

State Approaches to Including Fathers in Programs and Policies Dealing with Children and Families

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Introduction

This brief reviews some of the ways in which federal, state, and local initiatives in the U.S. have attempted to ensure that father involvement is reflected in programs and policies dealing with children and families. The examples provided are not comprehensive but cover much of the national activity that exists at the state level and illustrate the various ways in which father engagement issues are being addressed.

The brief begins with a summary of how father involvement issues emerged at the national level and describes key federal funding mechanisms. It then provides examples of state and local initiatives, most of which focus on providing direct services to fathers in the child support system to increase their employment, child support payments, and parent involvement, although a few also aim to create system-level change across multiple public agencies. The brief concludes with a discussion of research on the benefits of these programs and of some elements that link initiatives across geographical settings.

Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Grants

In 2015, the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released five-year competitive grant awards totaling \$55 million per year to 39 organizations in 19 states for New Pathways for Fathers and Families Programs. Five other organizations received grants to serve fathers transitioning from incarceration to their families and communities. The awards are part of its Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRP) discretionary grant program originally authorized under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 and reauthorized under the Claims Resolution Act of 2010. The funded programs aim to improve the well-being of children and families through the provision of services dealing with marriage and relationship education, economic stability, and responsible parenting. Some grantees are doing additional research on the types of programs and strategies that are most effective.²⁸

Federally Funded Initiatives

Fatherhood programs emerged in the 1990s with the advent of federal dollars to support services and programs, largely in reaction to the passage of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) which reduced the public benefit program known as welfare and vastly expanded the enforcement tools available to the child support agency. Although PROWRA acknowledged the non-economic role of fathers by authorizing the use of \$10 million of child support funds per year for access and visitation programs (see side bar on Child Support Funded Initiatives), fatherhood programs did not receive their first federal funding until September 1999, when Congress appropriated \$4 million to the National Fatherhood Initiative and the Institute for Fatherhood and Family Revitalization.^{1,2}

Despite federal efforts to support fatherhood during the Bush and Obama Administrations, both of whom included fatherhood programs in their annual budgets, the federal stake in these programs did not expand until 2005, when the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 was enacted, which included \$150 million per year from 2006 to 2010 for healthy marriage (\$100 million) and responsible fatherhood (\$50 million) programs. Funding for the two programs was equalized in 2011, with \$75 million going to each program per year.^{1,2} The most recent round of competitive, five-year Office of Family Assistance (OFA) grants for fatherhood were made in 2015 to 39 organizations in 19 states

With few exceptions, state-level fatherhood programming, other than that which is provided through HMRP grants, is funded through other federal sources, the chief ones being the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), TANF state maintenance of effort (MOE), and Social Services Block Grant (Title XX).¹ The drop in the welfare caseload (a 71% reduction between 1994 and 2016), combined with TANF's fixed block grant funding, means that resources previously spent on cash assistance are now available for other purposes, as long as they meet the broad goals of the TANF program.¹ This includes activities to promote or sustain marriage,

Child Support Funded Initiatives

- **National Non-Custodial Parent Employment Demonstration Project (CSPED).** In 2012, HHS's Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) made five-year awards of \$2.3 million per grantee to child support agencies in eight states: **California, Colorado, Iowa, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin.** Under the leadership of the child support agency that partnered with community agencies, each site offered four core services: employment assistance, parenting education delivered in a peer support format, case management, and enhanced child support services. OCSE funded a rigorous evaluation, with a final impact report and cost benefit analysis due in 2019.⁹
- **Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt (PJAC).** OCSE made five year awards of \$2.3 million per grantee to child support agencies in **Arizona, California, Michigan, Ohio, and Virginia** to increase voluntary compliance with child support orders by incorporating procedural justice principles into agency practices and offering obligors who are delinquent with their payments assistance with employment, information, and other forms of support. The final evaluation and impact report is due in 2021.²⁹
- **State Access and Visitation Grant Program.** As part of the 1996 welfare reform law (P.L. 104-193), Congress authorized the use of child support funds to promote access and visitation programs. Funding for states and territories is continuous at \$10 million per year, with \$200 million allocated between 1997–2017 for programs to increase parent-child access and visitation among noncustodial parents. Most states use their funds for unmarried, low-income NCPs and their children. Allowable services include mediation, parenting education, and supervised visitation.²⁰

promote responsible parenting, and foster economic stability. According to OFA financial data tables, 20 states used at least some funds in FY 2016 for "Fatherhood and Two-Parent Family Programs," with the national spending average being 0.5 percent of total TANF and MOE spending and transfers.³ In fact, however, spending for fatherhood programs was substantially lower since some states that record making transfers include after-school care programs and other initiatives to support two-parent families in that funding category. A recent Information Memorandum released by OFA (TANF-ACRF-IM-2018-01) urges states to use TANF funds to promote employment programs for NCPs.³

Child support programs are another potential source of funding for fatherhood programs. While federal rules preclude child support agencies from using regular child support funding for fatherhood programming (and a provision to allow child support agencies to directly fund job services for noncustodial parents was dropped from the Flexibility, Efficiency, and Modernization of Child Support Program Rule issued on December 2016),⁴ child support incentive funds can be tapped for this purpose if they improve the state's child support program and are approved by HHS. Although the amount of incentive funding for the child support program (which rewards states for their performance) was dramatically reduced by the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 and only four states use incentive funds to support employment services, a recent Information memorandum released by OCSE (IM-18-02, Feb. 15, 2018) asserts that HHS is "eager to grant exemption requests that would allow incentive payments to be used to fund work activities for noncustodial parents"⁵ In a similar vein, the budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2019 includes a provision that "would give states the authority to order any noncustodial parent who owes overdue support into work activities and to provide limited federal funding for those work activities through Title IV-D."⁶

Although much of the work being done by states and localities around fatherhood is supported by federal funds, there are a variety of ways in which these funds and the programs they support are managed. Outlined below are examples of statewide fatherhood commissions and other fatherhood initiatives in state human services agencies.

