

**THE ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD
2012 ANNUAL REPORT**

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www.responsiblefatherhood.illinois.gov

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Members of the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood

Jeffery M. Leving, Chairman

Members:

Sen. Kimberly Lightford

Sen. Edward Petka (Ret.)

Rep. Paul Froehlich (Ret.)

Rep. LaShawn Ford

Norris Stevenson

Dr. Yolanda Peppers

Dianna Durham-McLoud

Dr. Kirk Harris

David Hirsch

Dr. Leon Intrater

Rev. Walter Jones

Tim O'Grady

Lois Rakov

Rev. Rodney Byrd

INTRODUCTION

The Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood is a state commission established by the Illinois State Legislature to promote the positive involvement of both parents in the lives of their children. Countless study findings 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. This information indicates that these most challenging social problems are symptoms of father absence.

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. In Illinois, it is estimated that 1.1 million children grow up without their fathers present at home. The need is great to help fathers stay involved with their children as the child grows.

There is mounting evidence of the great benefits of appropriate and effective male “father figures/mentors” in the lives of children whose biological fathers are not available to them for various reasons. 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 and/or responsible “father figure/mentor” in the state of Illinois. Efforts of the Council and of the individual Council members are geared to fulfill the mission of the Council: to promote the positive involvement of both parents in the lives of their children.

2012 ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD ACTIVITIES

In 2012, the Council worked to spread awareness of the crucial importance of children's need for their dads and the serious effects of father absence. The Council and Council members concerned themselves with real life issues that men face such as fathers' rights, child support, relationships, access and visitation, public policy, expunging records, entrepreneurship, conflict resolution, foreclosure, education, health, and employment opportunities. The Council recognizes and builds public awareness on the importance of the community in advocating for and supporting male adult involvement in and assistance to children/adolescents who benefit from male adult presence and involvement in youths' lives.

Statewide Symposium

On December 8, 2012, the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood (ICRF) convened its Annual ICRF Statewide Symposium at the Hyde Park Art Center. The symposium, in collaboration with partners and community organizations, was attended by approximately 50 attendees including a representative from the Chicago Sun Times. The free community event was held at the Hyde Park Art Center with invitations sent by the Council and its members and other outreach provided by the Hyde Park Art Center, partner organizations and the media.

This event offered a responsible fatherhood educational program and covered timely and significant topics. The symposium was an opportunity for advocacy for Illinois parents and individuals in attendance to ask questions about the status of fathers in the community, the range and diversity of federal, regional, state and local fatherhood programs, the role of mother's as "gate keepers" and the need for legal assistance for fathers to gain access and visitation with their children. Speakers provided important statistical information on single parenting, particularly that of single fathers with custody, examples of the difficulties faced by children in situations of parental alienation and assistance with current resources as well as future events to promote the positive involvement of both parents in the lives of their children.

This event generated public awareness of the impact of father absence on children and the serious affect upon children of all ages throughout the state and nation.

Council Areas of Concern

The Council's strategic planning during 2011 identified key focus areas upon which the Council, as a group and individually, continued to work on in 2012.

During 2012, the Council utilized the identified areas of concern from the Council's strategic planning sessions to inform its plans and organize its efforts. Council members worked to make certain that the identified key areas of focus were aligned with the role and mission of the Council. The Council identified ICRF partners, developed action steps, and identified person(s) responsible for key areas of focus.

The key areas of concern identified many major issues facing fathers which are in line with the Council's continued work on its mission:

- Health and Wellness
- Funds and Resources
- Employment
- Public Policies
- Legal Obstacles
- Parenting/Parent Education

Identification of Partners

Illinois Council members reached out to numerous community groups to build partnerships to fulfill the mission of the council and to build awareness and support for fathers and families. Particular efforts were made to identify and work with partners in the identified key areas of concern.

Council Committee Work

Legislation

The Council continued in 2012 to give attention to needed reforms and legislation during its legislative committee's strategic meetings. For example, interest was high on the need to reduce the negative outcomes experienced by children affected by father absence and parental alienation.

Council members received a report on the legislation regarding the Illinois Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity Form (VAP). The bill was passed and a new form is now being used for the Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity. The new form very clearly emphasizes that genetic tests can be requested regarding the child's paternity. It is now very clearly and boldly indicated on the new form that by signing the VAP, the party gives up rights to a genetic test.

