



ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD

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THE ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD

2005 ANNUAL REPORT

**FROM THE OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN
JEFFERY M. LEVING**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The deterioration of responsible fatherhood over the last half-century has had a devastating effect on American families. Countless studies and mounting anecdotal evidence continues to demonstrate how children who grow up in father absent homes are much more likely to be poor, to use drugs, to experience educational, emotional and behavioral problems, to be victims of child abuse, and to engage in criminal behavior.

To confront this great social challenge in Illinois, the Council has continued working towards one clear and measurable goal: to significantly increase the proportion of children growing up with an involved and responsible father in the state of Illinois.

In 2005 the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood accomplished all of its anticipated outcomes and initiated the process of fulfilling its legislative mandate and completing a final report to be presented to the Governor and General Assembly in 2006.

The following is a summary of what we have accomplished in 2005:

Convened Regional Meetings – In 2005 the Council succeeded in meeting in goal of convening regional forums in different geographic areas of the state focused on fatherhood issues hosting events in Southern Illinois (Carbondale), Central Illinois (Springfield) and Northwest Illinois (Rockford).

Convened Statewide Symposium – On June 4, 2005 the Council convened a statewide symposium in collaboration with Cong. Danny K. Davis and other partner organizations. The event, held at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. College Prep High School in Chicago, sought to educate and empower fathers to be more responsible parents and to provide them with resources to make positive changes in their lives.

Built the Council Membership – The Council was able to present several qualified candidates to the Governor's Office for consideration for appointment. With the help of Sen. Kimberly Lightford, the Council was able to raise its ranks of voting members from five to 16 in 2005.

Completed First Phase of the Assessment of State Agencies – In September, the Council sent out letters to the heads of state agencies asking them to complete a self-assessment tool regarding their fatherhood programs developed by the Council. Phase One of the assessment initiative targeted the three state agencies that most directly impact fathers and families: DHS, DHFS and DCFS. The Council has meet with these agencies and they are currently completing their assessments. The Council anticipates that they will meet their deadlines and return them by Jan 1, 2006.

Generated Public Awareness – Leveraging regional and statewide events, the Council was able to secure significant placements in media throughout the state regarding the Council and the importance of its mission.

While much was accomplished in 2005, it is still a prelude to the work that needs to be done in 2006.

The responsible fatherhood movement has become a nationwide call-to-action for all parents and concerned citizens seeking to improve the welfare of the next generation of American children. The Governor and General Assembly's leadership on this issue and their continued support of the Council and its mission is essential to the success of the movement at both a statewide and national level. The Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood is one of the first government programs of its kind and will serve as a model for other states across the country seeking to restore responsible fatherhood as a societal norm.

COUNCIL OVERVIEW

Mission Statement

The mission of the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood is to significantly increase the number of children in Illinois that grow up with a responsible father in their lives. We seek to accomplish this through:

- Raising public awareness of the impact of father absence on children
- Assisting state agencies and other service providers in securing the resources they need to promote responsible fatherhood
- Reforming perceptions within state agencies and other service providers regarding the role of fathers as parents
- Advocating for programs, policies and legislation that will encourage the positive involvement of fathers

Strategic Overview

We will raise public awareness of the impact of father absence on children by:

- Holding regional meetings and sharing statistics
- Convening a symposium and conducting sessions on the impact of absent fathers
- Preparing a resource guide that will include statistical impact

We will assist state agencies and other service providers in securing the resources they need to promote responsible fatherhood by:

- Conducting assessments of state agency needs related to promoting responsible fatherhood
- Encouraging state agencies to complete father-friendly assessments
- Developing a resource guide listing available service-providers throughout the state

We will reform perceptions among state agencies and other service providers regarding the role of fathers as parents by:

- Conducting regional forum meetings to gain input from citizens throughout the state and share with stakeholders
- Convening a symposium to share lessons learned

See Appendix A for more information on the Council's structure and mission.

2005 ACTIONS

Convened Regional Meetings

In 2005 the Council succeeded in meeting its goal of convening regional forums in different geographic areas of the state focused on fatherhood issues.