Statewide Fatherhood Commissions

Statewide fatherhood commissions exist in four states (Ohio, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois). All were established in the early years of the responsible fatherhood movement (1999–2003), are legislatively authorized, and are housed within a state government agency with responsibilities related to social services and family welfare. Staffing occurs in various ways ranging from no dedicated staff (Hawaii and Illinois), staff that leverages work on other projects in addition to their work with the commission (Connecticut), and dedicated commission staff (Ohio). The commissions are structured to maximize involvement of individuals and agencies across multiple agencies and organizations. Ohio has 21 members, Connecticut has 35 to 40 members, Illinois began with 21 members, and Hawaii has eight members. Commissions meet regularly and may be engaged in a wide range of activities ranging from policy, education, fatherhood services and promotional events. See [Table 1](#).

- **Connecticut:** The CT Fatherhood Initiative (CFI), was legislatively established in 1999. The CT Department of Social Services (DSS) serves as lead agency for this broad-based, multi-agency, public-private partnership, focused on changing the systems that can improve fathers' ability to be fully and positively involved in the lives of their children. DSS and partners received HMRF funding from OFA for fatherhood programs during 2006–2011, along with legislative appropriation. Further, recognizing the foundation for their efforts in systems change, DSS has an Interagency Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with 10 key state partners, from both the Executive and Judicial Branches, which aims to ensure policies and operations are aligned with the objectives outlined in the initial legislation. The CFI launched a comprehensive statewide strategic plan in 2016 and is currently working to implement strategies across five domains concerning fathers and their families.
- **Ohio:** The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood was legislatively established in 1999, has bipartisan membership and multiple state agency representatives. The Commission currently has an annual allocation of \$1 million in state TANF funds to support community-based fatherhood services in seven organizations and to fund a staff

of four. Its 20 members meet five times a year to fund programs, develop policy recommendations, and build capacity of service providers. The Commission collects and reports outcome data across funded programs using standardized tools and provides leadership to a variety of state agencies on fatherhood issues. Several local governments in Ohio have adopted parallel initiatives and funded fatherhood services within their jurisdictions, such as Cuyahoga County, which recently provided more than \$700,000 to 10 programs to increase positive father involvement.

- **Illinois:** The Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood was created by the Illinois General Assembly in 2003 to promote the importance of both parents participating in the lives of their children. In its early years, there were 21 members of the Council who were appointed by the governor, and its goals were to increase awareness of the importance of fathers, identify obstacles to father involvement, and identify strategies to encourage responsible fatherhood. According to Council members, Council activity has lapsed and it currently has no state funding, dedicated staff, or regular meetings. More recently, Illinois's Power of Fathers Initiative was launched. Funded by a consortium led by the Pritzker Early Childhood Foundation, the Power of Fathers is a collaborative that consists of two statewide social service agencies, one Chicago region family support services agency, and a father engagement and family and community strengthening organization. The providers work with low-income fathers in targeted neighborhoods where they try to improve intra-organizational practices related to fathers' involvement and engagement, challenge policies that undermine meaningful and healthy involvement of fathers, and extend its father-informed practice model to agencies statewide. It is currently working with Illinois Department of Child Support Services to revise its Project Clean Slate initiative, a debt compromise program for previously incarcerated and low-income fathers.
- **Hawaii:** The Hawaii State Commission on Fatherhood was established by the Hawaii State Legislature in 2003. Administratively attached to the Department of Human Services, it serves in an advisory capacity to state agencies and makes recommendations on programs, services, contracts, policies, and laws relating to children and families and coordinates annual father events. There are eight commissioners representing Oahu, Hawaii, and Maui who meet monthly. The Commission currently operates without funding or staff but did commission two research projects on fatherhood: a demographic profile of fathers in the state in 2014, and a survey of 100 non-profit, family service organizations in Hawaii, the latter of which concluding that there was a lack of funding for fatherhood programs.

Interest in fatherhood commissions remains. For example, a number of **Pennsylvania** partners under the leadership of The Strong Families Commission, is currently in the process of drafting legislation that follows up on a September 2017 symposium on father involvement. The group is also organizing a three-day convening in October 2018 to launch a broad-based interagency, multidisciplinary campaign on greater father involvement. In addition to father involvement in the child protection process, local regional partners from around the state are expected to recommend the elimination of systemic barriers that impede greater father involvement in the lives of their children found in various systems of public policy such as administration of justice/public safety; behavioral health; child support and custody services and enforcement; dependent, delinquent, and crossover children and youth; early childhood development; education; employment and training; housing, supervised independent living and homelessness; parent education/supportive services; and public health.⁷

Some state legislatures have appropriated funds for fatherhood programs and initiatives in the absence of a commission. For example, while legislative efforts to create a statewide Fatherhood Task Force and a Fatherhood Commission failed in **Minnesota** in 2015, the legislature was not unmoved by the issue. In 2017, it enacted S.F. 1504, which granted Goodwill Easter Seals an appropriation of \$1.1 million per year for fiscal years 2018 and 2019 to continue the FATHER Project in Rochester, Park Rapids, St. Cloud, Minneapolis, and surrounding areas to "assist fathers in overcoming barriers that prevent fathers from supporting their children economically and emotionally."⁸ The FATHER Project lost funding following the expiration of its federal HMRF grant and was unsuccessful in other bids for state support.



