

**THE ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD  
2013 ANNUAL REPORT**

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[www.responsiblefatherhood.illinois.gov](http://www.responsiblefatherhood.illinois.gov)

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**Prepared by Council Members of the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood and the  
Office of Council Chairman Jeffery M. Leving**

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Members of the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood

Jeffery M. Leving, Chairman

Members:

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Judge Edward Petka, former Illinois Senator

Rep. Paul Froehlich

Rev. Rodney Byrd

Dianna Durham-McLoud

George Haley

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## 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. Yet the Fragile Families study found that 80% of the fathers of children born to never-married parents were involved at the birth of their child. 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.

## **2013 ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD ACTIVITIES**

In 2013, the Council worked to spread awareness of the crucial importance of children's need for their dads and the serious affects 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 7, 2013, the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood (ICRF) convened its Annual ICRF Statewide Symposium at the Oak Park Library, from 12:00 pm-3:00pm. The symposium, in collaboration with partners and community organizations, was attended by approximately 30 attendees. The free community event was held at the Oak Park Library with invitations sent by the Council and its members and other outreach provided by the Oak Park Library, partner organizations and the media. The symposium provided education on parental alienation, single fathers and education, Social Security Benefits for Disabled Children and fathers, a wide variety of services and programs by Haymarket Center. Council Chairman Jeffery Leving gave a welcome and an overview of the Council's work and then moderated the panel for the afternoon. The panel speakers included Council member Dr. Leon Intrater, Council member Lois Rakov, Detective Wayne Halick and Attorney Maureen Gorman,

This event offered a responsible fatherhood educational program and covered timely and significant topics. The symposium was an opportunity for advocacy for community members 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 2012 identified key focus areas upon which the Council, as a group and individually, continued to work in 2013.

During 2013, 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 mandated mission:

- Virtual Visitation
- Regional Fatherhood Network Calls
- Visitation Interference
- Empowering Fathers
- Surviving DCFS Investigations
- Mitigation, an Alternative to Litigation
- Fathers' Rights

### *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 2013 to give attention to needed reforms and legislation during its legislative committee's monthly reports to ensure that state programs' procedures and government policies are reviewed. For example, interest was high on the need to reduce the negative outcomes experienced by children affected by numerous custody issues.

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 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. Further action on these legislative items was not pursued by the Council. 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, with support from IDHS, explored potential grant funds that were relevant to the mission and/or key focus areas of the strategic plan. Discussions were held at the Council meetings regarding efforts that were put forth to draft a grant proposal. In 2013, the Council plans to clarify its process regarding submitting grant proposals and continue to make requests for funds to support the work of the Council.

### 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 and 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](http://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>

## **2014 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 intends to conduct a planning meeting in January 2014 to develop action steps and enumerate priorities.

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 2013 Annual Symposium, the Council will assess the benefits and ideas gained from the December Symposium in order to plan another statewide symposium and other public. 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 7 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. The Council plans to clarify its process regarding submitting proposals and continue to make requests for funds to support the work of the Council



## **Appendix A – Government Fatherhood Resources**

### **Department of Children & Family Services**

(312) 808-9040 [www.state.il.us/dcfs](http://www.state.il.us/dcfs)

### **Department of Human Services**

(312) 793-4131 [www.dhs.state.il.us](http://www.dhs.state.il.us)

### **State of Illinois Government Resources**

Child Support – (312) 793-7987 [www.childsupportillinois.com](http://www.childsupportillinois.com)

### **United States Dept. of Health & Human Services**

(877) 696-6775 [www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov)

### **United States Dept. Of Education**

(800) 872-5327 [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

### **National Responsible Fatherhood Clearing House**

(877) 432-3411 – [www.fatherhood.gov](http://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 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; and
- Preparing a resource guide that will include pertinent resources.

We will 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;
- Developing and 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

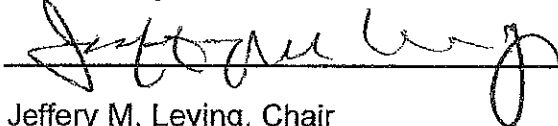
- b) Holding a symposium to gather information and evaluate current programs and policies.

**Sub-Committees (comprised of council members)**

**Symposium Sub-Committee Responsibilities:**

- Collaborating with state agencies to plan symposium; and
- Help plan regional meetings.
- Resource Guide Sub-Committee Responsibilities:
  - Collaborate with state agencies to revise “Non-Custodial Parent Service Directory” into a resource guide; and
  - Compile existing pertinent information on the state of fatherhood in Illinois for a 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.

Presented by:



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