<sup>252</sup>

In addition to providing medical and mental health screening for mothers, prenatal programs should also be expanded to offer a mental health screening for expectant fathers. This type of screening should include a review of the father's mental health state and his emotional responses to news of unplanned pregnancies and the responsibilities associated with becoming a new father. The review could also examine the father's childhood experiences with his own father, which may shed some light on possible existing mental health struggles. The parenting roles of both mothers and fathers are critically important and as such, it is important that both parents are residing in a healthy mental state during the prenatal period. Expanding prenatal programs to include mental health screenings for fathers can assist in ensuring this.<sup>253</sup>

To ensure that these programs are properly inclusive of fathers, healthcare providers should receive training stressing the need to encourage and welcome fathers into the prenatal process.<sup>254</sup> By investing in the training of healthcare practitioners to expand prenatal programs, providers can improve upon one of their top priorities – the quality-of-care levels they provide to their patients. The positive benefits to maternal health behaviors and fetal outcomes associated with father involvement alone make training efforts a worthy investment for providers.

An evolving debate has occurred over the past 20 years regarding the benefits and detriments of infants and toddlers participating in overnight parenting time with fathers. Initially, a theory, later endorsed by a few courts in other states, took the stance that children under 18 months should only rarely have overnight visits with their fathers, as it was believed to negatively impact the child's ability to form an attachment to their primary caregiver, believed to be necessary for their emotional and psychological well-being over time. A study in 2016 reviewed these studies and conducted its own study of overnight visits with fathers of young children. The abstract to the study provides a summary of the findings:

Contrary to some previous findings, the current study found benefits to both parent-child relationships associated with overnights (a) up to and including equal numbers of overnights at both parents' homes, (b) for both the long-term mother-child and father-child relationships, and (c) both when children were 2 years old, as well as when they were under 1 year of age. These benefits held after controlling for subsequent parenting time with fathers in childhood and adolescence, parent education and conflict up to 5 years after the separation, and children's sex and age at separation. While the findings do not establish causality, they provide strong support for policies to encourage frequent overnight parenting time for infants and

---

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>253</sup> *Supra*, n. 250.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

toddlers, because the benefits associated with overnights also held for parents who initially agreed about overnights as well as for those who disagreed and had the overnight parenting plan imposed over one parent's objections. The observed benefits for the long-term father-child relationship are consistent with findings from intervention studies showing that fathers who are more involved with infants and toddlers develop better parenting skills and relationships with their children.<sup>255</sup>

Studies have found that workplaces that encourage greater fatherhood involvement provide benefits to the fathers as well as the employers. Fathers work harder, have more loyalty, have higher job satisfaction and less work-family conflict. Such policies also help recruit talented employees and can even boost stock prices when first announced. Other benefits include less risky behaviors, more altruistic social relationships and higher incomes. Flexible schedules lead to higher levels of involvement with the children, even for low-income and non-resident fathers.<sup>256</sup> The ability to work from home may also have a positive impact. While paternal paternity leave is becoming more available in the United States, stigma regarding the "unmanliness" of considering family in work condition decisions, concerns about demotion, lower performance evaluations, reduced pay and benefits, may lead some fathers to be reluctant to seek paternity leave.<sup>257</sup>

### ***Relationship/Marriage Support***

The federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) was established in 1991 following the merger of the Office of Human Development Services, the Family Support Administration, and the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant Program. The ACF is a federal division operating under the auspices of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The mission of the ACF is to promote "...the economic and social well-being of families, children, youth, individuals, and communities with funding, strategic partnerships, guidance, training, and technical assistance."<sup>258</sup> Nineteen offices nationwide make up the ACF, including the Office of Regional Operations, which represents 10 regional offices around the country. Each ACF office is overseen by its own director or commissioner, tasked with ensuring that the activities of the office support ACF's mission. With a budget of more than \$58 billion, the ACF operates more than 60 programs. It is the second largest agency within the HHS.<sup>259</sup> Many programs assist parents in general, regardless of gender. Several also promote marriage as the most stable environment in which to raise children.

---

<sup>255</sup> W.V. Fabricius and G. W. Suh, "Should infants and toddlers have frequent overnight parenting time with fathers? The policy debate and new data," *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 23, No. 1 (2017): 68–84, DOI: 10.1037/law0000108. A copy of the full article is on file at the Commission offices.

<sup>256</sup> Scott Behson, PhD and Nathan Robbins, "The Effect of Involved Fatherhood on Families and How Fathers can be Supported both at the Workplace and in the Home," Paper to be presented at the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) Division for Social Policy and Development's Expert Group Meeting on Family Policies and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, New York, 12-13 May 2016. <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/docs/egm16/BehsonRobbins.pdf>.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>258</sup> "About," *Administration for Children and Families*, last modified January 26, 2022, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/about>.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is intentionally geared toward the promotion of two-parent families, and eligibility is principally focused on mothers. For example, prerequisites to receiving TANF cash benefits include cooperation with the Department of Human Services, the Domestic Relations Section of the County Court of Common Pleas or the County Court of Common Pleas in identifying a non-custodial parent, establishing paternity and establishing an order for support. Cooperation is required unless the applicant/recipient establishes good cause for not doing so, which can include that:

- The child was conceived as a result of incest or rape;
- Legal proceedings for the adoption of the child are pending before a court;
- The applicant or recipient is currently being assisted by a public or licensed private social agency while the decision is being made whether to relinquish the child for adoption and the discussions have not progressed for more than three months; or
- Establishing paternity or obtaining child or spousal support increases the risk to the family of further domestic violence.<sup>260</sup>

Within ACF are programs that promote nuclear families, including the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) Program. The HMRF programs are specifically designed to help interested adults and youth build stronger relationships, marriages, father-child engagement, and families. There are currently 110 grant awards to various organizations in 30 states to provide activities to promote healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood promotion activities, including grants under the Family, Relationship, and Marriage Education Works (FRAMEWorks) to promote activities for adults.<sup>261</sup>

One of the HMRF grantees in Pennsylvania is the Children’s Aid Society of Clearfield County (CASCC). CASCC operates the Real Relationships project to offer comprehensive marriage and relationship education and skills training through to residents of Clearfield County and eight adjacent counties (Blair, Cambria, Cameron, Centre, Clinton, Elk, Indiana, and Jefferson). Real Relationships’ target population is low-income, at-risk families, couples, individuals, and youth in rural central Pennsylvania. The ultimate goals of the Real Relationships project include improving family functioning and well-being, increasing economic stability and mobility, reducing poverty, and helping young people make a successful transition to adulthood. CASCC provides services for four main program areas:

- education in high schools about the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting
- providing marriage and relationship education/skills through weekly classes for at-risk youth ages 18-24-years-old
- offering pre-marital education and marriage skills training for engaged couples and couples interested in marriage

---

<sup>260</sup> PA Department of Human Services, *Pennsylvania State TANF Plan 2021*, <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Assistance/Documents/TANF%20State%20Plan%20effective%20date%20October%202021%20Clean%20080421.pdf>, 43.

<sup>261</sup> “Healthy Marriage & Responsible Fatherhood,” *US Department of Health & Human Services*, accessed January 18, 2024, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/healthy-marriage-responsible-fatherhood>.

- providing marriage enhancement and marriage skills training for married couples.<sup>262</sup>

### *Co-Parenting*

The fundamental premise underlying advocacy for joint custody and the call for an approach to child custody decisions that begins with the presumption that equal, shared custody is in the best interests of the child is that children do better overall if they have opportunities to be in the presence and under the supervision of both parents. When parents divorce, or were never married and do not cohabit, this by necessity means that the child must divide their time between the mother's household and the father's household to benefit from both parents' presence in their lives. One of the suppositions for co-parenting and shared custody as a starting point is that in most cases, there is no justifiable reason to favor one parent over the other. All things equal, there also does not appear to be much justification for giving one parent more decision-making authority over a child than the other. Parenting plans and custody agreements can and should be negotiated to work out details of instances when one parent or the other must be given sole decision-making authority.

Various studies have concluded that active father involvement in the lives of their children can have a mitigating effect on the negative impact of divorce on developmental outcomes. It is not simply a "quantity versus quality" dynamic, but rather a combination of both that revolves around the nature of the interpersonal relationship between father and child. Equal time can lessen the impact of "traditional" visitation schedules in which the father has the child every other weekend, alternate holidays, and a few weeks during school summer break. Studies have found that the relatively limited time spent with fathers can create a context in which "Dad time" becomes recreational time, with less discipline and more indulgence to "make up" for missed opportunities. Additionally, studies have found that active parenting time with each parent is extremely beneficial. This can create a greater bond and opportunity for role-modeling in the execution of routine daily activities, such as cooking meals, running errands, getting ready for school, doing homework and going to appointments. These opportunities are enhanced by the child spending overnights with the non-residential parent.<sup>263</sup>

In 2018, the *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* produced a two special issues: Special Issues on Shared Physical Custody Parts I and II: Recent Research, Advances, and Applications.<sup>264</sup>

---

<sup>262</sup> "Healthy Marriage & Responsible Fatherhood Grantee Locations," *US Department of Health and Human Services*, accessed January 18, 2024, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/map/healthy-marriage-responsible-fatherhood-grantee-locations>.

<sup>263</sup> Ryan D. Schroeder, Ph.D., "The Effect of Joint Physical Custody Following Divorce on Children and Adolescents," National Parents Organization, 2019.

<sup>264</sup> *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 59, No. 4 and 5, (2018), <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/wjdr20/59/4>. The Journal, established in 1977 as the *Journal of Divorce*, is "an interdisciplinary, international journal focused on the study of changes in and the complexity of family structure, how children and adults adjust to these changes, and the clinical skills, legal resources, and policy factors that can help families in the aftermath of family transitions." In 2024 the name of the Journal was changed to *Family Transitions* and its scope broadened to "an inclusive array of family structures and transitions, including, but not limited to, adoption and foster families, LGBTQIA+ families, cohabiting families, first-marriage families, separated and/or divorced families, single parent families, remarriage and stepfamilies, transnational and multicultural families, multigenerational families, and multi-residence families."

One article in is of special note to this study. A meta-analysis of 60 studies of joint custody versus sole physical custody's impact on children's outcomes looked at three of the factors that have been cited as the variables that have the most impact on the success of joint physical custody. The analysis found that quality of parent-child relationships, family income and the level of conflict between parents were not the decisive factors in determining children's outcomes in joint custody. While the study acknowledged that children may benefit from high-quality relationships with their parents, higher family income, and low conflict between their parents, joint physical custody still provides more overall benefits to children than sole physical custody. This finding could have implications for how custody factors are weighed in custody proceedings.<sup>265</sup>

More recent research has found that responsible fatherhood programs that include co-parents and expanded curricula can have greater impacts on fathers' family involvement. This conclusion is based in part on the evidence that the best predictor of a father's involvement with his child is the quality of his relationship with the child's mother, regardless of family structure.<sup>266</sup>

### ***Financial Stability***

Single fathers face many barriers, not the least of which is the ability to financially support their children. Steady employment is fundamental to the ability of a father to provide financial stability to their child. For fathers who dropped out of school and have not received enough education or job training, their ability to find and maintain consistent employment is challenged. There are several federal programs that are designed to help individuals prepare for and obtain good-paying jobs. The Library of Congress maintains a listing of online resources for employment opportunities. Many of these resources are focused on justice-involved adults, young adults, or adolescents, as well as veterans, service members, and individuals with disabilities.

#### *General Employment Assistance Programs*

##### [Apprenticeship.gov](https://www.apprenticeship.gov)

Apprenticeship.gov is an official website affiliated with the U.S. Department of Labor, through its Office of Apprenticeship (OA). The OA promotes and helps employers and organizations cultivate quality Registered Apprenticeship opportunities for interested workers seeking higher-skilled, higher-paying jobs. The OA oversees the National Registered Apprenticeship System, which is composed of employers, industry associations, labor, education providers, apprenticeship industry intermediaries, state apprenticeship agencies, and other

---

<sup>265</sup> Linda Nielsen, "Joint Versus Sole Physical Custody: Children's Outcomes Independent of Parent-Child Relationships, Income and Conflict in 60 Studies," *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 59, No. 4 (2018): 247-281, DOI: 10.1080/10502556.2018.1454204.

