



ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD

Phone: (312) 296-8656

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# **THE ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD**

## **2007 ANNUAL REPORT**

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

*December 28, 2007*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The deterioration of responsible fatherhood over the last half-century has had a devastating effect on American families and 24 million children live absent their biological dads in America. 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.

We must never forget children need their dads, and when they're absent, something is lost. We have a responsibility to help children who have been born into harsh circumstances and fractured families.

To confront this great social challenge in Illinois, the Council On Responsible Fatherhood (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.

The following is a summary of what the Council has accomplished in 2007:

*Convened Regional Meetings* – In 2007, the Council succeeded in meeting the goal of convening three effective regional forums focused on fatherhood issues. The Council hosted events in Peoria and Chicago.

*Convened Statewide Symposium* – On June 2, 2007, the Council convened a statewide symposium in collaboration with Congressman Danny K. Davis and other partner organizations. The event was held at Malcolm X College in Chicago. The symposium sought to educate and empower fathers to be more effective parents and to provide them with resources to make positive changes in their lives.

*Policy Report* – Based on feedback from parents, community leaders and practitioners who participated in our previous regional meetings, the Council has identified four major priority areas that need to be addressed in Illinois to help promote the positive involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. The major priority areas are discussed on Page 7.

*Completed Assessment of State Agencies* – In July 2007, the Council resent letters to the heads of various key state agencies, including: the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES), (Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (IDHFS), Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), and the Board of Education asking them to complete a current self-assessment tool regarding their fatherhood programs. The purpose was to update prior self-assessments. One completed self-assessment and two responses to the self-assessments were received from Illinois Department of Human Services, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs and Illinois Department of Labor respectively. Members of the Council received the copies of the self-assessment and responses from the above referenced 3 agencies. The other agencies did not respond.

*Completed Fatherhood Resource Guide*

The Council produced the “Illinois Fatherhood Resource Guide” and distributed copies of it throughout the state. Printing was done by IDHS. The Illinois Fatherhood Resource Guide is also available as a downloadable .pdf file at the Council’s Website ([www.responsiblefatherhood.com](http://www.responsiblefatherhood.com)), as well as on other state agencies and partner organization Websites.

*Generated Public Awareness* – Leveraging regional and statewide events, the Council was able to secure significant placements in media throughout the state regarding the importance of the commitment of the Governor, the General Assembly, and the Council’s mission. Throughout the state, increasing numbers of organizations and individuals now recognize the role the Council is playing in increasing awareness of the need for responsible father involvement for the well-being of Illinois children and families.

While much was accomplished in 2007, it is still a prelude to the work that needs to be done in 2008.

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 has served as a model for other states across the country seeking to restore responsible fatherhood as a societal norm in all communities.

## 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.

The Council seeks 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; and
- Advocating for programs, policies, and legislation that will encourage the positive involvement of fathers.

### *Strategic Overview*

The Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood will raise public awareness of the impact of father absence on children by:

- Holding regional meetings and sharing significant research and statistics;
- Convening an annual statewide symposium and conducting free public sessions on the impact of absent fathers; and
- Preparing and disseminating a resource guide that will include the statistical impact resulting from father absence.

The Council 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; and
- Developing and disseminating a resource guide listing available to 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 concerning different obstacles confronted by fathers in specific geographic areas throughout the state and share information and available resources with stakeholders; and
- Convening an annual statewide symposium to share information obtained at regional forums.

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

## 2007 ACTIONS

### *Convened Regional Meetings*

In 2007, the Council succeeded in meeting the goal of convening effective regional forums focused on fatherhood issues in different geographic areas of the state. The Council hosted two events in Peoria (February 24<sup>th</sup> and September 15<sup>th</sup>) and one event in Chicago (November 3<sup>rd</sup>).

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, community and faith-based organizations, social service agencies, educational institutions, and individuals in these geographic areas to participate in the forums. Dr. Carol Adams, the Director of IDHS, assisted with promotions of the September 15<sup>th</sup> Peoria event and provided department's publicist as a resource.

The objectives of the regional meetings were to:

- Identify the top policy issues and concerns that hinder 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; and
- Raise public awareness concerning the impact of father absence through public relations outreach.

From the positive comments of attendees, all three meetings were considered a success and generated important feedback. More information on the regional meetings is available in Appendix B.

### *Convened Statewide Symposium*

On June 2, 2007, the Council convened a statewide symposium in collaboration with Danny K. Davis and other partner organizations. The event was held at Malcolm X College in Chicago under the theme "Fathers United to Empower Families." This statewide symposium had the largest number of attendees to date, which displays the importance of fathers in the lives of their children.

Elected official Alderman Edward Smith and State Representative Paul Froehlich and representatives from the offices of Congressman Danny K. Davis and Senator Kimberly Lightford were in attendance as well as top representatives from state agencies.

The goal of the symposium was 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; and
- a Resource Fair.