The Council discussed possible legislative items. Two potential legislative items included 1) forgiveness of statutory interest on child support debt due to economic hardship and 2) parental notice of a convicted sex offender when the sex offender is a student in school. Council members suggested it would be informative to monitor Colorado legislation regarding sex offender notification and review the outcome.

Fatherhood Services

This committee continued to explore ways to seek funds for the Council during 2012. The Council explored potential grant funds that were relevant to the mission and/or key focus areas of the strategic plan.

Fatherhood Resources

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 and to assess the needs of fathers in a particular geographic area. The annual symposium, a success from a public policy standpoint, generated significant public relations. The Council received proclamations and recognitions from the President of the United States, the Governor of Illinois and the media.

Council Website

The development and refinement of the Council's website continued throughout 2012. The Council's web site at www.responsiblefatherhood.illinois.gov is a key vehicle for generating public awareness of the need for father involvement and the resources available to aid fathers and families. The goal of the website is to be a community resource for responsible fatherhood programs. With support from the Illinois Department of Human Services, the Council's website has an official state government URL.

Resource Guide

Copies of a summary resource guide were made available by the Illinois Department of Human Services and also distributed by Council members. Selected information from this resource guide can be found in this report and is available on the council's website's direct link: <http://responsiblefatherhood.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/ICRF-Datasheet.pdf>

Council Facebook Page

Public awareness about the Council's work was furthered due to the development and launch of the new ICRF Facebook page in October 2011. The new page was inaugurated with the initial announcement of the Council's annual symposium for December 17, 2011, at the Oak Park Library. The link for the Facebook page is

www.facebook.com/ResponsibleFatherhood

Fatherhood Involvement Activities of Council Members

In January 2012, Council member Rev. Walter Jones took part in several events focusing on the prevention of violence and the role of fathers. He participated in a Violence Prevention Event in the 11th, 15th and 25th districts of Chicago. He was also involved in fatherhood support groups, and a Fatherhood event in which Senator Collins of the 16th district also took part. In February, Council member Jones continued his efforts by attending Leadership, Anti-Violence, Father's Family, and Responsible Fatherhood meetings.

On February 21, 2012, the Chair of The Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood, Jeffery M. Leving presented on a critical panel at the 13th Annual National Fatherhood and Families

Conference in Los Angeles. The panel was entitled “Reaching Common Ground: Father’s Rights and Responsibilities.” He addressed the complexities of the challenges low-income fathers face in their children’s lives. Chair Leving also lectured on Fathers’ Rights and Father Absence at Azizi Books during Black History Month. This lecture focused on father absence among minorities.

Chair Leving was invited to lecture for the West Suburban Chiefs of Police on March 5, 2012. This legal presentation was a part of the continuing law enforcement education and training efforts that ultimately protect society and the best interest of children.

In April, Council member Rev. Walter Jones took part in the United States Department of Education and Congressional Black Caucus meeting. During April, Council members also collaborated with communities during Fatherhood and Men’s planning meetings in the 11th and 15th districts.

On April 24th, Council Chair Jeffery Leving’s book, *How to Be a Good Divorced Dad*, was published. An essential guide for any divorced father looking for strategies and skills for remaining a crucial part of their children’s lives, it was endorsed by the Archdiocese of Chicago, Cardinal Francis George, and praised by President Barack Obama.

In May, the Council continued to focus on violence prevention and the role of fathers in families. Council members took part in an Anti-Violence Clergy in West Garfield Park, a Healthy Fathers committee meeting, and a Black Fatherhood event.

On June 12, 2012, Council chair Leving was invited to be a remarks speaker at the Mid-West Regional Fatherhood & Healthy Families Summer Institute at the Elmhurst College Campus in Elmhurst, Illinois, hosted by the Fathers & Families Coalition of America. He introduced keynote speaker, the honorable Danny K. Davis, U.S. Congressman Illinois 7th District.

Council member Norris Stevenson participated in several prominent conference calls throughout the year. On July 12, 2012, he took part in the Administration Children and Families Annual Directors’ Meeting as a state representative and an ICRF council member. In September, he gave a presentation about the roles of fathers in the childhood support program in a regional conference call. Also in September, he participated in the regional Fatherhood meeting, which was a planning and strategic conference call. Again in December 2012, Council member Stevenson took part in the Region V Fatherhood Collaboration Conference call.