<sup>266</sup> Carolyn Pape Cowan, Ph.D., Alan J. Hawkins, Ph.D., Philip A. Cowan, Ph.D., "Responsible Fatherhood Programs: Children Benefit from a More Integrated Family Approach," Society for Research in Child Development, Child Evidence Brief No. 14 (2022), <https://www.srcd.org/research/briefs-fact-sheets/child-evidence-briefs#:~:text=Child%20Evidence%20Briefs%20are%20authored,lives%20of%20children%20and%20families>.

stakeholders.<sup>267</sup> The OA derives authority for its role from the National Apprenticeship Act<sup>268</sup> while apprenticeship program requirements are found within federal regulations promulgated by the Department of Labor.<sup>269</sup>

The website serves as a career resource for those considering starting a career through an apprenticeship. According to the site's fact sheet, Registered Apprenticeships are industry-driven career pathways "where employers can develop and prepare their future workforce, and individuals can obtain paid work experience, receive progressive wage increases, classroom instruction, and a portable, nationally recognized credential."<sup>270</sup> The fact sheet lists all the different industries in which Registered Apprenticeship programs are available, including advanced manufacturing, agriculture, care economy (including social services and education), construction, cybersecurity, energy, financial services, health care, hospitality, information technology, public service, and more. The fact sheet states that "93 percent of apprentices who complete a registered apprenticeship retain employment, with an average annual salary of \$77,000."<sup>271</sup>

The website also provides interactive clickable links that allow an individual to search for available apprenticeships. In addition, the site provides articles to explore for those who are new to the workforce, those career seekers who have barriers to the workforce (such as a criminal record), and information for service members and veterans. To assist individuals interested in pursuing an apprenticeship, the website provides video tutorials with commentary from individuals who found success through various apprenticeship programs. The site also has a step-by-step checklist on how to become an apprentice and provides additional resources such as access to news and events for the Advisory Committee on Apprenticeship, Inflation Reduction Act apprenticeship resources, data and statistics, apprenticeship job finder, and information on other relevant legislation, regulations, and guidance related to apprenticeships.<sup>272</sup>

### CareerOneStop

CareerOneStop is an online career resource sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor. The website allows an individual to create an occupational profile based on one's location and a self-assessment of one's skills, interests, values, and experience. To set up an occupational profile, an account must be created through CareerOneStop.<sup>273</sup> The interactive site also allows you to explore career options, find relevant training, search for available jobs, find local help, access its career toolkit, find temp agencies, and review its resources for veterans, workers with criminal

---

<sup>267</sup> "About Us," *ApprenticeshipUSA*, accessed August 10, 2023, <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/about-us>.

<sup>268</sup> The National Apprenticeship Act, 50 Stat. 664; 29 U.S.C. § 50.

<sup>269</sup> 29 C.F.R., Part 29.

<sup>270</sup> "What is a Registered Apprenticeship," *ApprenticeshipUSA*, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/employers/registered-apprenticeship-program>.

<sup>271</sup> ApprenticeshipUSA, *Fact Sheet: Earn While You Learn Today* (Aug. 2022), [dol-industry-factsheet-careerseeker-v10.pdf](https://www.apprenticeship.gov/factsheet-careerseeker-v10.pdf).

<sup>272</sup> "Career Seekers," *ApprenticeshipUSA*, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/career-seekers>.

<sup>273</sup> Explore Careers, *CareerOneStop*, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://www.careeronestop.org/ExploreCareers/explore-careers.aspx>.

convictions, 55 and over workers, workers with disabilities, young adults ages 14 – 24, entry level workers, and Spanish speaking individuals.<sup>274</sup>

CareerOneStop also provides a frequently asked questions (FAQ) section, a news center with a blog and outreach materials, data sources, how-to guides, and a video library that allows individuals to learn about different careers, skills and abilities related to different careers, and tutorial videos. The videos also provide Spanish translation transcripts for Spanish speaking job seekers.<sup>275</sup>

The website also provides access to its Competency Model Clearinghouse, a resource that explains the Industry Competency Model Initiative (ICMI). The ICMI allows partners to develop and maintain models of the foundation and technical competencies necessary in vital industries and sectors in the American economy. This serves as a resource to inform discussions among industry leaders, educators, economic developers, and other stakeholders while they collaborate to identify specific employer skill needs, develop competency-based curricula and training models, develop industry-defined performance indicators, skill standards, and certifications, and develop resources for career exploration and guidance.<sup>276</sup>

### Employment and Training Administration

The Employment and Training Administration (ETA) is a federal agency within the U.S. Department of Labor. The ETA provides information and online resources regarding apprenticeship programs, employment services, and grants. In addition, ETA administers federal government job training and worker dislocation programs, federal grants to states for public employment service programs, and unemployment insurance benefits. The ETA's mission is "to contribute to the more efficient functioning of the U.S. labor market by providing high-quality job training, employment, labor market information, and income maintenance services primarily through state and local workforce development systems."<sup>277</sup>

The ETA also administers programs and initiatives for individuals with disabilities who are seeking employment and provides information on workplace accommodations and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and information for disabled entrepreneurs. The ETA's programs and initiatives for individuals with disabilities are designed to facilitate programmatic and physical accessibility through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).<sup>278</sup> The WIOA aims to increase employment, training, education, and support services for individuals with barriers (including individuals with disabilities) to employment and support the alignment of workforce investment, education, and economic development systems. Among other objectives, the Act was also enacted to improve the quality and labor market relevance of workforce investment,

---

<sup>274</sup> "Resources For," *CareerOneStop*, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://www.careeronestop.org/ResourcesFor/resources-for.aspx>.

<sup>275</sup> "Video Library," *CareerOneStop*, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://www.careeronestop.org/Videos/video-library.aspx>.

<sup>276</sup> "Competency Model Clearinghouse," *CareerOneStop*, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://www.careeronestop.org/competencymodel/home.aspx>.

<sup>277</sup> "About Us," *U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration*, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/about>.

<sup>278</sup> The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Pub. L. 113-128, 28 U.S.C. ch. 32.

education, and economic development efforts to provide America's workers with the necessary skills and credentials to secure employment with family-sustaining wages.<sup>279</sup>

Some other program areas of the ETA include farmworkers, foreign labor certification, veterans, reentry (of formerly incarcerated individuals), and older workers. The ETA's website also provides research and evaluation resources, as well as information on all laws and regulations surrounding its purpose.<sup>280</sup>

### Goodwill

Goodwill Industries International (Goodwill), based in Maryland, operates a network of more than 150-community-based organizations in the U.S. and Canada, with a presence in 12 other countries. Goodwill's mission is to strengthen the communities its organization and stores are located in. Its mission also includes helping eliminate barriers to opportunity to help communities reach their full potential through learning and the power of work.<sup>281</sup>

According to its website, Goodwill has helped over 128,998 people train for banking, IT, and health care careers, to name a few. In doing so, the organization helped job seeking individuals obtain the necessary support services they need to find a job or new career. Some of those support services include English language training, additional education, and access to transportation and childcare. Much of this assistance is provided through local Goodwill organizations. Goodwill's website provides searchable resources, such as links to career centers and other online resources, to help job seeking individuals get started.<sup>282</sup>

### Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a service of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment (ODEP). It was developed in collaboration with West Virginia University and private industry throughout the United States. The network now has a global reach and provides free, expert, and confidential guidance related to job accommodations and disability employment issues. Specifically, JAN provides one-on-one practical guidance and technical assistance on job accommodation solutions, Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance and related legislation, as well as advice on self-employment and business ownership for people with disabilities.<sup>283</sup>

JAN's website provides a collection of resources such as an ADA library, which provides a summation of the ADA and its requirements, as well as legislative updates on the topic of disabilities law and amendments to the ADA. The ADA library also provides sample ADA videos and a link for questions and answers for small businesses. Another searchable resource on JAN's

---

<sup>279</sup> 29 U.S.C. § 3101.

<sup>280</sup> *Supra*, n. 277.

<sup>281</sup> "About - Goodwill Industries International," *Goodwill*, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://www.goodwill.org/about/>.

<sup>282</sup> "How We Work with You - Goodwill Industries International," *Goodwill*, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://www.goodwill.org/how-we-work-with-you/>.

<sup>283</sup> "About JAN," *Job Accommodation Network*, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://askjan.org/about-us/index.cfm>.

site includes an accommodation search and publications and articles on accommodation in the workforce.<sup>284</sup>

### Ticket to Work

Ticket to Work is a program administered by the U.S. Social Security Administration. The program is free and voluntary and helps people between the ages of 18 through 64, who receive Social Security disability benefits and are interested in finding employment. The program strives to help disabled individuals receiving Social Security benefits become financially independent, while keeping their Medicare or Medicaid. Specifically, Ticket to Work helps said individuals connect with services and support organizations they need to be successful in the workforce. The website contains an interactive link to search for service providers. In addition, the website provides a listing of helpful publications on working with a disability.<sup>285</sup>

### *Employment Programs for Veterans*

#### Veteran Readiness and Employment

Formerly known as the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program, the Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program provides veterans and service members with assistance in obtaining a job or career. Some of the services include job training, education, employment accommodations, resume preparation, and job seeking skills coaching. The VR&E also helps veterans and service members start their own businesses or obtain independent living services for those who are severely disabled.<sup>286</sup>

To apply for VR&E benefits, one must not have received a dishonorable discharge from military service, and one must have a service-connected disability rating of at least 10 percent from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). If an individual was discharged from active duty before January 1, 2013, the basic period of eligibility ends 12 years from one of these dates, whichever comes later: the date one received notice of their date of separation from active duty, or the date one received their first VA service-connected disability rating. However, the basic eligibility period may be extended if the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) determines that the individual has a serious employment handicap (SEH). An SEH is a service-connected disability that significantly limits the ability to prepare for, obtain, and maintain stable employment that matches one's ability and interests.<sup>287</sup>

If an individual is discharged from active duty on or after January 1, 2013, the 12-year basic eligibility period does not apply. In other words, there is no time limit on eligibility. One may still be eligible for VR&E benefits and services if they're a current service member and have a 20 percent or higher pre-discharge disability rating (memorandum rating) and will soon leave the

---

<sup>284</sup> "ADA Library," *Job Accommodation Network*, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://askjan.org/ADA-Library.cfm>.

<sup>285</sup> "Ticket to Work," *Social Security Administration*, accessed August 13, 2023, <https://yourtickettowork.ssa.gov/>.

<sup>286</sup> "Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E)," *U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*, accessed August 13, 2023, <https://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/>.

<sup>287</sup> "Eligibility for Veteran Readiness and Employment," *U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*, accessed August 13, 2023, <https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/vocational-rehabilitation/eligibility/>.

military, or they're waiting to be discharged because of a severe illness or injury that occurred while on active duty. Once a person is eligible, they must complete an application by mail, in-person, or with the help of a trained professional. The applications go to the VA for determination.<sup>288</sup>

### *Employment-Related Programs to Assist Individuals who were Formerly Incarcerated*

#### 2nd Chances 4 Felons (2C4F)

This organization provides community support and advocacy for those impacted by the criminal justice system. Its website provides links to staffing agencies and companies that hire felons.<sup>289</sup> The website did not provide any further information and additional searches related to the organization did not yield more detailed information.

#### Career Planning for People with a Criminal Conviction

The Career Planning for People with a Criminal Conviction online resource was created to provide comprehensive career information for individuals who do not have access to the Internet. The webpage is intended for use on a secured computer system within Minnesota Department of Corrections facilities.<sup>290</sup> Originally it was created under the name "Step Ahead" and was funded from Minnesota's Department of Corrections Transition Coalition Team and the Goodwill/Easter Seals of Minnesota's Prisoner Re-Entry, a 501(c)3 nonprofit that provides job training and customized career support to eliminate barriers to work and independence.<sup>291</sup> In 2019, the name changed from "Step Ahead" to "Career Planning for People with a Criminal Conviction." The program is currently sponsored by Minnesota state colleges and universities.<sup>292</sup>

People with criminal convictions and individuals who are currently incarcerated but will soon be released can use the website to plan for a career or career training. Individuals can also participate in a job search through the site. They can also receive advice on assessing their own skills and interests, exploring new career opportunities, developing a plan, and setting goals, expanding skills, finding a job, and managing a career.<sup>293</sup>

#### Felony Record Hub

The Felony Record Hub assists felons in finding jobs, housing, and reentry programs. According to the hub's website, it is the largest free Internet resource focused on assisting felons reenter society. The Felony Record Hub website has over 70,000 monthly visitors and over 20,000

---

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>289</sup> "2nd Chances for Felons," *2nd Chances for Felons*, accessed August 10, 2023, <https://www.2ndchances4felons.com/>.

<sup>290</sup> "About Us," *Minnesota State CAREERwise*, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://careerwise.minnstate.edu/exoffenders/about-us.html>.

<sup>291</sup> "Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota: About Us," *Goodwill/Easter Seals*, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://www.goodwilleasterseals.org/about/about-us>.