Table 1. Examples of Statewide Fatherhood Commissions

State	Established	Funding	Partners	Goals and Mission
Connecticut	Legislatively established in 1999. CT DSS serves as lead agency.	Federally funded during 2006–2011 through HMRF funds; received technical assistance through a TANF National Policy Academy funded by OFA in 2015, focused on a two-generational approach for noncustodial fathers and their children. State funding has not replaced lost federal grants. The program is administered through the Office of Child Support Services at CT DSS.	CT DSS has an interagency MOU with 10 state partners (Departments of Children and Families, Correction, Education, Housing, Labor, Mental Health and Addiction Services, Public Health, Office of Early Childhood, Judicial Branch, Court Support Service Division and Support Enforcement Services), which aim to ensure policies and operations are aligned with the objectives outlined in the initial legislation.	DSS manages a process to certify fatherhood programs. CFI partners seek opportunities to support programs in local communities and statewide and have conducted training on fatherhood for staff across multiple agencies. CFI launched a comprehensive statewide strategic plan in 2016. CFI is currently working to implement strategies across five domains concerning fathers and their families.
Ohio	Legislatively established in 1999.	The Commission currently has an annual allocation of \$1 million in state TANF funds to support community-based fatherhood services and to staff the commission.	Its 21-member commission includes representatives of all state agencies, including those dealing with child support, child welfare, corrections, health, and education.	Provides leadership on fatherhood issues, develops policy recommendations, builds capacity of service providers, and collects and reports pre- post outcome data using standardized tools. Several local governments have adopted parallel initiatives within their jurisdictions. The Cuyahoga County’s Fatherhood Initiative provides more than \$700,000 to 10 programs to increase positive father involvement including reducing infant mortality and promoting employment and father-child relationships.
Illinois	Legislatively established in 2003.	According to participants, the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood activity has lapsed. It receives no state funding, has no dedicated staff, and does not meet on a regular basis.	In place of the Council is the Power of Fathers Initiative, a foundation-funded collaboration of four statewide and Chicago region service providers coordinating services for low-income fathers in targeted neighborhoods to enhance economic self-sufficiency and involvement with their children.	The Power of Fathers Initiative aims to inform practices of agencies that serve families as well as state agency policies. The Initiative is currently working with the Illinois Department of Child Support Services on programs and practices for low-income fathers such as Project Clean Slate, its debt compromise program.
Hawaii	Legislatively established in 2003.	State Commission on Fatherhood currently operates without funding or staff.	There are eight commissioners.	Administratively attached to the Department of Human Services, the commission serves in an advisory capacity to state agencies and makes recommendations on programs, services, contracts, policies, and laws relating to children and families.





Fatherhood Initiatives in State Human Services Agencies

Statewide legislative initiatives are not the only way to promote father involvement in programs and policies that affect families and children. Several states have funded father engagement initiatives at the agency level. Typically, these efforts are based in Departments of Human or Social Services with the primary program sponsor being the state child support office (IV-D). These initiatives typically involve IV-D agencies and courts collaborating with fatherhood programs and/or workforce agencies to help noncustodial parents in the child support system become employed, economically self-sufficient, and child support payors. Funding for these initiatives comes from the TANF program and/or child support incentives. Some of the programs are modeled on the Child Support Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED) intervention and include a workforce component emphasizing job readiness and training; a parenting component that includes peer support and/or curriculum-based programming on fatherhood and co-parenting; and enhanced child support services that may include assistance with child support orders and modifications, reinstatement of driver's licenses, suspension of enforcement remedies including incarceration in exchange for program participation, and compromise of state-owed child support debt.⁹ Others adopt a purely employment-focused model that combines the provision of short-term workforce development and training services with close monitoring and compliance tracking. [Table 2](#) summarizes some of these state initiatives.

- **Alabama:** At the initiative of the director of the Department of Human Resources (DHR), the agency allocates \$2.8 million in TANF funds per year to cover previously funded fatherhood programs that did not receive HMRF funding in 2015. Funds are conveyed by DHR to the Children's Trust Fund (CTF), a state agency that funds community-based primary and secondary prevention programs that support families. The CTF coordinates the Alabama Fatherhood Initiative and, in turn, funds a network of family resource centers, as well as other non-profits and community-based organizations that deliver fatherhood programming. There is a coordinated evaluation of programs using standard outcome measures that include parent knowledge of child development, improvements in fathers' social connections, concrete supports, and children's academic adjustment.
- **South Carolina:** The Child Support Enforcement Division of the South Carolina Department of Social Services began transferring the agency's allocation of surplus TANF funds (\$2 million per year) to the Center for Fathers and Families soon after its inception in 2002 to provide workforce and fatherhood services for NCPs in the child

support system. Three years ago, it released an RFP for expanded services and increased the award amount to \$3.7 million per year. The Center won the bid for this five-year award with a possible one-year renewal. The core population for service delivery consists of NCPs who are referred by child support staff at all stages of case processing, as well as those who are in contempt of court for failure to pay and are referred by judges who offer them the choice of program enrollment or incarceration. In addition, fathers may enter the program on their own and referrals may also come from child welfare agencies and parole/probation. The Center uses a single, in-house curriculum that covers fatherhood, communication, job search and retention, and financial management as well as referrals to community services for treatment for substance abuse, mental health, intimate partner violence, and other issues.

- The **Texas** Non-Custodial Parent Choices (NCP Choices) program, which started in 2005, represents a collaboration between the child support division of the Office of the Attorney General and the Texas Workforce Commission. Its \$6 million annual budget is shared by the child support and workforce agencies which use child support incentive funds and TANF discretionary funds, respectively, to pay their share of program costs. NCP Choices operates in 21 of 28 workforce development boards, covering 80 percent of the state. The program serves any NCP who owes child support, is under or unemployed, is legally and physically able to work, and resides in the workforce development board's service area. Eligible NCPs enter the program via a judicial order. The core components of the NCP Choices program are job search and employment services, limited short-term training, and monitoring child support compliance. An evaluation of NCP Choices found the workforce services and monitoring aspects of the program to be highly successful in improving the frequency and consistency of child support payments as well as increasing NCP rates of employment, reducing unemployment claims, and reducing TANF Receipt among the associated custodial parents.¹⁰ To see whether additional services could boost outcomes, a pilot project conducted during June 2010 to January 2011 involved the addition of a curriculum dealing with parenting, relationships and financial education delivered by workforce personnel to a randomly generated group of NCP Choices participants (n=162). A short-term evaluation covering six to 12 months of post-program employment and child support payment activity showed increases in the frequency and consistency of child support collections in the curriculum group. Nevertheless, the effects were modest (which may be due to low sample size and the short-term nature of the project) and it was decided not to add the curriculum to the core program components of workforce services and compliance monitoring.¹¹
- The **Kansas** Father Initiative is administered by Kansas Child Support Services which receives \$1.4 million per year in TANF/MOE funds to serve NCPs in 20 of the state's counties with large populations. Funds are used to contract with five community-based organizations to provide workforce, fatherhood, and healthy relationship/co-parenting services. NCPs are referred to the program by child support workers at all stages of case processing and, in some settings, the courts. Child support workers assist the programs by explaining the child support process to participants and assisting with reinstatement of driver's licenses that have been suspended for non-payment of support; NCPs who graduate are eligible for reductions in their state-owed arrears. Funded programs track the numbers of fathers served, employed, making child support payments, graduating the program, and reporting increased interaction with their children.
- **Colorado's** 2Gen Transformation Project, is a current effort to incorporate holistic, two-generation services in 11 county child support agencies. Colorado was a CSPED demonstration project site. The Transformation Project extends the CSPED service model to 11 counties and adds a component for custodial parents (CP). The child support workers in targeted counties screen for barriers to payment on a routine basis and provide unemployed and underemployed NCPs with case management and workforce and fatherhood program services to promote positive parenting and co-parenting. Child support staff also try to identify the service needs of CPs and their children. Workforce, fatherhood, and other relevant services for NCPs, CPs, and their