In April 2005 the Council on Responsible Fatherhood for the state of Illinois convened two meetings – one in Southern Illinois (Carbondale) and one in Central Illinois (Springfield). The events were hosted by Southern Illinois University (April 16) and the University of Illinois at Springfield (April 30).

After these meetings, the Council analyzed the feedback from the Carbondale and Springfield attendees and information gathered at the symposium and scheduled an additional meeting. On Nov. 19, 2005 the Council held a regional meeting in Rockford at Rockford College. Another meeting is planned for Peoria at Bradley University in February 2006.

The regional meetings have helped us build a statewide network of supportive groups and individuals; pinpoint challenges that hinder father involvement in their children's lives; develop ideas for programs that would support fathers; and identify the means of bringing about legislative reforms. To accomplish this, the Council reached out to lawmakers, churches, social service organizations and individuals in these geographic areas to participate in the forums.

The objectives of the regional meetings were to:

- Identify the top policy issues and concerns that prevent the positive involvement of fathers in the lives of their children in different geographic areas of Illinois
- Discuss ways to engage fathers through programming and public outreach
- Raise public awareness concerning the impact of father absence through public relations outreach

All three forums were considered a success and generated important feedback. More information on the initial regional meetings and feedback from the attendees is available in Appendix B.

Convened Statewide Symposium

On June 4, 2005 the Council convened a statewide symposium in collaboration with Cong. Danny K. Davis and other partner organizations. The event, held at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. College Prep High School in Chicago, sought to educate and empower fathers to be more responsible parents and to provide them with resources to make positive changes in their lives through:

- Public dialogue with top state officials and decision-makers regarding policies and programs relevant to fathers
- Informative skill-building workshops
- Resource Fair

The 2005 event examined state policies and programs to encourage responsible fatherhood. More than 300 people attended. Many in attendance were indigent or lower-income fathers, and more than 30 social service agencies provided free information for

attendees (for a full list of organizations who participated in the resource fair see Appendix C)

Elected officials, such as; Congressman Danny Davis, Senator Kimberly Lightford, Rep. Paul Froehlich and Toni Preckwinkle (4th Ward Alderman) were in attendance as well as top representatives from state agencies. These included: Dr. Carol Adams and Marva Arnold, DHS; Dr. Eric Whitaker, IDPH; Erwin Mc Ewen and Bamani Obadele, DCFS; Norris Stevenson, Karen Newton-Matza and John Allen, IDPA; Jenny Gardner, ACF; and Jesse Montgomery, Jr., DOC.

The event was successful in helping create a framework for a collaborative, inter-agency effort to address father absence in Illinois.

More information on the symposium and feedback from the panel is available in Appendix C.

Built and Reorganized Council

At the end of 2004, the Council identified this as its most important goal. In the beginning of 2005, there were only a handful of members appointed to the Council. By reaching into their own network of colleagues and partners, the existing Council members were able to present several qualified candidates to the Governor's Office for consideration for appointment. With the help of Sen. Kimberly Lightford, the Council was able to raise its ranks of voting members from five to 16 in 2005.

The regional meetings held throughout the state also served as a catalyst for the Council to identify qualified candidates for the Council in different geographic areas throughout the state, which helped spur the increase in membership in 2005.

With an increased number of members and guided by the feedback from the initial regional meetings and the symposium, the Council resolved in July 2005 to create sub-committees to address the main initiatives required of the Council, as such:

- Symposium Sub-Committee – to collaborate with state agencies to plan a statewide symposium and help plan regional meetings
- Resource Guide Sub-Committee - to collaborate with state agencies to draft a resource guide and compile existing research/resources on fatherhood in Illinois
- Assessment Sub-Committee – to evaluate State programs, government policies and community initiatives related to fatherhood.
- Legislative Sub-Committee – to research legislative initiatives that could serve fathers and make recommendations for the General Assembly

Completed First Phase of Assessment Process

In September, the Council sent out letters to the heads of several state agencies and organizations asking them to complete a self-assessment tool regarding their fatherhood programs. The Council stressed a collaborative approach in the letter, in which the

Council would work cooperatively with the recipient to effectively complete the assessment.

Ultimately, the Council intends to complete the assessment process with seven state agencies: DHS, DHFS, DCFS, DOC, IDES, State Board of Education and IDPH.