<sup>292</sup> *Supra*, n. 290.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*

e-mail subscribers. The website provides interactive links that provide lists of available jobs for felons, companies that hire felons, and temp agencies that hire felons.<sup>294</sup>

In addition, the hub website provides informative legal postings on expungement of criminal records, the use of background checks, criminal law basics, and other legal topics related to criminal records and job eligibility. The site also has a FAQ section for visitors to review.<sup>295</sup>

### National Reentry Resource Center

The National Reentry Resource Center (NRRC) was established pursuant to the Second Chance Act (SCA).<sup>296</sup> The SCA was enacted in 2008 and reauthorized by the Congress in 2018. The act authorizes federal grants to government agencies and nonprofit organizations to assist formerly incarcerated individuals with reentry through employment assistance, substance use treatment, housing, family programming, mentoring, and other services. Through funding and coordination provided by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance, the NRRC provides information and guidance on reentry from life in prison to life back in the community.<sup>297</sup>

As a primary reentry resource for formerly incarcerated individuals, the NRRC works to advance the knowledge base of the reentry field. To do so, the NRRC works with SCA grantees, technical assistance providers, well-known research professionals and practitioners, to collect and develop resources and tools that can assist in the implementation of evidence-based, data-driven strategies to improve the reentry of individuals and reduce recidivism. The NRRC also distributes information and new resources on reentry, funding opportunities, and events in the field through its listserv and social media.<sup>298</sup>

The NRRC hosts several reentry clearinghouse resources including the following:

- Clean Slate Clearinghouse – This clearinghouse provides resources on juvenile and adult criminal record clearance policies in all 50 U.S. states and within U.S. territories. Clean Slate helps provide useful information to people with criminal records, legal service providers, reentry providers, and state policymakers.
- National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction – The national inventory is a searchable database available online. The database has an organized collection of statutes and regulations regarding the collateral consequences throughout the U.S., the federal system, and U.S. territories.

---

<sup>294</sup> “Start Here,” *Felony Record Hub*, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://www.felonyrecordhub.com/start-here/>.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>296</sup> The Second Chance Act, Pub. L. 110-199, 122 Stat 657.

<sup>297</sup> “About the National Reentry Resource Center,” *The National Reentry Resource Center*, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/about-national-reentry-resource-center>.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

- Public Safety Risk Assessment Clearinghouse – The Public Safety Risk Assessment Clearinghouse offers evidence-based information on using risk assessments to build safe communities.<sup>299</sup>

In addition, the NRRC keeps a listing of all Second Chance Act grantees throughout the U.S. to help provide people with connections to service providers in their communities. The NRRC also coordinates a Helpline to assist individuals about to or currently experiencing reentry.<sup>300</sup>

### Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO)

The Reentry Employment Opportunities program is authorized pursuant to § 169 of the WIOA. The program provides funding for youth involved in the justice system and for young adults and adults who were formerly incarcerated. The REO is designed to “develop strategies and partnerships that facilitate the implementation of successful programs at the state and local levels that will improve the workforce outcomes for this population.”<sup>301</sup> In 2023, the REO received \$115,000,000 in appropriated funds.<sup>302</sup>

REO services include case management, occupational skills training leading to industry recognized credentials, employment, work experience, tutoring, mentoring, high school diploma equivalency preparation, credit retrieval, restorative justice opportunities, summer jobs linked to academic and occupational learning, leadership development, utilizing non-profit legal services providers to mitigate juvenile and criminal records, diversion from adjudication, and follow-up.<sup>303</sup>

### Restoration of Rights Project (RRP)

The Restoration of Rights Project provides an online 50-state comparison of each state’s limits on use of criminal records in employment, licensing, and housing. Established in 2017, the RRP is part of the Collateral Consequences Resource Center in partnership with the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, National Legal Aide and Defender Association, National HIRE Network, Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, and Paper Prisons Initiative. The site contains detailed state-by-state analyses of the law in each U.S. jurisdiction relating to restoration of rights and status after an individual is arrested or convicted.<sup>304</sup>

The resources that comprise the RRP were originally published in 2006. Over the years, the information and charts have been expanded and updated to broaden their scope and to account for the many changes in the law. All project resources are now organized into a unified online platform.<sup>305</sup>

---

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>301</sup> “About,” *U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration*, accessed August 12, 2023, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/reentry/about>.

<sup>302</sup> “Fact Sheet,” *Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO)*, accessed August 12, 2023, <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/reentry/pdf/REO-Fact-Sheet-5.15.23.pdf>.

<sup>303</sup> *Supra*, n. 301.

<sup>304</sup> “About the Restoration of Rights Project,” *Restoration of Rights Project*, accessed August 13, 2023, <https://ccresourcecenter.org/restoration-about/>.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*

The project's website also notes that as of 2021, federal agencies and contractors are not permitted to inquire into an applicant's criminal history until after a conditional offer is made. The site further notes that the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission is interpreting Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964<sup>306</sup> to effectively prohibit employers from discriminating based on an individual's criminal history, absent a justifying business necessity. Alternatively, federal law does disqualify applicants with certain criminal convictions from employment in banking and transportation, and in a wide variety of state-licensed jobs in health care and education.<sup>307</sup> Though the RRP provides summaries and analyses of different jurisdiction's laws pertaining to restoration of rights, the project is not a law firm or legal services organization, and as such, it does not and cannot provide responses to legal questions.<sup>308</sup>

### ***Participation in Educational Planning***

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is a federal statute, initially enacted in 1965 pertaining to child education and families in poverty. The ESEA was reauthorized in 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and currently focuses on providing equal access to quality education in the U.S. The ESEA funds primary and secondary education with an emphasis on high standards and accountability. Federal funds provided in the ESEA are authorized for professional development, instructional materials, resources to support educational programs, and encouragement of greater parent involvement.<sup>309</sup>

To achieve its aim of encouraging greater parental involvement, the ESEA provides local education agencies (LEAs) funds if the agency conducts outreach to all parents and family members and implements programs, activities, and procedures for the involvement of parents and family members. The federal law requires that LEAs establish written policies with and distribute to parents and families that facilitate and build a capacity for their involvement in their children's education.<sup>310</sup>

These statutory requirements and funds are not specific to only fathers; however. If they are granted to schools and other LEAs, all parents (unless excluded under legal circumstances) will have the right to be involved in their children's education. Though this is not a father-specific program or initiative, it is worth noting that all parental involvement (mother and father) is encouraged at the federal level through conditional funding to LEAs.

---

<sup>306</sup> The Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub. L. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241.

<sup>307</sup> "50-State Comparison: Limits on Use of Criminal Record in Employment," *The Restoration of Rights Project*, accessed August 12, 2023, <https://ccresourcecenter.org/state-restoration-profiles/50-state-comparisoncomparison-of-criminal-records-in-licensing-and-employment/>.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>309</sup> The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Pub. L. 89-10, 79 Stat. 27; 20 U.S.C. ch. 70; Joint State Government Commission, *Training Mandates on Pennsylvania Public Schools: Report of the Advisory Committee*, (June 2023), 22.

<sup>310</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 6318(a).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), previously known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) and reauthorized by the IDEA in 1990 (and subsequently reauthorized again in 2004 and 2015), is a federal law that requires States and LEAs to offer a free appropriate public education to all eligible children with disabilities and requires special education and related services to those children. The IDEA specifically provides federal requirements on how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities.<sup>311</sup>

The IDEA also authorizes what are known as formula grants to states to support special education and other services such as early intervention. In addition, IDEA authorizes the provision of discretionary grants to state educational agencies, institutions of higher education, and other nonprofit organizations. These grants generally are available to “help support research, demonstrations, technical assistance and dissemination, technology development, personnel preparation and development, and parent-training and -information centers.”<sup>312</sup>

The IDEA does not specifically provide funding initiatives for fatherhood programs related to education; however, the IDEA acknowledges in its findings provisions that state educational agencies, and local educational agencies partnering with parents of children with disabilities, and other individuals and organizations, can best improve the education system to address special needs. The IDEA supports and encourages parent training and information activities to assist parents of children with special needs and to ensure the involvement of parents in planning and decision-making with respect to early intervention, educational, and transitional services.<sup>313</sup>

As such, IDEA authorizes the awarding of grants to support parent training and information centers to assist parents in navigating the developmental and academic achievement goals that have been established for their children. The IDEA also provides support in the form of grant funds for community parent resource centers. Again, though these are not a father-specific grant programs or initiatives, it is worth noting because it applies to all parents, including fathers, indirectly.<sup>314</sup>

---

<sup>311</sup> The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Pub. L. 101-476, 104 Stat. 1142; 20 U.S.C. § 1400 *et. seq.*; The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Pub. L. 114-95, 129 Stat. 1802; 20 U.S.C. ch. 28 § 1001 *et. seq.*; “About IDEA,” *U.S. Department of Education*, accessed August 1, 2023, <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/>.

<sup>312</sup> “About IDEA,” *U.S. Department of Education*, accessed August 1, 2023, <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/>.

<sup>313</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1450(3), (4).

<sup>314</sup> U.S.C. § 1471(a)(1).

## PERMANENT COMMISSION

---

Ohio, Florida, and South Carolina have been cited as states that have established a permanent commission on fatherhood designed with the intent to help promote responsible fathers and strengthen families. Connecticut (Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative CFI),<sup>315</sup> and Hawaii<sup>316</sup> also have similar commissions that were established during the early period of the responsible fatherhood movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Illinois established the Council on Responsible Fatherhood; however, the council lapsed and no longer receives funding.<sup>317</sup> All these commissions are legislatively authorized and operate within a state government agency with responsibilities related to social services and family welfare. Some commissions, such as Hawaii's and Illinois' have no dedicated staff, while others like Connecticut and Ohio maintain staff that work to effectuate the goals and projects of the commission. The commissions' memberships are "...structured to maximize involvement of individuals and agencies across multiple agencies and organizations."<sup>318</sup> The OCF has 21 members, while Connecticut's commission has 35 to 40 members, Illinois began with 21 members, and Hawaii has eight members.<sup>319</sup>

### *Ohio Commission on Fatherhood*

The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood (OCF) has been cited as a model program. Its longevity and has allowed for surveys and studies of its effectiveness to be completed. It is a "...statewide commission funding community-based programs that serve low-income fathers..."<sup>320</sup> These OCF-funded programs have benefitted participating fathers, many of which grew up in fatherless homes and lack experience and interaction with a responsible father.<sup>321</sup> The mission of the OCF is to "enhance the well-being of Ohio's children by providing opportunities for fathers to become better parents, partners, and providers."<sup>322</sup>

---

<sup>315</sup> C.G.S.A. § 17b-27b.

<sup>316</sup> HRS § 577E-1.

<sup>317</sup> 20 ILCS 3928/20 repealed by its own terms.

<sup>318</sup> Jessica Pearson, PhD, "State Approaches to Including Fathers in Programs and Policies Dealing with Children and Families," *Fatherhood Research & Practice Network*, (May 2018): 3-4.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>320</sup> "Championing Fatherhood," *National Fatherhood Initiative*, accessed October 25, 2023, <https://www.fatherhood.org/championing-fatherhood/national-fatherhood-initiative-and-ohio-commission-on-fatherhood-commemorate-multi-decade-partnership>.

<sup>321</sup> The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood Brochure (Revised July 2019).

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*

Since its inception in 1999, the OCF promotes responsible fatherhood and works to empower families and their communities through training, grant funding, and public initiatives. In addition, the OCF provides policy and law recommendations impacting families.<sup>323</sup> The recommendations are memorialized in a report for review by the Ohio state legislature. The OCF also holds meetings at least five times a year to discuss its activities and business, each of which is open to the public.<sup>324</sup>

The OCF was created in the Department of Children and Youth and is currently part of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and located within the Office of Family Assistance. Its members include legislative members from Ohio's House of Representatives and Senate. The commission also includes the Governor (or his/her designee), one representative from the judicial branch of government appointed by the Chief Justice of the Ohio State Supreme Court, directors of health, children and youth, rehabilitation and correction, mental health and substance use disorder services, youth services, and education and workforce (or their designees). The OCF must also consist of at least one representative of the Ohio Family and Children First Cabinet Council and five representatives of the public appointed by the Governor. Said members of the public must have "extensive experience in issues related to fatherhood."<sup>325</sup>

Members appointed to the OCF serve two-year terms. However, a member appointed from Ohio's House of Representatives serves on the commission until the end of the General Assembly from which the member was appointed or until the member ceases to serve in the General Assembly in which the member serves at the time of appointment, whichever occurs first. The Governor or his or her designee serves until he or she ceases to be Governor.<sup>326</sup> From the members, the OCF is required to elect a chairperson in every odd-numbered year. The Governor is required to appoint an individual to serve as the commission's executive director, who serves at the pleasure of the Governor and reports to the Director of Children and Youth or the director's designee. The Department of Children and Youth provides staff and other support services the Commission needs to fulfill its duties.<sup>327</sup>

As mentioned previously, the OCF funds several community-based programs designed to benefit families and low-income fathers within Ohio. Some of these programs focus directly on fathers, while others focus on family and provide indirect assistance to fathers. OCF-funded community-based programs (and the amount of OCF funding each receives) include the following:

---

<sup>323</sup> *Supra*, n. 321.

<sup>324</sup> "About Us," *Ohio Commission on Fatherhood*, accessed October 25, 2023, <https://fatherhood.ohio.gov/about>.

<sup>325</sup> R.C. § 5101.34(A)(1)-(6).

<sup>326</sup> R.C. § 5101.34(B).

<sup>327</sup> R.C. § 5101.341(A)-(B).

