



Resolution on Fatherhood Initiatives

Introduction

The 1996 PRWORA legislation established a new paradigm for U.S. social policy, making family self-sufficiency the ultimate goal of the welfare system. With the establishment of this time-limited and work-oriented family support system, the purpose of the Child Support program similarly evolved to give greater emphasis to promoting family self-sufficiency instead of the historical welfare cost recovery purpose. NCSEA endorses this change and supports policies and initiatives to promote responsible fatherhood as a path to family self-sufficiency.

Research increasingly shows that responsible loving fathers make a valuable contribution to the well-being of their children and to society; that a majority of unwed fathers and mothers are involved at the time of the birth of their child; and that young unwed fathers and mothers both need services in order to support their families. More than any other agency of state government, the Child Support program has the responsibility and is in a position to reach out to fathers who need supportive services, and to benefit by working cooperatively with fatherhood initiatives that provide these services. Child Support agencies are already involved in forging relationships with fathers through partnerships with community-based organizations. Further, Child Support agencies provide a natural link to coordinate with TANF agencies and with Workforce Development Boards to develop family self-sufficiency.

THEREFORE, NCSEA resolves that:

1. Fathers are important to their families and low-income fathers need services to help them provide emotional and financial support.
2. Financial obligations for low-income fathers of fragile families must be based on ability to pay, including a realistic assessment of earning capacity.
3. The role of the IV-D agency in fatherhood initiatives is to participate in partnerships with community-based organizations and other public agencies to help fathers negotiate the Child Support system, rather than IV-D agencies directly providing such services.
4. Legislation is needed to fund community-based organizations to provide services for low-income fathers to help them establish paternity and meet their financial and emotional responsibilities and thereby promote child well-being.
5. The child support community should have an active participatory voice in all funding decisions related to initiatives designed to aid family self-sufficiency, especially with regard to the TANF, WIA and Welfare to Work programs.



Background

Recent research has reinforced findings on the importance of fathers. It shows that responsible, loving fathers make a valuable contribution to the well-being of their children and to society. Children who grow up without a responsible father in their lives are more likely to be poor, to drop out of school, to end up in foster care or juvenile justice facilities, to bear their own children out-of-wedlock, and to be under-employed as adults. Research also shows that at the time of the birth four out of five unwed mothers and fathers are romantically involved, over half of unwed parents of low-income children are living together, and over two-thirds say their chances of marriage of 50-50 or better. Further, mothers reported that fathers provided support to them during the pregnancy, and over ninety percent of the mothers said they wanted the father to help raise the baby.

Finally, research shows that the profiles of young, unwed fathers are remarkably similar to those of the mothers. Of the poor non-custodial fathers who do not pay child support and the poor custodial mothers who do not receive child support, 43% of these fathers and mothers were high school dropouts. Additionally, 40% of these fathers had been out of work for up to 3 years, and 32% had been out of work for more than 3 years. Corresponding figures for mothers were 31% and 34% respectively. Finally, total family income was \$4,861 for fathers and \$7,408 for mothers. Thus, both partners need services to support to their children.

More than any other agency in state government, the child support program has a responsibility, and is in a position, to reach out to fathers, and to benefit from supporting fatherhood initiatives. As the Child Support program requires fathers to pay support, so it must also help them position themselves to be able to assume this responsibility. Fathers have a long-term responsibility for their children starting at birth. Under the PRWORA system of time-limited assistance to families, Child Support is the primary agency with long-term responsibility for children. Because of this, Child Support must work with both parents, and both parents must work with child support, to provide the best financial and emotional support possible. This must include a Child Support commitment to obligations based on current ability to pay and a realistic assessment of capacity to earn, as well as to expeditiously modify orders.

Child Support agencies are already involved in forging relationships with fathers through partnerships with community-based organizations providing services to fathers. This activity is often at the initiative of community-based organizations who recognize the importance of establishing paternity and paying child support as a key element of responsible fatherhood. Thus, child support agencies have learned the need to exercise flexibility in working with the fragile family population. They have also learned that the success in working with low-income fathers will help the Child Support program meet performance goals.



Child Support agencies provide a natural link to coordinate with TANF agencies and with Workforce Development Boards to develop family self-sufficiency. An effective fatherhood initiative for fathers of fragile families should be coordinated with the state TANF agency and the state Workforce Development Board so that there is a comprehensive strategy to develop self-sufficiency for the family. Child Support agencies already have such a relationship with the TANF agency, including computer data links between mothers and fathers, and are establishing relationships with the Workforce Development Boards. This linkage is crucial to the successful operation of a fatherhood initiative.

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