The 2007 event examined state policies and programs to encourage responsible fatherhood. More than 500 people attended. Many in attendance were indigent or lower-income fathers, and more than 25 social service agencies provided free information for attendees (for a list of organizations who participated in the Resource Fair see Appendix C).

The event was successful in helping create a framework for a collaborative, inter-agency effort to address father absence in Illinois. From this framework, the Illinois Council is in an excellent position to continue its work in the coming year.

More information on the symposium is available in Appendix C.

### *Policy Report*

Based on feedback from parents, community leaders, and practitioners who participated in our regional meetings, the Council has identified four major priority areas that need to be addressed in Illinois to help promote the positive involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. The Council plans to work with state agencies and legislators to enact reforms and legislation that will address the following needs:

- **Create a more father-friendly court system:** Eliminate the perceived gender bias against fathers in the court system and encourage a process that promotes the positive involvement of both parents. This includes access to legal assistance for low-income fathers;
- **Encourage fathers to stay involved in their children's lives:** Reform of state programs to create incentives that encourage fathers to remain involved;
- **Assist incarcerated fathers:** Create programs that help incarcerated fathers maintain contact with their children, abate and/or modify child support and assist in re-entry; and
- **Provide career opportunities for fathers:** Provide education and career training for fathers to better provide for their children.

### *Completed Fatherhood Resource Guide*

The Council completed production of its resource guide and began distributing copies of it throughout the state. The Illinois Department of Human Services undertook the task of printing the guide on behalf of the Council. The resource guide is also available as a downloadable .pdf file at the Council's Website ([www.responsiblefatherhood.com](http://www.responsiblefatherhood.com)), as well as other state agency and partner organization Websites.

### *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.

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. Public relations outreach netted coverage in nearly 20 community newspapers across the city including the Chicago Defender, Streetwise, and the Chicago Crusader.

In addition, the ICRF Legislative Committee drafted language for the Virtual Visitation Bill in order to promote awareness of new technology in the area of visitation between fathers and their children. Also, Chairman Jeffery M. Leving testified before the Illinois House Judiciary Committee regarding House Bill 3486 (Virtual Visitation).

The Council also established an Intergovernmental Committee. The purpose of this Committee is to review self-assessments and identify problem areas and provide resources to correct issues or make enhancements.

The Council is pursuing an initiative with the Illinois Department of Corrections to develop a pilot program for virtual visitation.

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
- Print: Published letter in Chicago Sun Times regarding child support burdens on ex-convicts who are without income upon release.
- Print: Published article in Chicago Daily Law Bulletin regarding ICRF support of virtual visitation law.

## 2008 EXPECTED OUTCOMES

### *Policy Report*

The Council plans to work with state agencies and legislators to enact reforms and legislation that will: implement a virtual visitation plan for incarcerated parents and disabled veterans, determine the role of providing support to state agencies requesting assistance for fatherhood programming, determine plan to seek funding for collaborative program initiatives and to assist with technical assistance and training at state agencies, and enhance public awareness of rules and regulations that impact fathers rights.

### *Convene a Statewide Symposium on Responsible Fatherhood*

Building on the success of last year's 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 needed to promote responsible fatherhood in their homes and in their communities.

### *Continue to Convene Additional Regional Meetings*

A regional meeting is being planned for the Rockford area in Summer 2008.

### *Upcoming Local Symposiums*

The following symposiums have been scheduled for 2008:

January 19, 2008	Carruthers Center for Inner City Studies Northeastern Illinois University
February 16, 2008	Prairie State College
March 1, 2008	Oakton Community College
April 26, 2008	Chicago State University

## 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 Congressman Danny K. Davis (7<sup>th</sup> Congressional District), Bradley University, St. Xavier University, Malcolm X College (Chicago), and the Fatherhood Educational Institute.

However, for the Council to continue holding regional meetings and 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 Council does not receive state funding which is needed and important to its continued effectiveness. The Responsible Fatherhood Act does not provide for any specific funding amounts.

Therefore, the Council would like to recommend that the General Assembly grant a special appropriation to the Council to fund these important initiatives.

## REQUEST FOR ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

The Council would like to request at least 1 (one) full time skilled staff person to support the Council in performing all of its duties. Pursuant to Public Act 093-0437, "The Department of Human Services must provide staff support to the Council". Based upon the Council members' knowledge, this has not occurred and the Council has been in existence for years. Therefore, the Council would like to recommend the General Assembly assist us in trying to obtain this much needed administrative support on an ongoing basis.

On November 15, 2007, the Council requested in writing to Marva Arnold, Human Capital Development, that the Council be provided with an additional supply of the Illinois Fathers' Resource Guides. As of December 6, 2007, Ms. Arnold authorized the printing of 5,000 guides. These resource guides are required immediately for distribution at the following symposiums: January, 19, 2008, February 16, 2008, March 1, 2008 and April 26, 2008.