<b>Table 1</b>	
<b>OCF-Funded Programs for Fathers in 2022</b>	
<b>Programs</b>	<b>OCF Funding Amount</b>
Action for Children	\$215,000
Community Action Organization (CAO) of Scioto County	75,000
Early Childhood Resource Center	215,000
Forever Dads	215,000
National African American Male Wellness Agency	75,000
Passages Connecting Fathers and Families	215,000
Pathway, Inc.	75,000
Starts within Organization	75,000
Talbert House	215,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,405,000</b>

Source: Ohio Commission on Fatherhood, *State Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report*, p. 7.

The commission is permitted to accept gifts, grants, donations, contributions, benefits, and other funds from any public agency or private source to carry out its duties. The funds are deposited directly into the OCF Fund, created in the state treasury. In addition, OCF receives federal grant money from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)<sup>328</sup> program funding. TANF is a "...time-limited program that helps families when parents or other relatives cannot provide for the family's basic needs. The federal government provides grants to states to run the TANF program."<sup>329</sup> Federal law allows states the flexibility to operate eligible programs under TANF designed to do the following.

- Help needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives.
- End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage.
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies.
- Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.<sup>330</sup>

<sup>328</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 601 *et seq.*

<sup>329</sup> "What is TANF," *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*, accessed October 27, 2023, <https://www.hhs.gov/answers/programs-for-families-and-children/what-is-tanf/index.html>.

<sup>330</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 601(a)(1)-(4).

States then administer their own related programs and decide on aspects such as program design, type and amount of assistance payments, range of services to be provided, and qualification requirements for benefits.<sup>331</sup> In 2023, the OCF received an additional \$250,000 from TANF “...to expend on TANF-allowable expenses to support their commission activities,” according to Ohio Governor Mike DeWine’s Executive Order 2022-09D, executed on April 29, 2022.<sup>332</sup> Table 2 illustrates the number of TANF-eligible fathers served in OCF-funded programs in 2022.

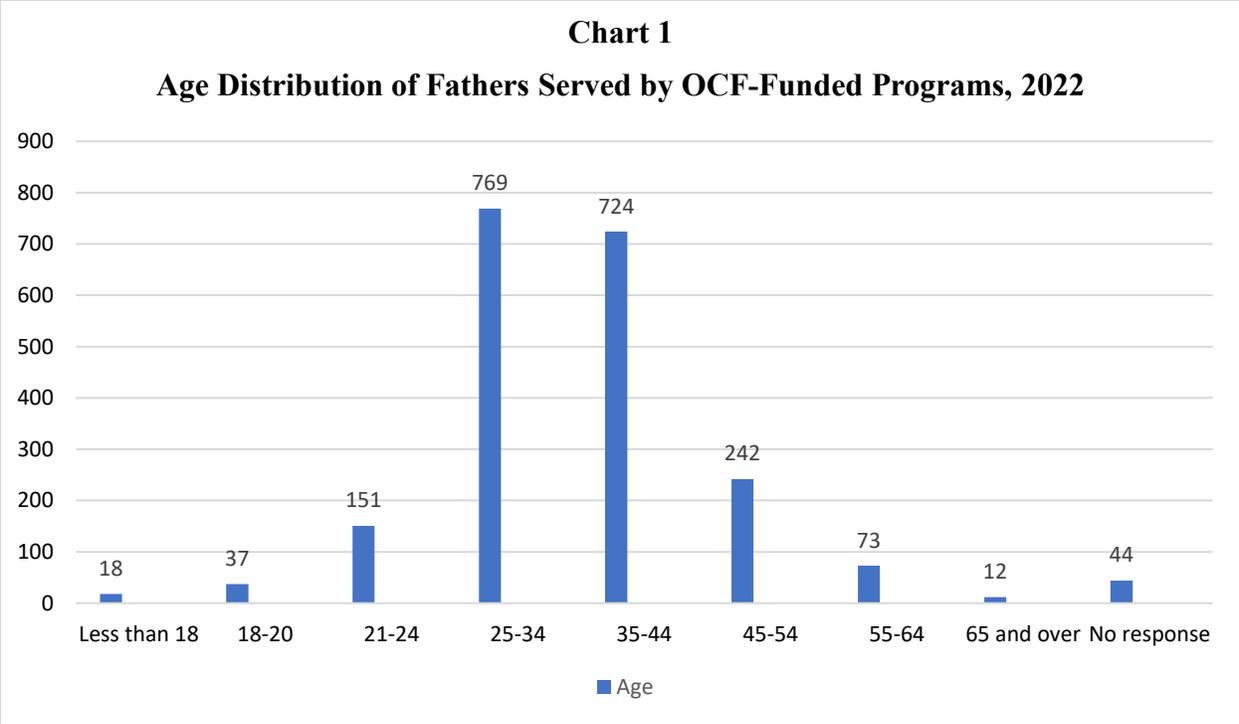
<b>Table 2</b>	
<b>TANF-Eligible Fathers Served in OCF-Funded Programs in 2022</b>	
<b>Programs</b>	<b>No. of TANF-Eligible Fathers Served</b>
Action for Children	222
Community Action Organization (CAO) of Scioto County	102
Early Childhood Resource Center	297
Forever Dads	248
National African American Male Wellness Agency	62
Passages Connecting Fathers and Families	202
Pathway, Inc.	142
Starts within Organization	109
Talbert House	322
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,706</b>

Source: Ohio Commission on Fatherhood, *State Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report*, p. 7.

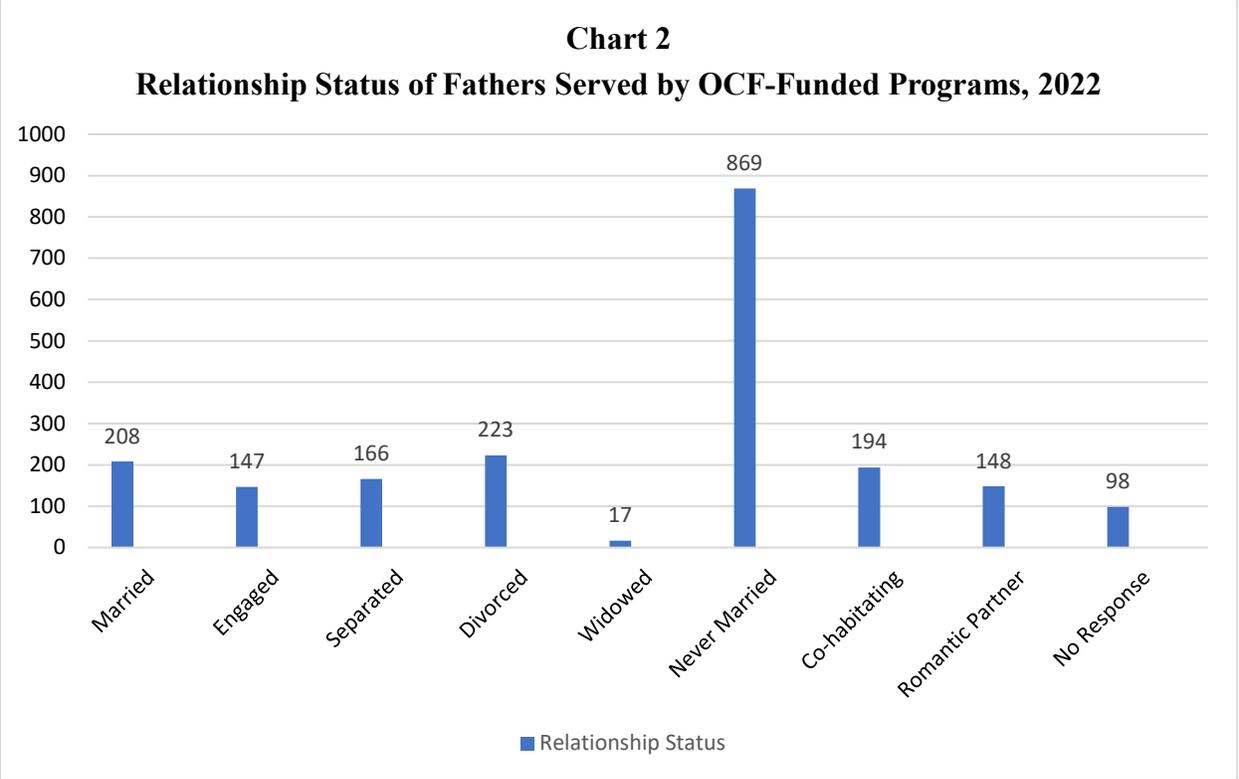
As has been noted previously, fathers differ in many demographic ways. The programs that OCF funds serve many fathers of varying demographics, with a majority of fathers participating in these programs being between the ages of 25-44. Most of the fathers served by OCF-funded programs were also never married and most were either Caucasian or African American. See Charts 1, 2, and 3 below for a complete breakdown in demographics by age, relationship status, and race.

<sup>331</sup> *Supra*, n. 10.

<sup>332</sup> Ohio Executive Order 2022-09D (Apr. 29, 2022).

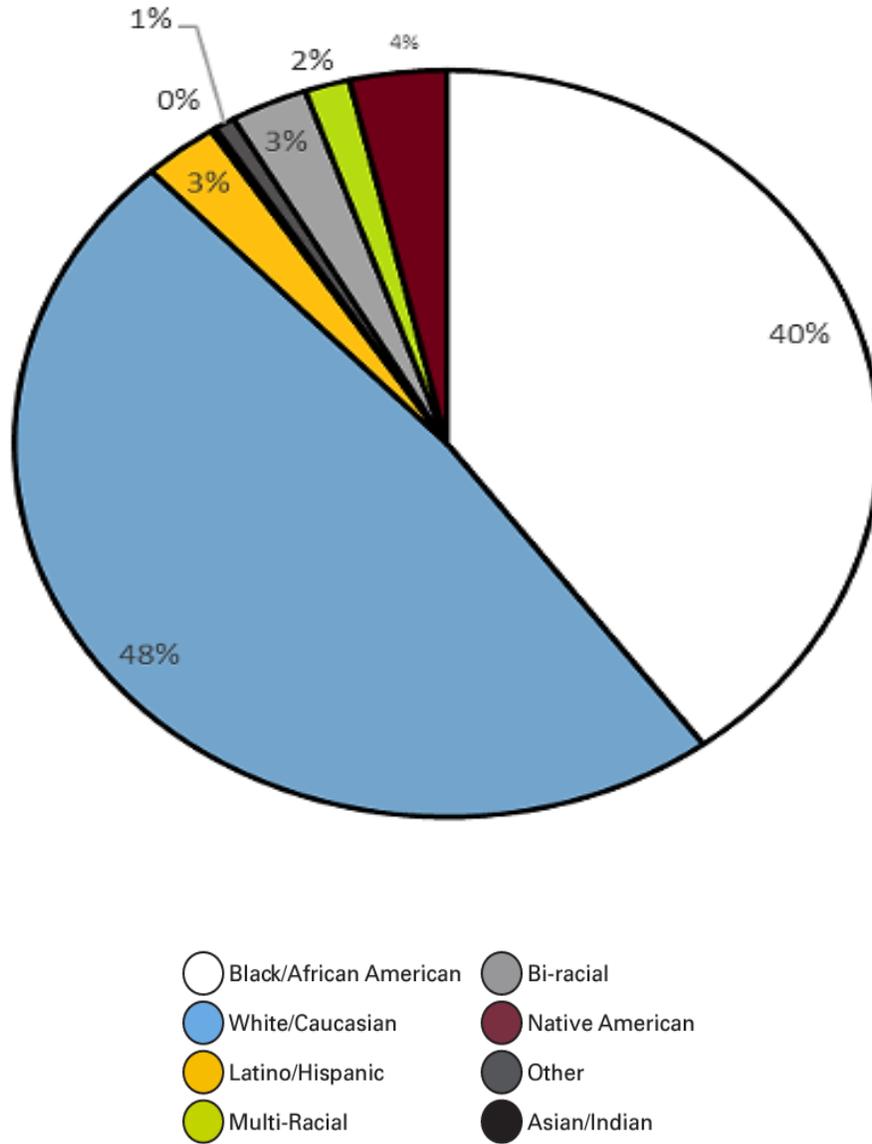


Source: Ohio Commission on Fatherhood, *State Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report*, p. 12.



Source: Ohio Commission on Fatherhood, *State Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report*, p. 12.

**Chart 3**  
**Race/Ethnicity of All Fathers**  
**Served in Responsible Fatherhood Programs**  
**2022**



Source: Ohio Commission on Fatherhood, State Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report, p. 12.

The programs financially supported by OCF have been mostly well-received by the fathers who have utilized them. See TABLE 3.

<b>Table 3</b>		
<b>Father Satisfaction with OCF-Funded Programs, 2022</b>		
<b>Query</b>	<b>No. of Fathers Selecting “Strongly Agree”</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
The staff gave me the help I needed.	655	71%
The staff did a good job.	696	76
I would recommend this program to others.	711	77
I learned information that I will apply in my life.	675	73
I have a better understanding of my rights as a father.	603	66
My questions were answered.	659	72
I plan to return for more help.	530	58

Source: Ohio Commission on Fatherhood, *State Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report*, p. 9.