children are provided by a variety of public and community-based organizations with which child support is establishing collaborations and service partnerships. The project is funded by the Colorado Division of Child Support Services using a mixture of grant and regular child support funds. The impetus for the project is Colorado's participation in CSPED and commitment to 2Gen principles. Colorado is one of the five states participating in the National Governor's Association Parents and Children Thriving Together (PACTT): Two Generation State Policy Network.

- The **Maryland** legislature enacted House Bill 1502 in 2016, signed into law on April 26, 2016, by Governor Larry Hogan as Chapter 312, initiating a three-year pilot program (renamed the Supporting, Training and Employing Parents STEP Up—program) to provide eligible unemployed or underemployed noncustodial parents (NCPs) in Baltimore City with assistance in obtaining employment. The program targets NCPs with active child support cases and requires the conduct of a program evaluation and annual report to the legislature.¹¹ Funded with TANF and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) funds, STEP Up involves a multi-agency collaboration including the child support and TANF agencies within the Department of Human Services; the Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation; local workforce investment boards; the circuit court for Baltimore City; and a variety of community partnering agencies including community colleges, technical institutes, apprenticeship and training organizations, and fatherhood programs. In addition to STEP Up in Baltimore City, Maryland also has a variety of noncustodial parent employment programs in various county Departments of Social Services, as well as a statewide Payment Incentive Program, and Child Support Administration Young Fathers' Employment Programs and NCP Employment Mini-Grant Programs. They are funded by TANF funds from the Maryland Department of Human Services as well as offsets for the collection of child support on state-owed TANF arrears. They offer NCPs assistance with job services, collaborations across individual Departments of Social Services, community colleges, the courts, and community-based agencies offering employment training opportunities in targeted occupational sectors.
- **Georgia's** Fatherhood Program began in 1997 and operates on a statewide basis in all 159 offices of the Georgia Division of Child Support Services. Regular child support case managers refer and/or encourage NCPs who are unemployed and/or underemployed to enroll in the voluntary program, which is staffed by 21 child support agents. The intervention is focused on employment services provided by Department of Labor agencies and community-based employment programs. Participants must engage in diligent job searches upon entering the program, gain employment within 90 days of program entry, and provide regular updates



on their progress. The Division of Child Support Services requests a waiver to utilize child support incentive funds for outreach activities performed by 21 agents who manage cases for participants, monitor their compliance, and educate them on the child support system. No additional program funding is provided. Employment services are provided by other agencies through longstanding collaborations and partnerships. The Fatherhood Program encourages parents to increase father engagement, but no formal fatherhood classes are currently offered. Regular enforcement actions such as license suspension are stayed during successful program participation but reinstated for those who fail to complete it or become subsequently delinquent in payment.

Assessments of Program Benefits

A number of the state fatherhood commissions and initiatives described in this brief have conducted assessments of their programs that include descriptions of the number and demographic characteristics of the fathers they serve as well as their self-reported changes in parenting, the aggregate number of jobs they obtain, and/or the amount of child support they pay. Although they are not cost-benefit analyses, these studies attempt to make the case for the programs' value to participants and the larger society. For example, per **Maryland** legislation, the annual report to the legislature on STEP Up must include the number of NCPs who participate in the program, the level of their participation, the number who obtain employment, their earnings, job retention rates, and the child support payments they make. In its first year, the program reported serving 292 NCPs, of which 148 attended programs and classes, 64 obtained employment, and 235 made consistent child support payments totaling \$93,356.¹²

Similarly, the Annual Report of the **Ohio** Commission on Fatherhood presents information on child support payments by participants in the three months prior to enrollment in, during, and following graduation from fatherhood programs that receive grants from the Commission, as well as self-reported assessments of changes in parenting skills by participants. Highlights of the Ohio report are that child support payments in the three months prior to and following program completion increased from \$78,976 to \$164,103, and that 97 percent of fathers report more confidence in their parenting skills.¹³

Less common are state and local program assessments that attempt to quantify the benefits that fatherhood programs generate for participants and the larger society. For example, the **South Carolina** Center for Fathers and Families releases an annual impact report covering its activities and accomplishments. It includes information on the number of participants served in its fatherhood program (2,543), children impacted (5,970), and the percentage reporting an improvement in the parent-child relationship (41%). As to financial benefits, the program reported annual child support payments among participants of \$646,881, gross earnings of \$3,142,965, total benefits to families and society of \$3,789,846, and total savings and benefits to families and society of \$5,974,846. Over a two-year period, the savings the State of South Carolina realized by delinquent child support obligors enrolling in the program rather than being incarcerated is estimated to have generated \$4.27 for every program dollar spent.¹⁴