**Presented by:**



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**Jeffery M. Leving, Chair**  
**Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood**

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# Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood STRATEGIC OVERVIEW APPENDIX A

### **Council 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

### **Council 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 assessment 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

We will advocate for programs, policies and legislation that will encourage the positive involvement of fathers by:

- Conducting assessment or researching of current programs, policies, legislations that hinder father engagement
- Holding a symposium to gather information and evaluate current programs and policies
- Preparing a report to identify current status of responsible fatherhood in Illinois and recommendations for enhancement

## **Sub-Committees**

### Symposium Sub-Committee

Responsibilities:

- Collaborating with state agencies to plan symposium
- Help plan regional meetings

### Resource Guide Sub-Committee

Responsibilities:

- Collaborate with state agencies to revise “Non-Custodial Parent Service Directory” into resource guide
- Compile existing research/statistics on the state of fatherhood in Illinois for Resource Guide

### Assessment Sub-Committee

Responsibilities:

- Revise/Design assessment program/tool for state agencies
- Make recommendations for internal policies and programs

### Intergovernmental Affairs Sub-Committee

#### Responsibilities:

- Interact with state agencies to keep abreast on new policies and programs
- Make recommendations for changes in agency policies and programs

### Legislative Sub-Committee

#### Responsibilities:

- Research legislative initiatives that could serve fathers
- Make recommendations for the General Assembly

### Chairman

#### Responsibilities:

- Organize and implement regional meetings
- Organize full Council meetings, set agendas
- Manage and maintain Web site
- Manage sub-committees and provide administrative support



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# Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood REGIONAL MEETINGS REPORT APPENDIX B

### **Background**

In 2007, the Council on Responsible Fatherhood for the State of Illinois convened three regional meetings – Peoria, IL on February 24<sup>th</sup> and September 15<sup>th</sup> and Chicago, IL on November 3<sup>rd</sup>.

The regional meetings sought to 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 look for 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 forum.

The stated objectives of the meeting were to:

- Identify what are the top policy issues or concerns that prevent the positive involvement of fathers
- Discuss ways to engage fathers through programming and public outreach
- Form regional taskforces

The regional meetings also offered an opportunity to raise public awareness of the impact of father absence through public relations outreach in these areas.

## Results Summary

Information was gathered through dialogue in the forum discussions.

The following is an assessment from the meetings.

- **Create a more father-friendly court system:** Eliminate the perceived gender bias against fathers in the court system and encourage a process that promotes the positive involvement of both parents
- **Encourage fathers to stay involved:** Reform of state programs to create incentives that encourage fathers to remain involved
- **Assist incarcerated fathers:** Create programs that help incarcerated fathers maintain contact with their children, abate child support and assist in re-entry
- **Providing career opportunities for fathers:** Provide education and career training for fathers to better provide for their children



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# Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood FATHERHOOD SYMPOSIUM REPORT APPENDIX C

### Overview

#### ***Mission:***

To educate and empower fathers to be more responsible parents and to provide them with resources to make positive changes in their lives.

The 2007 Fatherhood Symposium accomplished this through:

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

The focus of the 2007 event was reforming state policies and programs to encourage fathers to be more involved in the lives of their children.

#### ***Theme:***

“Paving a Pathway to Parenthood: Investing in Fathers”

#### ***Location:***

Malcolm X College in Chicago, Illinois

#### ***Who Was There:***

- More than 500 people attended. Many in attendance were indigent or lower-income fathers.
- More than 25 father-friendly social services agencies that provided free information and services for those in attendance, including: Black Star Project; Chicago Area Project; Chicago Freemasons; Community Action of Nebraska; Community Action of Northeast Indiana; Daddy’s Club; Family

Focus Lawndale; Fatherhood Educational Institute; Fathers Who Care; Fathers' Center; Featherfist; First Impression, LLC; Goodwill; Lifelink; Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois; Midwest Center on Workforce and Family Development, Inc.; Neighborhood Technology Resource Center; New Moms, Inc.; One Family, One Child; Order of the Eastern Star; Raymond's Foundation; Roll Call; Sankofa Way Spiritual Services, Inc.; and WOVEN.

- Elected official Alderman Edward Smith, State Representative Paul Froehlich and representatives from the offices of Congressman Danny K. Davis and Senator Kimberly Lightford were in attendance as well as top representatives from state agencies.
- Entertainer: Tony Sculfield - WGCI.

***Collaborators:***

The Council on Responsible Fatherhood and Cong. Danny Davis collaborated with the following organizations for the 2007 Fatherhood Conference & Resource Fair:

- Cong. Danny K. Davis
- Fatherhood Educational Institute
- Fathers Who Care
- Midwest Center on Workforce and Family Development, Inc.

***Summary:***

Panel discussions with agency representatives briefly addressed the audience and detailed their organization's efforts to promote positive father involvement. Then the panel took questions from the audience. The purpose of the forum was to open dialogue between policy-makers and concerned citizens and provide an opportunity for each organization to commit publicly to helping provide support for fathers in Illinois.