### ***The Florida Fatherhood Initiative***

Prior to 2003, Florida had a statewide commission specifically designed to tackle issues of fatherhood. However, the commission, known as the Florida Commission on Responsible Fatherhood was repealed in 2003 and replaced with the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives.<sup>333</sup> The new commission was intended to take a broader approach to strengthening families by establishing statewide strategies to promote safe, violence-free, substance-abuse-free, respectful, nurturing, and responsible parenting, including connection or re-connection of responsible parents, both mothers and fathers, with their children.

Membership on the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives is established by the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, each of which appoints six members, with at least half of the commissioners representing the private sector.<sup>334</sup>

In July of 2022, Florida redrew attention specifically to fathers by enacting a law requiring its Department of Children and Families (DCF) to contract with a not-for-profit entity for the development and implementation of the Responsible Fatherhood Initiative. The initiative is directed to provide opportunity for every father in the state to obtain information and inspiration to enhance his abilities as a father. The law recognizes that fathers often face great challenges and

<sup>333</sup> West's F.S.A. § 383.0112 Repealed by Laws 2003, c. 2003-122, § 2.

<sup>334</sup> *Florida Fathers*, accessed December 7, 2023, <https://www.floridafathers.org/>.

would benefit from increased support.<sup>335</sup> In 2022, the Florida Legislature appropriated over \$68.9 million dollars for the Initiative.<sup>336</sup>

At minimum, the initiative must provide several specific resources for fathers. For example, the law requires the initiative include a website and other related electronic resources for fathers regarding effective parenting, identify areas in which support would enable him to become a more effective father, and be connected to such support, including, but not limited to, support provided by organizations receiving grants.<sup>337</sup> The initiative must also use materials from the fatherhood media campaign found within the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, as well as include print, television, digital, and social media elements and public events. The Initiative is authorized to utilize appearances by and involvement from public figures and influencers.<sup>338</sup>

The not-for-profit entity the DCF contracts with to implement the initiative must have history of focusing on responsible fatherhood and must have the organizational capacity to manage a statewide initiative and carry out the requirements for the initiative. In administering the initiative, the entity must work in tandem with other relevant Florida state agencies and private organizations.<sup>339</sup>

In addition, Florida law requires the DCF to award grants to not-for-profit community-based organizations to address the needs of fathers. Types of grants include those “...that comprehensively address the needs of fathers, such as assisting them in finding employment, managing child support obligations, transitioning from a period of incarceration, accessing health care, understanding child development, and enhancing parenting skills.”<sup>340</sup> The law further requires that services provided must be tailored to the needs of the father being served and case management services must be provided by the grant recipient, either directly or by subcontract, to the fathers served. Grants are prioritized based on need in a geographic area and the population to be served by the grant indicated by, at a minimum, the following factors.

- Unemployment rates
- Incarceration rates
- Housing instability
- The number of single-parent households
- The number of public benefit recipients
- Graduation rates
- Levels of academic achievement<sup>341</sup>

---

<sup>335</sup> West’s F.S.A. § 409.1464(1).

<sup>336</sup> “The Responsible Fatherhood Initiative: Fathers First,” *Florida Department of Children and Families*, accessed December 7, 2023, <https://myflfamilies.com/fatherhood>.

<sup>337</sup> West’s F.S.A. § 409.1464(2)(a).

<sup>338</sup> West’s F.S.A. § 409.1464(2)(b)-(c).

<sup>339</sup> West’s F.S.A. § 409.1464(3)(a)(1)-(2), (b).

<sup>340</sup> West’s F.S.A. § 409.1465(2)(a).

<sup>341</sup> West’s F.S.A. § 409.1465(3)(a)(1)-(7).

Grant priority also depends on other factors, such as whether an applicant has a primary mission of, or a history of a significant focus on and effective work towards, addressing the needs of men in their role as fathers, as well as an applicant's current involvement in the community being served.<sup>342</sup>

In October of 2023, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis launched a statewide community network and the *Father First* website as part of the Fatherhood Initiative. The *Father First* initiative includes educational programs, mentorship programs and one-on-one support promoting responsible and involved fatherhood.<sup>343</sup>

Florida's Fatherhood Initiative could help serve as one example of a successful statewide model on increasing support and resources for fathers.

### ***South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families***

The South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families (Fathers and Families) was established in 2002 to expand statewide fatherhood initiatives. Fathers and Families initially grew out of a statewide initiative in 1997 by The Sisters of Charity Foundation, which was aimed at reducing child poverty through the reengagement of fathers with families. Fathers and Families operates as a public-private partnership with the South Carolina Department of Social Services.<sup>344</sup> The organization claims to have positively impacted more than 25,000 South Carolina fathers and 56,000 South Carolina children.<sup>345</sup>

The center was one of 100 fatherhood initiatives nationwide to receive a federal grant from the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) and was recognized as one of the most successful OFA funded programs in the country. Through collaboration with the South Carolina Department of Social Services, the organization expanded the state's network of community-based programs by 2015. Fathers and Families provides technical support and funding for these community-based programs and raises awareness of fatherhood issues across South Carolina. The organization also collects and analyzes data for programs to be evaluated and adapted to better meet the needs of fathers across the state.<sup>346</sup>

---

<sup>342</sup> West's F.S.A. § 409.1465(3)(b), (c).

<sup>343</sup> "Governor Ron DeSantis Announces Statewide Network Established to Support Florida's Fatherhood Initiative," (Oct. 27, 2023), *Ron DeSantis Press Release*, <https://www.flgov.com/2023/10/27/governor-ron-desantis-announces-statewide-network-established-to-support-floridas-fatherhood-initiative/>.

<sup>344</sup> "Who We Are: Our History," *South Carolina Centers for Fathers and Families*, accessed December 7, 2023, <https://www.scfathersandfamilies.com/who-we-are/our-history/>.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*

The organization also incorporates digital media in its efforts to be a major resource to fathers and families. For example, the organization created “Father 365” in 2017. Father 365 was designed to help provide fathers resources for parenting tips and child support guidance via phone. Having this tool available on one’s phone has helped many fathers who do not own a computer access information they need or seek on father-related issues.<sup>347</sup>

---

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*

## PROGRAMS AFFECTING FATHERHOOD

---

### *Federal Programs and Funding Initiatives*

Due to the critical impact parents have on their children's lives, federal, state, and local governments have administered and funded parenting programs for decades, as well as private organizations. These programs have sought to help families affected by divorce, separation, domestic abuse, parental incarceration, and even the death of a parent. However, many of these programs were often more targeted at mothers than fathers or parents in general. Given the significant impact fathers have on their child's development and well-being, new attention has been given to the funding of programs that directly or indirectly target fathers and their involvement in their children's lives. The funding and administrative sources behind these programs can be found within federal, state, and local government, as well as through private non-governmental organizations and charitable organizations. Programs directly related to workforce development and employment can be found in the *Financial Stability* section at pages 68-76.

#### *Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Grant Program*

The federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has offered many fatherhood programs and initiatives through the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) since 2006. Some of the initiatives provide grant funds to states for local programs, while others engage in research analysis on how effectively existing fatherhood programs help support fathers and their families, and how they can be improved upon. Other programs provide resources available to fathers and family members for support and education. The ACF and its subsidiary offices have provided federal funds to Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) programs since 2006. Within the ACF is the Office of Family Assistance (OFA), which helps fund many of the programs. These grants are part of HHS' community-based efforts to promote strong, healthy family formation and maintenance, responsible fatherhood and parenting, and economic stability.

There are currently 110 grant awards to various organizations in 30 states to provide activities to promote healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood promotion activities. Grants cover five-year time periods, with the current cycle running from 2020-2025. The grants were awarded under three Funding Opportunities Announcements (FOAs):

- Family, Relationship, and Marriage Education Works (FRAMEWorks) — Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education promotion activities for adults.

- Fatherhood Family-focused, Interconnected, Resilient, and Essential (Fatherhood FIRE) — Responsible Fatherhood promotion activities for adult fathers or father figures by providing services promoting parenting, co-parenting, and father-child engagement. Fatherhood FIRE also works to help its participants find stable employment through job search assistance, resume building, and other job training initiatives. Currently, OFA funds 58 organizations across the United States to provide Responsible Fatherhood services through FIRE grants. The Fatherhood FIRE grantees can provide a range of activities including:
  - Promoting Marriage or Sustaining Marriage
  - Responsible Parenting
  - Economic Stability
  
- Relationships, Education, Advancement, and Development for Youth for Life (READY4Life) — Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education promotion activities for youth, including parenting youth.

As of early 2024, there are four fatherhood programs in Pennsylvania, two of which are located in Philadelphia, that receive HMRF funding.<sup>348</sup> They are:

1. Children's Aid Society in Clearfield County, FRAMEWorks funding stream

The Children’s Aid Society was organized in October 1890 as the first child welfare agency in Clearfield County. The Society was created to place children in suitable homes and prevent these orphaned children from spending their young lives in poverty. This grantees allowable/authorized activities are: education in high schools on the value of marriage relationship skills, and budgeting; marriage education, marriage skills, and relationship skills programs that may include parenting skills, financial management, conflict resolution and job and career advancement; pre-marital education and marriage skills training for engaged couples and for couples or individuals interested in marriage; and marriage enhancement and marriage skills training programs for married couples. Funds will used to accomplish four goals: teach communication skills, conflict resolution, management and problem-solving skills, self-esteem building/assertiveness stress management, parenting skills and recognizing/preventing domestic violence; marriage and relationship education to individuals, couples and CareerLink for job seekers/skills training for job and career advancement; relationship building, commitment, friendship and problem solving; and assist couples to maintain high levels of functioning and prevent marital problem from developing. This grantee will use the following curricula to support project activities: Money Habitudes, PREP, Within My Reach (WMR) and Within Our Reach.

---

<sup>348</sup> HHS, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, *FY 2020 Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Grantees (2020-2025)*, accessed January 11, 2024, [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ofa/FY%202020%20HMRF%20List%20of%20Grantees%20by%20State\\_508.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ofa/FY%202020%20HMRF%20List%20of%20Grantees%20by%20State_508.pdf).

## 2. Health Promotion Council of Southeastern Pennsylvania, Inc., Fatherhood FIRE funding stream

Health Promotion Council of Southeastern Pennsylvania, Inc., located in Philadelphia, provides the Focus on Fathers (FOF) program, which helps Philadelphia's fathers overcome barriers to positive father/child engagement. FOF is a coordinated parenting, healthy marriage/relationship, and economic stability education program. Its goals are to: 1) enhance positive father/child engagement; 2) foster healthy co-parenting and romantic relationships; and 3) improve economic stability and mobility opportunities among the target population of low-income custodial and noncustodial fathers 16-years-old and older in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. FOF delivers direct services through three distinct educational areas: parenting and fatherhood, healthy relationships, and job readiness. All the education is coupled with intensive case management services that include direct linkages to financial management services, mental health and substance use disorder treatment, trauma counseling, legal services, housing, and a host of other supports available through the FOF partnership network. HPC's media campaign promotes the unique and vital role of fathers in creating positive outcomes for their children. FOF's objectives are to: 1) reduce barriers to positive parenting, healthy relationships, and economic stability; 2) increase participants' knowledge of positive parenting behaviors; 3) enhance education about healthy relationships and coparenting behaviors; 4) expand the fathers' job readiness; and 5) build community capacity to support father-child relationships. Projected long term outcomes of the program are to improve family functioning and adult and child well-being, while increasing economic stability and mobility, and reducing poverty. FOF is also an affiliate program of the Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC), described more fully later in this chapter.

## 3. Goodwill of Southwestern Pennsylvania, Fatherhood FIRE funding stream

Goodwill operates its FIRE Fatherhood for the benefit of economically disadvantaged adult fathers aged 18 and older in Allegheny County. FIRE offers a fellowship with other fathers in a friendly group setting to all participants to:

- Exchange ideas with other dads
- Learn parenting tactics from other fatherhood figures
- Learn techniques for successful co-parenting
- Get support from other dads
- Become a better role model through self-improvement

#### 4. Private Industry Council of Westmoreland/Fayette, Fatherhood FIRE funding stream

Private Industry Council (PIC) of Westmoreland/Fayette, Inc. is a Responsible Fatherhood Program in Beaver, Fayette, Washington and Westmoreland Counties in southwestern Pennsylvania. It supports fathers in addressing barriers that affect their abilities to be actively involved with their children. The target population is minority, low-income fathers, ages 18-years and older, and families with children receiving TANF. Named “Dads Matter,” the goals of the program include improved family functioning, adult and child well-being, increased economic stability and mobility, reduced poverty, and decreased recidivism. The program uses evidence-based curricula and activities to encourage responsible fatherhood, economic stability, and healthy relationship improvement. It also provides customized training for workers that increases their life skills; earning capacities; and training for fathers interested in improving employability skills and obtaining employment skills certifications; unsubsidized employment for new hires; economic and financial literacy training; and other services targeted toward the needs of fathers who are reentering the community after incarceration. The project addresses challenges including inability to access public benefits, lack of information about community resources, and the need for supportive services. All services are participant-driven and fathers choose from a variety of activities and attend trainings aligned with the goals in their Individualized Education and Employment Plans. PIC’s approach also includes connecting fathers to services and activities that will produce direct benefits to their children, improving their status both economically and socially. Finally, fathers are offered assistance with supportive service referrals including substance use disorder treatment, mental health counseling, and other additional supports. This approach capitalizes on keeping fathers engaged and motivated.<sup>349</sup>

Four additional grantees are listed as current grantees on ACF’s Pennsylvania Health Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Region 3 list but not on the main HMRF webpages.