Table 2. Examples of Father Initiatives in State Agencies

State	Agency	Funding	Population Served	Activities
Alabama	Alabama Department of Human Resources and the Children's Trust Fund.	The Department allocates \$2.8 million in TANF funds per year to cover lost federal HMRF grants for fatherhood programs not funded in 2015. Funds are conveyed by DHR to the Children's Trust Fund (CTF), a state agency that funds community-based family resource centers and other community-based organizations offering primary and secondary prevention programs that support families.	Family resources centers and other community-based organizations provide numerous services to all family members: fathers, mothers, and children.	CTF coordinates the Alabama Fatherhood Initiative. There is a coordinated evaluation of programs using standard outcome measures.
South Carolina	Child Support Enforcement Division of the South Carolina Department of Social Services and the South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families.	Child Support transfers the agency's allocation of surplus TANF funds (\$2 million per year prior to 2015, and \$3.7 million since then per an RFP) to the Center for Fathers and Families to provide services statewide. The Center also has an HMRF grant from OFA and a direct appropriation in the state budget.	The Center works to reduce child poverty through father engagement. It serves all fathers (2,534 in 2016), including NCPs who are in contempt of court for failure to pay support, for whom the program is an alternative to incarceration. Child support workers in all counties make referrals at all stages of case processing and 70 percent of participants are child support clients. In addition, fathers may enter the program on their own and referrals may also come from child welfare agencies and parole/probation.	The Center uses a single curriculum that covers fatherhood, communication, job search and retention, and financial management. Case managers make referrals for treatment of substance abuse, mental health, domestic violence, and other issues. Center staff attend contempt hearings and fathers have the choice of enrolling in the program or being incarcerated.
Texas	NCP Choices is a collaboration between the Child Support Division of the Office of the Attorney General and the Texas Workforce Commission.	Annual budget of \$6 million. The Office of the Attorney General Child Support Division uses incentive funds to cover one-third of program operating costs, and the Texas Workforce Commission provides two-thirds of program funding from available TANF discretionary funds.	NCP Choices operates in 21 of 28 workforce development boards across Texas, covering 80 percent of the state. The program serves any NCP parent who owes child support, is under or unemployed, is legally and physically able to work, and resides in the workforce development board's service area. Referral occurs in courts with judges ordering eligible NCPs into the program where they are linked to local workforce development boards that provide employment services and child support compliance monitoring.	NCP Choices focuses on workforce development services and monitoring child support payment. The program mirrors TANF Choices, the employment and training program for TANF families, and adopts a "work first"-oriented services model that focuses on job readiness and job search. Unemployed NCP Choices participants are expected to participate in workforce services for 30 hours per week; their compliance with the workforce program is monitored by child support staff via an online tracking system.

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<p>Kansas</p>	<p>The Fatherhood Initiative is a program of the Kansas Child Support Services of the Kansas Department for Children and Families.</p>	<p>The Department transfers \$1.4 million per year in TANF/MOE funds to Child Support Services, which releases an RFP and awards the money to five community-based organizations (CBOs) located in five regions of the state to conduct its Fatherhood Initiative.</p>	<p>NCPs in 20 of the larger counties in the state are referred to the CBOs conducting the Fatherhood Initiative by child support workers at all stages of case processing and, in some settings, the courts. In FY 2017, 742 fathers were served.</p>	<p>The Fatherhood Initiative aims to improve parental relationships, co-parenting, and support of children. NCPs receive fatherhood and healthy relationship/co-parenting services, as well as job coaching and mentoring, post-employment retention services, and expungement of criminal records. NCPs may also be eligible for compromise of state-owed child support debt and reinstatement of driver's licenses.</p>
<p>Colorado</p>	<p>The 2Gen Transformation Project is a program of the Colorado Division of Child Support Services and local child support agencies in 11 Colorado counties.</p>	<p>The Colorado Division of Child Support Services and local child support agencies in 11 Colorado counties fund the Project using a mixture of grant and state child support funds. The impetus for the project is Colorado's participation in CSPED, and commitment to 2Gen principles. Colorado participates in the National Governors Association's Parents and Children Thriving Together (PACTT) Two Generation Project.</p>	<p>NCPs and CPs in 11 Colorado counties who are identified by child support workers as having barriers to payment of child support and/or family self-sufficiency.</p>	<p>Child support agencies in 11 Colorado counties are offering holistic, CSPED-type services to NCPs including case management and referral for workforce services and fatherhood programming. Child support agencies build collaborations with other public and community service providers, screen for barriers among NCPs and custodial parents and their children, and refer both NCPs and CPs for help when relevant.</p>
<p>Georgia</p>	<p>The Georgia Fatherhood Program is a program offered by the Department of Human Services and monitored by Division of Child Support Services (DCSS).</p>	<p>DCSS requests a waiver from OCSE to support outreach activities with child support incentive funds. Funding is used to pay for 21 fatherhood agents who provide services in all 159 counties in Georgia. All employment services are provided by Department of Labor agencies and community-based employment programs through unpaid collaborations and services agreements.</p>	<p>NCPs who are under or underemployed and, as a result, become delinquent in their child support payments and/or experience a job loss or decrease in income and expect to be unable to pay their child support obligation.</p>	<p>Fatherhood agents handle fatherhood activities for participants while they are enrolled in the program. They reinstate driver's licenses suspended for non-payment; refer NCPs for job training, search, and placement services; and monitor their compliance with the program requirements.</p>
<p>Maryland</p>	<p>The Noncustodial Parent Employment Assistance Program (renamed STEP Up) the Young Fathers Program(s), NCP Employment Mini-Grant Programs, and Statewide Payment Incentive Program are programs of the Child Support Administration (CSA) of the Department of Human Services (DHS).</p>	<p>TANF discretionary funds and offsets for the collection of child support on state-owed TANF arrears are used to pay for the Young Fathers Programs and mini-grants programs that offer employment services for NCPs in numerous Maryland counties. Additionally, SNAP funds are also allocated to SCA through the Department of Human Services for STEP Up.</p>	<p>Voluntary and court-ordered NCPs with active child support cases who are unemployed and underemployed with barriers to employment.</p>	<p>Each county with an NCP Employment program and Baltimore City develop a unique network of collaborating partners. Child support staff members provide enhanced child support services and referral to community-based employment services providers for job readiness skill training, job training, job placement and retention, and fatherhood programming. Employment services and related job readiness training are provided using the same resources available to custodial parents as part of the Welfare to Work Program.</p>