Council member Lois Rakov continued working with Region V Administration for Children and Families on planning, coordinating, and facilitating the quarterly Fatherhood Network Collaboration calls. The calls during 2012 focused on the topics important to fathers and families, such as “How the Affordable Health Plan Affects Fathers and Families,” “Urban Jurisdictions Working with Fathers—Challenges and Innovations to Empower Fathers and Families” and “Working Toward Economic Stability with Fathers and Families.” Council member Lois Rakov works with the Ohio Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families to have information gathered from these calls archived at

http://www.opnff.net/MIDWEST_FATHERHOOD.ASP. Members of the council take part on these calls.

Awards & Accolades

On April 26, 2012, the Chair of The Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood, Jeffery M. Leving was honored by the members of the Illinois House of Representatives with the adoption of Resolution No. 995 for his work in safeguarding the rights of fathers and protecting the welfare of children and families in Illinois.

On November 2, 2012, Council Chair Jeffery M. Leving received the National Lifetime Call to Service Award.

2013 Plans

The Council plans to continue implementing activities and sponsoring outreach that address the identified areas of Council concern such as health, wellness, employment, public policies, legal obstacles and parenting/parent education.

The Council plans to work with state agencies, associations, community organizations and legislators to identify legislative and policy reforms and to build awareness to these issues. Council members will work to advance measures to make changes and identify more specific strategies to address these concerns. The Council will continue to pursue funds for collaborative program initiatives that will assist with technical assistance and training at state agencies and enhance public awareness of rules and regulations that impact fathers' rights.

Building on the momentum of the December 2012 Annual Symposium, the Council will assess the benefits and ideas gained from the December Symposium in order to plan another statewide symposium. The focus will be identified by community members and Council members in response to the prior identified focus areas and the questions raised on December 8 by audience participants. The broad goals remain: to focus 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.

The Council will continue to seek funding and identify person(s) from the Council, partners and community who are able to collaborate to pursue grant opportunities. This is crucial in order for the Council to enhance its efforts in promoting positive fatherhood involvement in the lives of children throughout Illinois

Appendix A – Government Fatherhood Resources

Department of Children & Family Services

(312) 808-9040 www.state.il.us/dcfs

Department of Human Services

(312) 793-4131 www.dhs.state.il.us

State of Illinois Government Resources

Child Support – (312) 793-7987 www.childsupportillinois.com

United States Dept. of Health & Human Services

(877) 696-6775 www.hhs.gov

United States Dept. Of Education

(800) 872-5327 www.ed.gov

National Responsible Fatherhood Clearing House

(877) 432-3411 – www.fatherhood.gov

APPENDIX B -- 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; and
- Advocating for programs, policies and legislation that will encourage the positive involvement of fathers.

Goals

- To promote father-friendly policies statewide in state and community agencies, faith-based organizations and institutions;
- To provide assistance and resources to local fatherhood groups;
- To build partnerships with state agencies fatherhood program staff and with community and faith-based organizations; and
- To enhance public awareness of the important role of biological fathers and other father figures in the children's development and learning.

Council Strategic Overview

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

- Holding strategic meetings and sharing statistics;
- Convening a symposium and conducting sessions on the impact of absent Fathers; and
- Disseminating a resource guide that will include pertinent resources.

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

- Updating services state agencies to offer fathers information;
- Disseminating a resource guide listing available to service-providers throughout the state; and
- Drafting and supporting legislation that supports father engagement.

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

- Gathering input from citizens throughout the state and share with stakeholders; and
- Convening a symposium to share lessons learned.
- We will advocate for programs, policies and legislation that will encourage the positive involvement of fathers by:
 - a) Conducting assessment or researching of current programs, policies, legislations that hinder father engagement; and

- b) Holding a symposium to gather information and evaluate current programs and policies.

Sub-Committees (comprised of council members)

Symposium Sub-Committee Responsibilities:

- Collaborating to plan symposium; and
- Resource Guide Sub-Committee Responsibilities:
 - Facilitate distribution of ICRF Resource Guide.
- Fatherhood Services Committee and Sub-Committee Responsibilities:
 - Maintain up-to-date information regarding fatherhood services; and
 - Assist with seeking funds to enable the Council to better fulfill its role and function.
- Intergovernmental Affairs Sub-Committee Responsibilities:
 - Interact with state agencies to keep abreast on new policies and programs; and
 - Make recommendations for changes in agency policies and programs.
- Legislative Sub-Committee Responsibilities:
 - Research legislative initiatives that could serve fathers; and
 - Make recommendations for the General Assembly.

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