The Community Prevention Partnership of Berks County Community Prevention Partnership of Berks County was established in 1992 to provide prevention services that address problems such as alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse. The organization later expanded to provide services for other community issues including school dropouts, teen pregnancy and violence. This grantee’s allowable/authorized activities are: education in high schools on the value of marriage, relationship skills, budgeting, marriage education, marriage skills, and relationship skills programs. They will use funds to teach high school students how to make wise choices about relationships and finances as part of the health classes. Marriage education services include skill building in the areas of communication, stress management, conflict resolution and healthy relationships. The following curricula will be used to support project activities: Love Notes, Money Matters, PREP Within My Reach and PREP Within Our Reach. The Partnership currently offers two programs through the Berks County Intermediate Unit’s Pregnant and Parenting Teen Program:

---

<sup>349</sup> “Healthy Marriage & Responsible Fatherhood Grantee Locations,” *HHS, ACF*, accessed January 11, 2024, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/map/healthy-marriage-responsible-fatherhood-grantee-locations>.

Project ELECT (Education Leading to Employment and Career Training) and ELECT Fatherhood Initiative help young people to raise healthy children and become better parents.<sup>350</sup>

The Employment Opportunity Training Center of Northeastern PA has been renamed “Outreach Center for Community Resources.” The center offers workforce development programs and evidence-based parent-child programs, including Parents as Teachers.<sup>351</sup>

People For People, Inc., (PFP) offers the Project D.A.D. (Developing Active Dads) program, which is a pathways for fathers and families program in Philadelphia. The target population is low-income, minority fathers ages 18-years and older who have children under 16-years-old. Fathers are recruited through Philadelphia Family Courts and PFP’s network of community partners in the Philadelphia area. Each cohort consists of approximately 70 fathers. The Project D.A.D. intervention model includes an intensive case management approach that centers on fatherhood development education designed to offer the best opportunities for low-income fathers. Project D.A.D. has a commitment to developing responsible fathers who are gainfully employed and contributing to the quality of their children’s lives. The program works with fathers and teaches them to be responsible parents by providing programming that improves participants’ relationships with their children and helps them achieve increased economic stability through intensive employment services and case management. Project D.A.D. team members help fathers create individual development plans to address barriers to becoming better fathers. Individual development plans include: responsible fatherhood classes; economic stability services, including a cluster of vocational and certification programs; and healthy marriage and relationship classes. Project D.A.D. focuses on equipping and empowering fathers with essential knowledge about their prominent roles in their children’s development. The curricula and training provided is designed to enhance individual traits such as self-discipline and self-respect that create a pathway for better decision making, financial stability, and personal responsibility.<sup>352</sup> This project was part of the FIRE grant funding period 2015-2020.

No information could be found for TWOgether Pittsburgh, the fourth grantee listed.

The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse is an Office of Family Assistance (OFA) funded resource designed to promote and encourage involvement of fathers in their children’s lives. It provides access to curricula, webinars, research products, and other resources to improve existing Responsible Fatherhood programs. The Clearinghouse also conducts a national media campaign in collaboration with the Ad Council on the benefits to father involvement.<sup>353</sup>

---

<sup>350</sup> “Programs and Services,” *Community Prevention Partnership*, accessed January 11, 2024, <https://communitypreventionpartnership.org/programs/>; “Pennsylvania Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood, Current Grantees,” *HHS, ACF*, accessed January 11, 2024, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/oro/pennsylvania-healthy-marriage-and-responsible-fatherhood>.

<sup>351</sup> “Programs,” Outreach, accessed January 11, 2024, <https://outreachworks.org/> and Pennsylvania Health Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood. See also, Sarah Hofius Hall, “Fathers find support, help through Scranton’s Outreach Center,” *The Times-Tribune*, last modified June 18, 2023; *Supra* previous note.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>353</sup> “About Us,” *National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse*, accessed August 4, 2023, <https://www.fatherhood.gov/>.

*Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE)*

Within the ACF is OPRE, which, in collaboration with OFA, oversees numerous research and evaluation projects related to the Responsible Fatherhood grant program. The following projects are examples of the type of research and evaluations that OPRE conducts to address various specific issues.

Fatherhood, Relationships, and Marriage  
– Illuminating the Next Generation of Research (FRAMING Research)

Initiated in 2019, this project is intended to support activities relevant to a learning agenda for HMRF programming. The project is gathering and summarizing information and systematically identifying gaps in the knowledge base on HMRF and connected topics or areas. Connected topics or areas are identified through project activities and reflect ACF priorities.

This work includes:

- Consultation with relevant practitioners and research experts and those with lived expertise in marriage and relationship education, fatherhood, and related fields to identify gaps in the HMRF knowledge base.
- Conducting a review of the HMRF literature and publicly available research reports.
- Analyzing existing research and other sources to map and refine what is known about HMRF programs and practice, what is currently being learned, and what needs to be learned to make programmatic advancements.
- Examining potential connections between selected topics and areas relevant for HMRF programming and its goals.
- Disseminating reports and project findings throughout the project.<sup>354</sup>

Recent reports issued under this project include supporting young fathers and LGBTQ+ inclusivity in both youth and adult serving programs.<sup>355</sup>

---

<sup>354</sup> “Fatherhood, Relationships, and Marriage – Illuminating the Next Generation of Research (FRAMING Research),” *HHS, ACF*, accessed January 11, 2024, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/project/fatherhood-relationships-and-marriage-illuminating-next-generation-research-framing>.

<sup>355</sup> “Figuring It Out: Serving Young Fathers in Responsible Fatherhood Programs,” *HHS, ACF*, Practice Brief, December 6, 2023, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/figuring-it-out-serving-young-fathers-responsible-fatherhood-programs>; “Strategies to Promote LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Adult-Serving Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Programs,” December 5, 2023, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/strategies-promote-lgbtq-inclusivity-adult-serving-healthy-marriage-and-relationship>; “Strategies to Promote LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Youth Serving Health Marriage and Relationship Education Programs,” December 5, 2023, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/strategies-promote-lgbtq-inclusivity-youth-serving-healthy-marriage-and-relationship>.

## REFRAME: Race Equity for Fatherhood, Relationship, and Marriage Programs to Empower Black Families

The REFRAME project is a four-year project began in 2022 to identify the assets, needs, and experiences of black families served by HMRF and develop programmatic resources to help grantees to better support Black families.<sup>356</sup>

### Strengthening the Implementation of Responsible Fatherhood Programs (SIRF)

As the initiative's name indicates, the Strengthening the Implementation of Responsible Fatherhood Programs (SIRF) project provides research on ways to improve existing fatherhood programs using learning cycles. Learning cycles “use an iterative approach to identify implementation roadblocks, design and test solutions, interpret findings, and adapt practices and measurement.”<sup>357</sup> The SIRF's research team recently identified common implementation challenges and recommended potential solutions for Responsible Fatherhood programs. The study findings are to be disseminated on an ongoing basis throughout the course of the project. This study concluded in 2022.<sup>358</sup> A similar study was conducted on marriage programs from 2019-2023.

### Testing Identified Elements for Success in Fatherhood Programs (Fatherhood TIES)

This project is designed to identify the elements of fatherhood programs that lead to better outcomes for the fathers who take part in them. The Fatherhood TIES project will identify and test core components of fatherhood programs. Core components are the essential functions, principles, elements, and components that are judged as being necessary to produce positive outcomes. The project will use this information to try to determine which core components or set of components are most effective at improving the lives of fathers who participate in fatherhood programs and their children. The project is scheduled to run from 2022 to 2027, and it is anticipated to collaborate with four or five fatherhood programs in 2024 to conduct the study.<sup>359</sup>

---

<sup>356</sup> Lorraine Perales, Bright Sarfo, Lashawn Richburg-Hayes, Sam Elkin, and Allison Hyra, *REFRAME: Centering the Strength of Black Voices in Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Programs* (OPRE Report #2022-287, January 2023), [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/reframe\\_interim\\_brief\\_feb2023\\_0.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/reframe_interim_brief_feb2023_0.pdf).

<sup>357</sup> “Strengthening the Implementation of Responsible Fatherhood Programs (SIRF),” *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families*, accessed August 4, 2023, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/project/strengthening-implementation-responsible-fatherhood-programs-sirf-2019-2022>.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>359</sup> “Testing Identified Elements for Success in Fatherhood Programs (Fatherhood TIES),” *HHS, ACF*, accessed January 11, 2024, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/project/testing-identified-elements-success-fatherhood-programs-fatherhood-ties>.

## *Pennsylvania State Initiatives*

Pennsylvania offers many programs and funding initiatives for families and child development through its Department of Human Services. There was not a surplus of programs and initiatives focused solely on fatherhood, though some of the broader family-service programs address and support the role of fathers' involvement in the family. Some of the available information on the state initiatives regarding fathers did not appear to be updated. Some references to these initiatives also did not have available information.

### *Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS)*

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is a Pennsylvania state agency whose mission is to assist “Pennsylvanians in leading safe, healthy, and productive lives through equitable, trauma-informed, and outcome-focused services while being an accountable steward of Commonwealth resources.”<sup>360</sup>

The DHS operates seven program offices that administer services that provide various care and support to vulnerable individuals and families residing within Pennsylvania. These seven program offices include: Office of Child Development and Early Learning; Office of Children, Youth and Families; Office of Developmental Programs; Office of Income Maintenance; Office of Long-Term Living; Office of Medical Assistance Programs; and the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services<sup>361</sup> Within some of its family-service programs, the DHS administers programs that assist and support families and responsible fatherhood.

### Family First

Family First is a program funded through federal reimbursement for federally approved evidence-based prevention programs to pregnant and parenting youths in foster care and children and youth living at home who are at risk of entering foster care. Pennsylvania has a Family First Learning Collaborative that provides a forum for sharing information and ideas related to family support and prevention strategies supported by the Family First parent organization. The collaborative also highlights and shares county and provider accomplishments in addressing known challenges. It is open to interested participants from the county and provider agencies. The forums are based on a peer education and support model. This forum is facilitated by consultants and the Bureau of Child and Family Services. Meetings are held virtually monthly for a 60-minute period and are recorded. Topics are selected for every meeting that can be covered in the first 30 minutes with the remaining 30 minutes used as an open forum for questions and presentations by counties.<sup>362</sup>

---

<sup>360</sup> “About DHS,” *Pennsylvania Department of Human Services*, accessed July 31, 2023, <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/about/DHS-Information/Pages/Learn-About-DHS.aspx>.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>362</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, *2023 Annual Progress and Services Report*, 7.

## Pennsylvania Family Centers

Pennsylvania's Family Centers are state funded and have been in operation since 1992. These centers provide community services to help families become healthier, better educated, and self-sufficient. They also help parents learn about their children's development. In addition, Family Centers help parents engage in parent education and child development activities, access health care information, access education, training, and employment information, and receive information and assistance on other community resources. There does not appear to be an abundance of information on the centers other than that a mention provided by the Department of Education. The Department's website provided a link to a list of state funded Family Centers; however, the link was not operable.<sup>363</sup>

## Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Initiative (PRF)

In 1999, the DHS, in coordination with other Commonwealth agencies, established the Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Initiative (PRF). DHS recognized that fatherhood programs can strengthen positive father-child engagement, improve employment and economic mobility opportunities, and improve healthy parental, co-parenting, and marital relationships.<sup>364</sup> The site provides a link for fatherhood programs under the initiative; however, the link is not in-service at present. It is unclear how many programs are being operated under the PRF.

## *Home Visiting Programs to Promote Better Parenting*

The Pennsylvania Office of Early Learning and Development in DHS offers several home visiting programs that work with parents. The Pennsylvania Promise for Children, or PA Promise, is an oversight program. Programs under the home visiting umbrella that are available to mothers and fathers include:

### Early Head Start

This program assists pregnant women and families in developing the skills they need to enhance their children's growth from birth through age three. Early Head Start home-based services include weekly 90-minute home visits and two group socialization activities per month for parents and their children. Families earning up to 100 percent of poverty may be eligible. Early Head Start may also be provided in a facility, similar to how Head Start functions.

### Family Check-Up (FCU)

The program assists families with young children to address challenges that arise with young children before these concerns become more serious or problematic. The model focuses on families experiencing high levels of stress and adversity, which puts children at risk for unfavorable outcomes, such as child conduct problems. FCU seeks to decrease children's conduct,

---

<sup>363</sup> "Family Support Programs: Family Centers," *Pennsylvania Department of Education*, accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.education.pa.gov/Early%20Learning/Family%20Support%20Programs/Pages/default.aspx>.