Texas conducts an annual Return on Investment (ROI) study on NCP Choices. It considers changes in child support payments, employment, and earnings following program participation as well as changes in TANF and SNAP benefits paid to custodial parents and children associated with the NCPs who participate in the program. A 2016 assessment of program benefits shows that the program returns an estimated \$8.31 for every dollar invested and provides an annual savings to the State of Texas of \$12 million. The original program evaluation for NCP Choices documented that relative to the comparison group, participants paid their child support 47 percent more often, paid \$57 per month more, for a 51 percent increase in total collections, paid their child support 50 percent more consistently over time even two to four years after the program, were employed at 21 percent higher rates, were one-third less likely to file an unemployment claim in the first year after the program, participated in workforce development activities 82 percent more often, and were associated with custodial parents who were 21 percent less likely to receive TANF benefits in the first year after the program and 29 percent two to four years after the program. Another finding was that the earnings of employed program participants were lower than members of a comparison group—likely the result of more of them entering new employment at a somewhat lower wage.¹⁰

The ROIs conducted for a few stand-alone fatherhood programs are worthy of discussion even though they are not part of a statewide initiative, because they document both measurable outcomes for which financial data are available as well as estimates of less easily measured outcomes. For example, an evaluation of the Parents to Work! Program operated by the Division of Child Support Enforcement of Arapahoe County, **Colorado**, compared earnings and child support payments for 600 NCPs randomly assigned to a treatment group that was referred to the Arapahoe/Douglas Workforce Center (AD/Works) with 350 NCPs in a “business as usual” group. Treatment group members received a customized menu of employment-focused services and access to supportive services as well as enhanced child support services. Although the program operated during the height of the Great Recession (August 2007 to November 2010), the treatment group contributed \$311,163 in extra child support payments that were not matched in the comparison group, and \$2,283,485 and \$3,951,450 in excess earnings and sales growth, respectively. Taken together, this made for a one-year return on investments of \$1.70 for child support payments, \$4.37 in earnings growth, and \$7.74 in sales/revenue growth.¹⁵

The most ambitious ROI conducted to date is Return on Investment to the FATHER Project, a program of Goodwill/Easter Seals **Minnesota**. The 2010 ROI conducted by Wilder Research, concluded that the net economic value of the program to participants, their children, and taxpayers through increased wages, child support payments and taxes paid during the 2009 fiscal year came to \$2.7 million and returned \$3.41 for every dollar invested in one year of operation. This conservative estimate was based on increased income of \$2.45 million, increased child support payments of \$50,180, and increase tax revenue totals of \$183,000. In addition to those “actual” benefits, the researchers estimated ROI benefits of \$4.7 million for less tangible outcomes. This amount included \$97,000 for paternity establishments, \$1.66 million for reduced criminal convictions and recidivism, \$45,000 for increased child literacy reflecting increased paternal participation and parenting skill, and \$2.9 million for father engagement in early childhood programming. The addition of these prospective benefits was estimated to return another \$6.03 for every dollar invested, making the combined totals an estimated \$9.47 for every dollar invested in the program.¹⁶



Table 3. Studies of Program Benefits and Return on Investment

Initiative	Funding	Fathers in the ROI Study	ROI Findings
The Father Project of Minnesota	Goodwill/Easter Seals of Minnesota.	380 fathers served during fiscal year 2009.	"Overall, using conservative estimates, the benefits generated by the project outweigh the costs of its operation in the long term, returning \$3.41 for every dollar invested in one year of operation." The benefits include gain in earnings of fathers, child support payments, and tax revenue. Adding to this estimate on savings related to paternity establishment, reduced criminal activity, increased child literacy, engagement with early childhood education, and community involvement would bring the figure to \$9.47 for every dollar invested.
South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families	Child Support transfers the agency's allocation of surplus TANF funds the Center. The Center also has an HMRF grant from OFA for program services and receives a direct appropriation in the South Carolina state budget.	Fathers who owe child support arrears.	The Alternative to Incarceration component of the fatherhood program offers an alternative to jail for fathers who are behind in their child support payments. Over a two-year period, the savings realized by avoiding incarceration is estimated to have generated \$4.27 for every dollar spent.
Parents to Work Arapahoe County, Colorado	Regular funds of the Arapahoe County Child Support Program, the Arapahoe/Douglas Workforce Center and the Arapahoe County Department of Human Services.	Non-paying un- and under-employed obligors flagged by child support workers during August 2008 to March 2010, consisting of 601 in the experimental and 349 in the comparison group.	Adjusting assumptions to take into consideration the fact that some comparison group fathers would have found employment without the program, the regional earnings and sales revenues increased by \$4.37 and \$7.34, respectively for every program dollar expended.
NCP Choices State of Texas	Annual budget of \$6 million. The Office of the Attorney General Child Support Division uses incentive funds to cover one-third of program operating costs, and the Texas Workforce Commission provides two-thirds of program funding from available TANF discretionary funds.	19,870 noncustodial parents served during state fiscal year 2012 through 2016. The population was limited to this time period to examine payment data 18 months prior and post program entry.	Texas collects \$8.31 for every \$1 spent on the program. Findings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child support collections increased 122 percent. • On average, participants made 90 percent more child support payments. • On average, payment consistency increased approximately 23 percent. • Participants began paying within 48 days of enrollment. • 71 percent find employment within eight weeks. • 77 percent of those who find employment retain employment for at least six months. • Using standard cost avoidance/recover methodology, NCP Choices saved the State of Texas \$12 million in SFY 2016 alone.



Common Elements Across State Father Engagement Initiatives

State initiatives to serve fathers vary in the scope of their work and the resources they employ. Nevertheless, there are some common factors among the initiatives and programs highlighted in this brief.