Phase One of the assessment initiative targeted the three state agencies that most directly impact fathers and families: DHS, DHFS and DCFS. The Council has met with these agencies and they are currently completing their assessments. The Council anticipates that they will meet their deadlines and return them by Jan 1, 2006. The Council will setup meetings with the remaining organizations and initiate their assessment process in Jan. 2006.

Generated Public Awareness

One of the primary functions of the Council, as mandated in the Responsible Fatherhood Act, is to generate public awareness of the impact of father absence on children. Leveraging regional and statewide events, the Council was able to secure significant placements in media throughout the state regarding the Council and the importance of its mission. (Detailed reports on media placements for the regional meetings is available in Appendix C).

The symposium, a success from a public policy standpoint, also generated significant public relations. The Council was able to secure a media partnership with three Clear Channel stations (WGCI-FM, V103-FM and WGRB-AM) to promote the event as well as responsible fatherhood. The Council also produced both a radio and video PSA that ran on more than 12 outlets throughout the city. Public relations outreach netted coverage in 19 community newspapers across the city including the Chicago Defender, Streetwise and the Chicago Crusader, a segment on the WGN evening news and interviews on the popular Herb Kent Show.

Moreover, the chairman of the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood has championed the Council and its mission through public outreach. Some forums in which he has promoted the Council include:

- Radio: Interviews on radio shows, including Chicago talk radio and WGCI-FM;
- TV: As a host of “Chicago Counterpoint,” a popular public affairs show on CAN-TV in Chicago, and through an interview on a major Rockford television station; and
- Print: As a featured columnist in a prominent community newspaper in Chicago and several submitted Op-Ed pieces to top dailies throughout the state

2006 EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Complete and Analyze Agency Self-Assessments

In 2006 the Council will meet with the remaining state agencies/organizations it has identified for evaluation and initiate their process of self-assessment. The Council will work collaboratively with these agencies throughout the process. The Council will use these self-assessments to help identify opportunities for the state agencies to promote, or continue to promote, responsible fatherhood.

Convene Second Statewide Symposium on Responsible Fatherhood

Building on the success of last years event, the Council will convene another statewide symposium focused on educating fathers, families, practitioners and community leaders about fatherhood issues and provide them the practical resources need to promote responsible fatherhood in their homes and in their communities.

Convene More Regional Meetings

The Council already has scheduled a forum in Peoria at Bradley University in February 2006. The Council is currently exploring holding another meeting in East St. Louis, the Quad Cities and Champaign-Urbana.

Complete Fatherhood Resource Guide

The Council has already completed a draft of the resource guide and is working on refining the content. Once this has been completed the Council will render the document into a visually-appealing, downloadable pdf file that will be accessible online at the Council's Web site (www.responsiblefatherhood.com) as well as other state agency and partner organization Web sites.

Ultimately, the Council would like to be able to print a sizable amount of these resource guides that can be distributed to fathers and practitioners throughout the state. At a minimum, the Council intends to print a limited amount of resource guides to distribute at the symposium.

Present Report

Drawing on data garnered from the regional meetings, both symposiums and existing research, the Council will draft a report that will include recommendations to the General Assembly and the Governor for legislation to promote responsible fatherhood and strengthen families and provide opportunities for administrative actions within the state agencies to better serve responsible fatherhood, children and the families of Illinois.

REQUEST FOR FUNDING

The Council has accomplished its progress to date with the time and commitment of the Council members and through the support of partner organizations, including the 7th Congressional District (Cong. Danny K. Davis), Southern Illinois University, University of Illinois – Springfield, Rockford College and the Fatherhood Educational Institute.

However, for the Council to convene a symposium representative of the authority granted to the Council by the General Assembly and the importance of its mission, the Council needs funding. The Responsible Fatherhood Act does not provide for any specific funding amounts and the Council's support agency – the Department of Human Services – has been unable to provide any resources (financial or human) to support our initiative.

Moreover, while the Council intends to complete the Resource Guide and make it available online via download, it cannot print and distribute hardcopies of these guides to fathers and practitioners throughout the state without financial support.

Therefore, the Council would like to recommend that the General Assembly grant a special one-time appropriation to the Council to fund both of these initiatives.

Presented by:

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