<sup>364</sup> "Family Support Programs," *Pennsylvania Department of Education*, accessed July 31, 2023, <https://www.education.pa.gov/Early%20Learning/Early%20Intervention/Pages/FamilySupportPrograms.aspx>.

academic, and internalizing problems; reduce mother's depression; and increase parental involvement and positive parenting. The FCU involves three visits with a Family Coach – a therapist certified in the model, which can take place in the home or a community location. After the three FCU sessions, families can choose from a menu of service options, including: family-based interventions tailored to the needs of their family, parent skills training, preschool consultation, community referrals, and more.

### Healthy Families America (HFA)

This program is designed to work with overburdened families who are at-risk for adverse childhood experiences, including child maltreatment. It is the primary home visiting model best equipped to work with families who may have histories of trauma, intimate partner violence, mental health and/or substance use disorder issues. HFA services begin prenatally or right after the birth of a baby and are offered voluntarily, intensively and over the long-term (3 to 5 years after the birth of the baby).

### Parents As Teachers

The program provides home visits with trained experts who educate parents on how to become the first and most important teacher in their child's life. It offers support services from pregnancy to kindergarten and serves at-risk families such as teen parents, parents or children with a disability, low-income families, parents without a high school diploma or GED, or those experiencing substance use disorder.<sup>365</sup>

The Childhood Begins at Home organization, based in Harrisburg, is engaged in a statewide campaign to help policymakers and the public understand the value of evidence-based home visiting and support public investments in the programs.<sup>366</sup>

### *Office of Children & Families in the Courts*

The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania established the Office of Children & Families in the Courts (OCFC) to help improve the outcomes for foster children across the Commonwealth. The OCFC's mission is to protect children, promote strong families, and provide timely permanency. One way the OCFC seeks to accomplish this mission is to facilitate programs that assist fathers in Pennsylvania.

### Father Engagement Workgroup

In May 2009, the Pennsylvania State Roundtable recognized the value of fathers in the life of their children, and endorsed the creation of what became known as the Father Engagement Workgroup. The workgroup examines and analyzes current father involvement in child dependency matters, state/national best practices. In addition, the workgroup makes

---

<sup>365</sup> "Home Visiting Programs," *PA Promise*, accessed January 10, 2024, [https://papromiseforchildren.com/home-visiting-programs/#:~:text=Family%20Check%2DUp%20\(FCU\),become%20more%20serious%20or%20problematic](https://papromiseforchildren.com/home-visiting-programs/#:~:text=Family%20Check%2DUp%20(FCU),become%20more%20serious%20or%20problematic).

<sup>366</sup> Childhood Begins at Home website <https://www.childhoodbeginsathome.org/about/>.

recommendations on enhancing father engagement. The workshop's states that it "endorses the positive involvement of fathers and paternal family to protect children, promote strong families, promote child well-being, and provide timely permanence for children."<sup>367</sup>

The workshop believes that "positive connections between children and their fathers are achieved and nurtured by prompt identification, outreach, and engagement in services that recognize fathers' unique strengths and are tailored to meet each father's individual needs." The workshop also conducts surveys to gather information. In a recent survey, the workshop gathered information in identifying and locating fathers, engaging fathers in case planning and services (including incarcerated fathers), visits for fathers, and perceived barriers to non-resident fathers' full participation as a parent.<sup>368</sup>

### *Temple University and the Center for Policy Research*

Temple University and the Center for Policy Research are provided funding by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation to operate certain programs in furtherance of social and policy-related research and data collection.

### Fatherhood Research & Practice Network

Temple University and the Center for Policy Research operate the Fatherhood Research & Practice Network (FRPN) through federal HHS funding. This network performs evaluations of fatherhood programs, disseminates information to fatherhood practitioners and researchers, and helps to bring about changes that support father engagement.<sup>369</sup>

### ***Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)***

While there is no universal definition of an NGO, typically they are a voluntary groups or institutions with a social or political purpose that operate independently from the government.<sup>370</sup> NGOs range in size and operate around the world for just about every imaginable purpose. The term is a relatively modern one (though some NGOs have existed for 100-plus years, for example, the Red Cross) that originated from the United Nations to differentiate between government bodies and private organizations.<sup>371</sup>

---

<sup>367</sup> "About OCFC," *Office of Children & Families in the Courts*, accessed August 4, 2023, <https://ocfcpcourts.us/childrens-roundtable-initiative/state-roundtable-workgroupscommittees/father-engagement/m>; "Father Engagement," *Office of Children & Families in the Courts*, accessed August 4, 2023, <https://ocfcpcourts.us/childrens-roundtable-initiative/state-roundtable-workgroupscommittees/father-engagement/>.

<sup>368</sup> "Father Engagement," *Office of Children & Families in the Courts*, accessed August 4, 2023, <https://ocfcpcourts.us/childrens-roundtable-initiative/state-roundtable-workgroupscommittees/father-engagement/>.

<sup>369</sup> Jessica Pearson and Rachel Wildfeuer, "Policies and Programs Affecting Fathers: A State-by-State Report," *Fatherhood Research & Practice Network*, (2022), 23.

<sup>370</sup> "What is an NGO?" *NGOsource*, accessed July 31, 2023, <https://www.ngosource.org/what-is-an-ngo>.

<sup>371</sup> "Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs)," *Harvard University*, accessed July 31, 2023,

*The Institute for the Advancement of Working Families (IAWF)*

The IAWF was originally established in 2001 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit by Dr. Rufus Sylvester Lynch. The purpose of the IAWF is to conduct education, training, research, and program development regarding welfare recipients and the working poor. To conduct its affairs, IAWF partners with public and/or private organizations to deliver professional services on various topics. The IAWF's services and activities includes those related to responsible fatherhood programming.<sup>372</sup>

*The Father's Day Rally Committee, Inc.*

Established in Philadelphia in 1988, FDRC is one of the oldest fatherhood programs in the country. FDRC states its objective is to “help African American males face with social, economic, legal, educational, and relationship challenges that hinder them from being responsible, productive male role models. By creating a safe and trusted environment, men learn new life and communication skills that enable them to become accountable to their families and communities.” Programs offered by the group includes Project Lifeline (a group therapy approach to teaching new ways to respond to challenges and problems); The Jobs Not Guns Initiative; and Fathers on A Mission (FOAM) (an in-person all male support group for fathers and males who have lost loved ones to violence.<sup>373</sup>

*The Strong Families Commission*

The Strong Families Commission was incorporated in 2014 as a 501(c)(3) organization, an outgrowth from the Philadelphia Strong Families Coalition. The Commission is dedicated to serving fathers with children. It is structured as a volunteer advocacy organization that partners with children, youth, family, and community-focused systems of care that are committed to including fathers in their service delivery models, to improve the emotional, social, physical, intellectual, spiritual, and financial well-being of the children they serve. The Commission's vision is that “Children and youth in Philadelphia, across the state of Pennsylvania, and around the country will benefit from and grow up with the support of both of their biological parents in a healthy and supportive environment.”<sup>374</sup> The Commission was instrumental in advocating for the formation of the Advisory Committee and study represented by this report.

---

<https://hls.harvard.edu/bernard-koteen-office-of-public-interest-advising/about-opia/what-is-public-interest-law/public-service-practice-settings/international-public-interest-law-practice-setting/nongovernmental-organizations-ngos/>.

<sup>372</sup> “Services and Activities,” *The Institute for the Advancement of Working Families*, accessed July 31, 2023, <http://www.iawfpa.com/servicesandactivities.html>.

<sup>373</sup> “Father's Day Rally Committee,” *Fathers Rally*, accessed January 18, 2024, <https://fathersrally.com/>.

<sup>374</sup> *The Strong Families Commission*, accessed January 18, 2024, <https://www.thestrongfamiliescommission.com/>.

### *National Fatherhood Initiative*

Founded in 1994, the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) was established to increase father involvement by “equipping communities and human service organizations with the father-engagement training, programs, and resources they need to be father-inclusive.”<sup>375</sup> The NFI’s website acknowledges the importance of fathers to a child’s well-being, while acknowledging that millions of families interact with human service organizations annually that are primarily mother-focused. The NFI believes that such organizations need to be more father inclusive. Moreover, the NFI believes that to be more father inclusive, these organizations need better resources, training, and technical assistance. The NFI attempts to provide these resources, training, and technical assistance.<sup>376</sup>

The NFI also offers programs such as 24:7 Dad (described as a fatherhood program for any dad), Inside Out Dad (a fatherhood program for incarcerated dads), Understanding Dad (a program for moms on father involvement), 24:7 Dad: Key Behaviors Workshop (described as a short-length fatherhood workshop), NFI Core Program, and Fathering in 15 (an online learning program for dads).<sup>377</sup> The NFI also offers fatherhood literature and guides on father-related topics related to non-custodial dads, maternal gatekeeping, communication, and domestic violence.<sup>378</sup>

### *National Parents Organization*

NPO is a non-profit organization based in Massachusetts that advocates for shared parenting after separation or divorce. Their mission is: “To improve the lives of children & strengthen society by protecting every child’s right to the love & care of both parents after separation or divorce.” There is an NPO chapter in Pennsylvania and most of its neighboring states.

### *The Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center: Fatherhood Resource Hub*

This resource is an independent, nonpartisan research group based out of Vanderbilt University’s Peabody College of Education and Human Development. The group states that its mission is to build on the science of the developing child and rely on evidence to determine the state policies and strategies that create the conditions all infants and toddlers need to thrive.<sup>379</sup>

The Fatherhood Resource Hub is provided on the policy impact center’s website and provides the recognition that father’s matter in their children’s lives and are an important part of a family. In addition, the site provides an interactive link to watch a “Dads Matter” webinar that discusses the benefits of positive father involvement, along with the many risks and consequences that can occur in a father’s absence. The webinar also discusses the obstacles fathers face to being

---

<sup>375</sup> “Our Mission & Solution,” *National Fatherhood Initiative*, accessed July 31, 2023, <https://www.fatherhood.org/who-we-are>.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>379</sup> “About Us,” *Fatherhood Resource Hub*, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://fatherhoodresourcehub.org/about-us/>.

more involved in their children’s lives, and what organizations and programs can do to promote greater father involvement.<sup>380</sup>

### *Casey Family Programs*

Casey Family Programs is an organization focused on safely reducing the need for foster care in the U.S. The program’s mission is to provide and improve and ultimately prevent the need for foster care. Its website provides materials on the essential role fathers play in children’s lives. The program also analyzes the benefits of father involvement. The program offers strategies and resources that support fatherhood initiatives and interventions in child welfare, some of which are related to child abuse and neglect prevention.<sup>381</sup>

### *PostPartum Support International*

This group was founded in 1987 and is headquartered in Oregon. The mission of Postpartum Support International is to promote awareness, prevention and treatment of mental health issues related to childbearing in every country worldwide. It has volunteer coordinators in every state. Among its services are a dad’s support group, a monthly Just for Dads Chat, and a community-based workshop entitled Boot Camp for New Dads. All of these services are for men experiencing postpartum mental health issues and not simply just “how to support mom” services.<sup>382</sup>

### *Public Health Management Corporation*

Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC) is a nonprofit public health institute that has served the Greater Philadelphia region since the early 1970s. The PHMC operates with the mission of building healthier communities through partnerships with government, foundations, businesses, and other community-based organizations. The PHMC provides outreach, health promotion, education, research, planning, technical assistance, and other services to achieve its mission. The PHMC is one of the largest public health organizations in the nation, with 2,500 employees, 350 programs, subsidiary organizations, and 70 locations. According to the PHMC, it serves over 350,000 clients annually.<sup>383</sup> Some of the programs within the PHMC are designed for fathers.

---

<sup>380</sup> “Dads Matter,” *Fatherhood Resource Hub*, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://fatherhoodresourcehub.org/dads-matter/>.

<sup>381</sup> “Who We Are: About Us,” *Casey Family Programs*, accessed July 31, 2023, <https://www.casey.org/who-we-are/about/>; “Fatherhood Resources to Promote Family Well-Being,” *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway*, accessed July 31, 2023, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/promoting/fatherhood/>.

<sup>382</sup> “About Us,” *Postpartum Support International*, accessed January 18, 2024, [https://www.postpartum.net/about-psi/#:~:text=Postpartum%20Support%20International%20\(PSI\)%20was,experience%20during%20pregnancy%20and%20postpartum.](https://www.postpartum.net/about-psi/#:~:text=Postpartum%20Support%20International%20(PSI)%20was,experience%20during%20pregnancy%20and%20postpartum.)