- **Few state-funded and/or state-coordinated father engagement initiatives exist.** Perhaps the key commonality across the initiatives and programs outlined in this brief is their rarity. Only four states have broad, legislatively authorized initiatives, of which only two are staffed at least on a part-time basis and engaged with representatives of other state agencies. The state initiatives described in this brief that operate in conjunction with the child support agency are more numerous than fatherhood commissions and councils, but still rare and confined to fewer than a dozen states, especially when federally funded demonstration projects like CSPED are removed from the calculus. Finally, fathers (particularly non-resident fathers) are virtually invisible in newer Two-Generation and/or Whole Family Initiatives that some states are pursuing.¹⁷ Indeed, the current level of state activity in coordinating fatherhood initiatives falls below levels documented in studies conducted in the early days of the responsible fatherhood movement, in the late 1990s and early 2000s.^{18,19}
- **High-level leadership and collaborations in state human services and/or child support agencies are critical.** In virtually all states with strong initiatives, a key to their initiation and duration is the engagement of the executive of the state's Department of Human Services and/or its director of the state child support program. Another key leadership partner is the Department of Labor, which can contribute a network of workforce programs and services. Strong relationships among and between child support, the agency responsible for TANF and other public benefits, and the workforce agency—often reinforced by longstanding ties and/or co-location—help to explain the transfer of discretionary TANF funds for fatherhood and workforce programs and the delivery of workforce services to NCPs referred by the child support agency without new funding allocations.
- **Sustainable state funding is critical but rare.** The statewide fatherhood initiatives described in this brief are chiefly funded by TANF block grant and state MOE funds for programs and services that accomplish the broad purposes of the TANF program, child support incentive dollars, and direct legislative appropriations. In doing so, they buck the norm. Although 20 states nominally record transferring TANF or MOE funds for “fatherhood and two-parent household programs,” the average transfer is only 0.5 percent of TANF funds nationally. More to the point, many of the 20 states that nominally transfer funds appear to use the money for programs to address two-parent household needs (e.g., after-school care), rather than fatherhood. In addition, only four states currently obtain waivers to use child support incentive monies to fund workforce activities for NCPs, despite OCSE encouragement to state IV-D agencies to do so. While some programs in states that have broader initiatives for fathers are recipients of an HMRF grant awarded by OFA in 2015 (e.g., South Carolina), there is no necessary correspondence between receipt of an HMRF award for service delivery and the program's long-term sustainability or the promotion of father inclusion policies at the state level.
- **The goal of improving the capacity of noncustodial parents to make economic contributions is paramount.** With few exceptions, state initiatives and the programs they fund target parents in the child support system who are not meeting their child support obligations because of unemployment or underemployment. Their primary objective is to ensure that parents contribute financially to their children's upbringing. The programs adopt a “work first” orientation and focus on assessing employment needs, providing employment services and monitoring program compliance and child support payment. Key workforce interventions deal with soft skills training, job readiness activities, job search and job placement. These objectives are underscored in recent IMs released by OFA and OCSE that urge the use of TANF and child support incentive funds, respectively, to promote employment programs for NCPs.

- **Interventions that address father engagement, effective parenting, and co-parenting are less common.** Much less frequently, state-funded programs include classes, workshops, or other activities that deal with father engagement, effective parenting, and co-parenting. State-funded programs with father engagement components tend to have human services or child support agency leaders who are philosophically committed to healthy family relationships as well as employment, have long-standing partnerships with holistic fatherhood programs, and/or are convinced that holistic interventions boost the success of workforce interventions. The best model for this type program is the South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families, a statewide program funded by TANF funds and other sources that combines employment services with parenting and co-parenting for NCPs who have fallen behind in child support payments as well as other fathers in and out of the child support system.
- **The CSPED model of service delivery has grown in influence.** Several of the fatherhood initiatives described in this brief utilize the CSPED model of service delivery, the hallmarks of which are employment assistance, parenting education delivered in a peer support format, case management, and enhanced child support services such as driver's license reinstatement and compromise of state-owed arrears. As in the national CSPED demonstration projects, state initiatives using this approach incorporate public agency and community partnerships for the delivery of core services which are staffed by a mix of workers drawn from child support agencies, workforce programs provided by the Department of Labor, and some community service providers such as fatherhood programs. An impact evaluation and cost-benefit analysis of CSPED is due in 2019.
- **Mandatory and voluntary participation formats are both utilized.** Parents access fatherhood and/or workforce program services through both voluntary and mandatory formats. Some parents are self-referred or hear about programs through word of mouth. Others are referred by child support workers at all stages of case processing and/or probation officers and child welfare agency staff. Still others are ordered to participate by judges during contempt proceedings due to nonpayment of child support and face sanctions, including incarceration, for failure to engage in program services.
- **Assessments of program benefits and returns on investment are very promising.** Without exception, studies of the benefits of NCP employment programs and fatherhood programs that have strong employment components find that child support payments and employment increase following program participation. The Texas IV-D agency estimates that every dollar of spending in 2016 on NCP Choices generated \$8.31 in savings due to increased child support payments and declines in benefits including the use of TANF among CPs associated with program participants. Other documented savings are based on increases in state income and sales tax revenues associated with increased earnings following program participation, and/or the public savings due to avoided jailing in contempt cases due to nonpayment of support. An ROI of the FATHER Project in Minnesota, which measured both the direct program benefits of child support and earnings and less tangible indirect benefits due to paternity establishment and increased father engagement and improved parenting skill, led to total estimated benefits of \$9.47 for every program dollar invested.
- **Engagement in state policy is limited.** With the exception of Fatherhood Commissions in Ohio and Connecticut, and the Power of Fathers Initiative in Illinois, the initiatives described in this brief are focused on the delivery of services and have limited engagement in broader conversations about policies for children and families. As such, they have few opportunities to promote father inclusion in programs and policies and drive system-level change. While CSPED-type interventions at the agency level frequently involve collaborations between and among child support and workforce agencies and fatherhood programs, fatherhood commissions and councils are the only entities that engage high-level staff from those core partners as well as pursuing formal collaborations with other state agencies dealing with courts, corrections, public health, education, and child welfare.



Conclusions

Despite their potential to drive system change dealing with fathers, fatherhood commissions have failed to thrive and only four states have one, of which only one has dedicated, full-time staff. Nevertheless, where they exist, they have been effective vehicles of public advocacy, a clearinghouse of information, promoters of coordinated service, architects of braided funding strategies, and facilitators of interagency collaboration and training.

One of the chief challenges that existing commissions and attempted commissions have faced is a lack of funding. One strategy to address this problem would be to restructure the existing HMRF grant program along the lines of the State Access and Visitation Grant Program. Unlike HMRF grants, which currently involve annual awards of \$55 million to 39 organizations in 19 states through a competitive process for fatherhood programming, the AV grant program is a continuous one that doesn't sunset, that involves annual awards of \$10 million to states. Although AV awards to states are extremely small and fail to meet the demand for services, the predictable annual infusion of grant funds to states (\$200 million between 1997 and 2017) has led to the development of an infrastructure and programmatic strategy dealing with parenting time within each state. For example, in FY 2016, more than 99,000 low- and moderate-income families were served through the engagement of nearly 300 local programs, and strong coordination with local courts which generate 46 percent of referrals for AV grant services. AV grant programs in each state are staffed at some level; some states have developed multi-agency grant advisory committees; still other states augment their AV grant resources with state contributions, in-kind donations and collaborations with other agencies.²⁰ The proposed restructuring of the HMRF grant program would generate more than five times the resources currently available to states for AV services (and 15 times the resources available to states for AV if the full amount of the \$150 million HMRF grant program was used in this manner) and has the potential to support a state-generated initiative to promote policy advocacy and programs dealing with fatherhood.

A second way to boost father engagement in policies and programs dealing with families and children is to incorporate them in newer initiatives dealing with Two-Generation and Whole Family Programs. Only one state (Colorado) in the five-state National Governor's Association's Two-Gen initiative (PACTT) involves a statewide program that includes NCPs, and its program was initiated prior to the inception of PACTT. A search of other programs, including a recent national scan of 52 active programs operating as of early 2016,¹⁶ found that they typically focus on primary caregivers and their children and that none included non-resident fathers. ASCEND at the Aspen Institute, a national leader in the advancement of two-generation policies is beginning to redress this imbalance and lists the support and promotion of work opportunities for NCPs as one of its top 10 priorities for action.²¹

A third way to strengthen father engagement initiatives is for the child support agency to play a stronger leadership role in fatherhood. There are several reasons why this makes sense. First, child support is the agency that is vital to the well-being of families and children and most deeply involved with fathers. In 2016, the child support program collected more than \$30 billion in payments on behalf of more than 15.5 million children in 14.5 million cases, including more than a third of US children living in poverty.²² The program establishes legal fatherhood (paternity) for 1.5 million men each year and is credited with lifting more than one million children out of poverty each year and thereby improving their well-being and reducing the economic costs of childhood poverty. Second, child support agencies need to improve collections from the very fathers that are targeted by fatherhood programs. Nationally, only 65 percent of current support due in FY 2016 was collected and distributed and the total amount of past due support reported for all fiscal years was \$114.6 billion. Although its extensive array of enforcement tools underly the success of the child support agency in collecting child support, punitive sanctions are ineffective with noncustodial parents who do not pay child support because they are unemployed and underemployed (estimated by OCSE to be 13%).²³ Third, fatherhood programs offer fathers in the child support system help with many of the things they say they want: **1)** more access to their children, **2)** more relationship skills so that they can co-parent their children, and **3)** help finding and maintaining employment.¹



Given its lengthy involvement with families in its caseload (e.g., 18 to 22 years), its ability to identify and reach fathers who fall behind in their payments due to low and unstable earnings, and its ability to suspend punitive sanctions and deliver positive ones such as driver's license reinstatement and state debt forgiveness to support pro-social behavior, the program has a unique opportunity to intervene in a positive way to improve the capacity of fathers to become legal fathers through voluntary paternity establishment and to pay and strengthen their relationships with their children. Indeed, the recently formed U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty takes a similar view and has issued a call to transform child support into a family building system.²⁴

Figuring out how child support agencies can become "family building systems" and fund fatherhood program services is challenging, but a few states have found some paths. One is to use TANF and MOE funds for these purposes. Not only is this allowed, but a recent Information Memorandum released by OFA urges states to use TANF funds to promote employment programs for NCPs.²³ Similarly, states are both allowed and encouraged to seek waivers to use child support incentive funds to provide employment programs for noncustodial parents. More states should explore the use of both of these funding sources and follow the example of their peers in South Carolina and Kansas that favor "holistic" programs that include services for both employment and parenting.

Finally, Congress needs to change its rules about allowable IV-D agency expenditures. The federal government reimburses states for 66 percent of their expenditures for allowable expenses. While the Flexibility, Efficiency, and Modernization in Child Support Programs Final Rule issued by OCSE in December 2016 encourages states to find ways to build fathers' financial capacity to pay, it does not allow states to spend program resources on employment services and/or fatherhood programs.²⁵ Similarly, while Congress established safe parenting time in child support orders as an "important goal" in Section 303 of the 2014 Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, it too allocated no new funding.²⁶ Like employment services and fatherhood, parenting time services are also not allowable program activities and do not qualify for 66 percent federal reimbursement. For child support agencies to realize their full potential to enhance family well-being, they will need to be able to use regular program funds to support job training and other services to help fathers secure and maintain employment, as well as services that will enhance their access to children, and their ability to engage in positive parenting and co-parenting behaviors.

The justification for additional spending on fatherhood policies and programs is irrefutable. A recent economic analysis determines that childhood poverty cost the nation \$1.03 trillion in 2015, and that every dollar spent on reducing childhood poverty would save the country at least \$7.²⁷ Engaging fathers economically, socially, and psychologically makes good sense for children and the wider society as well.

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