<sup>383</sup> “About Us,” *PHMC*, accessed August 3, 2023, <https://www.phmc.org/site/about-us.>

## Resources for Children’s Health

The Resources for Children’s Health (RCH) is a nonprofit agency founded in 1985 that promotes positive parenting, healthy pregnancies, and healthy children. Like Focus on Fathers, RCH is an affiliate program of PHMC. It provides parenting and family events throughout the Philadelphia region. A portion of its funding comes from the Philadelphia Department of Human Services, Philadelphia Department of Health, the ACF, United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, and other corporate donors.<sup>384</sup>

### *Fathers and Sports Programs*

To many fathers, sports provide a unique opportunity to bond with their children. In many cases, sports can provide developing individuals with important life lessons. Sports can help teach the importance of teamwork, communication, competition, sacrifice, hard work, goal setting, and practice. More broadly, sports teach the importance of working together with others toward a common goal. Fathers often coach or get involved in their children’s sports teams, but the positive impact they have on their own children can often extend to other children, especially children who lack a father figure in their life. Athletic coaches and athletes alike can inspire children to work hard and navigate all obstacles and adversity in their lives. Certain professional athletes and professional sports organizations have built on this connection by creating programs designed to support fathers and families in low-income communities.

#### *Fathers & Men of Professional Basketball Players*

One example of this is Fathers & Men of Professional Basketball Players (FAMPBP). FAMPBP, an international program established to provide support and resources to low-income families that can help build strong communities. The organization works to achieve this goal through education, mentoring, and involvement in leadership programs across the U.S., Canada, and even abroad. The program includes fathers of professional basketball players and former players such as Anthony Randolph, Wendell Carter, Tee Morant, John Robertson, Ed Gordon, Leroy Brown, to name a few. FAMPBP’s vision states: “We are fathers unified and committed to leaving every youth with the desire to be better citizens by taking a holistic approach to enriching the lives of families and communities.”<sup>385</sup>

The FAMPBP offers community support programs aimed at reducing the impact of poverty, school dropouts, obesity, prevention of teen pregnancy, and the safety of youth. Community programs supported by the organization include group homes, shoes, toys and school supply delivery programs, and NBA-Hosted All-Star Weekends that include family events and activities. The organization also provides educational support programs focused on business, technology, and financial literacy. Educational programs supported by FAMPBP are run in

---

<sup>384</sup> Resources for Children’s Health, *PHMC*, accessed August 4, 2023, [https://www.phmc.org/site/pdf/ar/06/affiliates/AR2006\\_affiliates\\_RCH.pdf](https://www.phmc.org/site/pdf/ar/06/affiliates/AR2006_affiliates_RCH.pdf).

<sup>385</sup> “About,” *Fathers & Men of Professional Basketball Players*, accessed December 12, 2023, <https://www.fampbp.com/about-us>.

collaboration with various associations and local agencies. In addition, the organization offers a series of leadership programs focused on teaching goal setting, decision making, public speaking, problem solving, and responsible citizenship. The FAMPBP also provides athletic and sports camps to educate children on the importance of health and wellness.<sup>386</sup>

*All Pro Dad*

All Pro Dad is a program, co-founded by retired NFL coach, Tony Dungy, who won a Super Bowl in 2007 while coaching the Indianapolis Colts. All Pro Dad is a program of Family First, an organization dedicated to strengthening families and marriages. All Pro Dad focuses on making fathers more visible to children in schools and in the community. The program provides practical guidance and tips on being an involved and supportive father. All Pro Dad is more of a guidance resource than an activity-based program. The program provides inciteful publications on fathering topics such as raising sons and daughters, being a single dad, parenting teenagers, and being a part of a blended family.<sup>387</sup>

*The Art of Fatherhood*

The Art of Fatherhood is a broadcasting podcast founded by Art Eddy, a writer on the importance of fatherhood. The podcast interviews caring fathers involved in professional sports, such as former NFL pro wide receiver Jerry Rice, current NHL player, Jason Zucker, NASCAR driver, Kyle Busch, and former football quarterback Joe Montana. The podcast talks to professional athletes and allows them to share their unique perspectives on fatherhood and what it means to be a loving father.

***Local and Regional Programs***

The following is not a definitive listing of all the local fatherhood programs in Pennsylvania but provides a sample of what is available around the state. Programs that were identified and discussed in other parts of this report are not reproduced here.

<b>Local Fatherhood Programs</b>		
<b>County</b>	<b>Agency Name</b>	<b>Program</b>
Allegheny	Angels' Place	Support Services for Single Parents
	Office of Family and Child Health	Fatherhood Engagement Program

<sup>386</sup> “Programs,” *Fathers & Men of Professional Basketball Players*, accessed December 12, 2023, <https://www.fampbp.com/programs>.

<sup>387</sup> “About All Pro Dad,” *All Pro Dad*, accessed December 12, 2023, <https://www.allprodad.com/about/>.

<b>Local Fatherhood Programs</b>		
<b>County</b>	<b>Agency Name</b>	<b>Program</b>
Allegheny <i>Continued</i>	Healthy Start	Male Initiative Program
	Allegheny Intermediate Unit	Responsible Fatherhood Program
	Allegheny Family Network	Fathers Involved Now
	County Department of Human Services – Family Support Centers with programs for fathers	Hilltop, Lawrenceville, Homewood, Sto-Rox, SHIM South Hills, Braddock, Rankin, Turtle Creek, East Allegheny, Highlands, Lincoln Park, Hill District, Providence, and East Liberty
Bucks	Family Service Association <a href="http://www.fsabc.org">www.fsabc.org</a>	24/7 Dad
		LINKS Family Reunification
		Nurturing Parenting
		Parent Support Group
		Parenting Together
		Parents as Teachers
Erie	Erie Family Center <a href="https://eriefamilycenter.org/">https://eriefamilycenter.org/</a>	Fatherhood Support Initiative
	Prince of Peace Center, Erie Catholic Diocese, Family Supportive Services, Crisis Management	FAITH Initiative
Lancaster	Community Action Partnership of Lancaster County, Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Initiative, <a href="http://www.caplanc.org">www.caplanc.org</a>	Foundations of Fatherhood
		Long Distance Dads
		Five Love Languages
		Dads in Training
	A Woman’s Concern: Pregnancy and Parenting Resource Center, <a href="https://www.pregnancylancaster.com/en/edu/dads/">https://www.pregnancylancaster.com/en/edu/dads/</a>	Courageous Dads

<b>Local Fatherhood Programs</b>		
<b>County</b>	<b>Agency Name</b>	<b>Program</b>
Philadelphia	Children's Advocacy Project – Resources for Fathers	Young Fathers
		United Parenting Support
		Healthy Start Fatherhood Initiative through Maternity Care Coalition
		Daddy University
		ELECT Teen Parent Program
		F.A.C.E. Father's and Children's Equality
		Fatherhood Enrichment Program
Tioga	Tioga County Department of Human Services	Promoting Responsible Fatherhood
Venango	Venango County Human Services <a href="https://co.venango.pa.us/206/Fatherhood-Initiative">https://co.venango.pa.us/206/Fatherhood-Initiative</a>	Venango Fatherhood Initiative
York	Bell Family Shelter, <a href="https://bellsocialization.com/homeless-services-and-housing-support/bell-family-shelter-emergency-help-for-homeless-families/">https://bellsocialization.com/homeless-services-and-housing-support/bell-family-shelter-emergency-help-for-homeless-families/</a>	Homeless shelter that accepts single fathers with children

<b>Regional Fatherhood Programs</b>		
<b>County</b>	<b>Agency Name</b>	<b>Program</b>
Greater Philadelphia area	JAFCO Family Matters, Greater Philadelphia area	Family Strengthening Program
Dauphin, Cumberland, and Perry Counties	TriCounty Community Action	Parents as Teachers
		24/7 Dad
Armstrong and Indiana Counties	ARIN Intermediate Unit	ELECT Fatherhood Initiative
Statewide	Dads' Resource Center	ERA – Education, Advocacy and Resources

**GREATER FATHER INVOLVEMENT ACT - ENACTMENT**  
**Act of Nov. 3, 2022, P.L. 1747, No. 114      Cl. 23**

An Act

Establishing the Pennsylvania Advisory Committee on Greater Father Involvement within the Joint State Government Commission and providing for its powers and duties.

The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania hereby enacts as follows:

Section 1. Short title.

This act shall be known and may be cited as the Greater Father Involvement Act.

Section 2. Definitions.

The following words and phrases when used in this act shall have the meanings given to them in this section unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

"Commission." The Joint State Government Commission.

"Committee." The Pennsylvania Advisory Committee on Greater Father Involvement.

Section 3. Findings and declaration of policy.

The General Assembly finds and declares as follows:

(1) Fathers are role models, caretakers, providers and advocates. Research shows that father involvement is associated with better outcomes for child well-being.

(2) When a child has the benefit of access to both parents, the child is more likely to exhibit healthy behaviors, excel in school and achieve emotional well-being.

(3) Fathers should be fully present and engaged in providing the emotional, social, physical, intellectual, spiritual and financial contributions that their children need to ensure safety, stability and well-being.

(4) Father involvement is a protective factor for children that aids in the development of resilience and mitigates certain psychological and social risks in adulthood.

(5) Approximately 24,000,000 of the nation's children are being raised in single-parent households, some without access to their fathers and their emotional and financial support.

(6) A father's absence or noninvolvement can have a negative impact on a child's well-being from birth forward, increasing the risks of abuse, substance use, educational underachievement and incarceration.

(7) In the absence of public policy that promotes greater father involvement, many children will be less likely to receive the level of parental support needed to achieve economic stability, emotional well-being and independence.

(8) Societal and institutional barriers to greater father involvement may include stigma linked to seeking behavioral health services, housing programs that do not encourage fathers living with children and educational and support services systems that do not foster coparenting.

(9) The public policy of the Commonwealth is to end institutional barriers that may impede fathers in fostering supportive connections with their children, establish support mechanisms to enhance the ability of fathers to assume a beneficial parenting role and assist men in preparing for the legal, financial and emotional responsibilities of fatherhood.

#### Section 4. Pennsylvania Advisory Committee on Greater Father Involvement.

(a) Establishment.--The commission shall establish the Pennsylvania Advisory Committee on Greater Father Involvement within the commission.

(b) Membership.--The commission shall appoint no fewer than 13 individuals to serve as members of the committee. Committee members shall be residents of this Commonwealth and shall have demonstrated expertise in one or more of the following areas:

- (1) Adoption and foster care.
- (2) Adult education or literacy.
- (3) Behavioral health.
- (4) Early childhood development.
- (5) Education.
- (6) Employment and workforce development.
- (7) Family law and child custody.
- (8) Fatherhood programs or initiatives.
- (9) Housing and independent living.
- (10) Parenting and coparenting.
- (11) Public safety and corrections.
- (12) The juvenile dependency and delinquency systems.
- (13) The Department of Health.

(c) Reimbursement.--The commission shall reimburse members of the committee for all necessary and reasonable expenses incurred in connection with the performance of their duties as members of the committee.

(d) Chairperson.--The commission shall designate one of the members of the committee to be the chairperson of the committee. The following apply:

(1) The chairperson shall preside at all meetings of the committee and perform all the duties and functions of the chairperson.

(2) The committee may designate one of the members to be the acting chairperson during the absence or incapacity of the chairperson.

(e) Other officers.--The committee may select other officers as necessary to carry out the powers and duties of the committee.

(f) Meetings.--

(1) The first meeting of the committee shall be held in Harrisburg with all members physically present.

(2) Subsequent meetings of the committee may be held in any manner or at any location that the committee deems appropriate.

(g) Quorum and official action.--

- (1) A majority of the committee shall constitute a quorum to conduct business.
- (2) A majority of those present at a meeting of the committee shall be sufficient for official action to be taken by the committee.

#### Section 5. Powers and duties of committee.

The committee shall:

- (1) Work with State and local governments and other entities through collaboration, coordination, research and consultation to recognize and promote the contributions that fathers make to improving societal outcomes for children and families.
- (2) Evaluate governmental programs and initiatives that impact fatherhood and make recommendations regarding needed improvements and existing impediments to successful implementation of those programs and initiatives.
- (3) Develop a comprehensive plan that will support early connection of fathers to their children beginning in the gestational stage of child development and continuing throughout the life of the child.
- (4) Promote and continue to support programs and entities that foster the following:
  - (i) Workforce development programs that assist fathers in preparing for, finding and securing employment.
  - (ii) Parenting through skills-based educational programs that foster quality coparenting relationships.
  - (iii) Development of conflict resolution skills training.
- (5) Propose changes to statutes, regulations, administrative rules and policies that impede the development or implementation of greater father involvement measures or that will enhance the prospect of success of those measures.
- (6) Identify additional sources of funding, including nongovernmental sources, to support the following:
  - (i) The work of the committee.
  - (ii) Programs that directly support fathers and responsible fatherhood.
- (7) Make recommendations regarding the possible establishment of a long-term or permanent fatherhood commission and its powers, duties and funding.
- (8) Issue, by December 31, 2023, a report to the Governor and the General Assembly regarding responsible fatherhood programs and issues within this Commonwealth and make recommendations to aid in understanding, evaluating or improving the successful implementation of these programs and issues.

#### Section 6. Expiration.

The committee shall expire January 31, 2024.

#### Section 7. Effective date.

This act shall take effect immediately.