

**THE ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD  
2019 ANNUAL REPORT**

*December 31, 2019*

[www.responsiblefatherhood.com](http://www.responsiblefatherhood.com)  
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## MEMBERS

<b>Name</b>	<b>Date appointed</b>	<b>County of residence</b>
Jeffery M. Leving, chairman	3/11/2004	Cook
Phoenix Barnes	12/12/2014	St. Clair
Rodney Byrd	8/22/2005	St. Clair
Diana Durham-McLoud	6/21/2005	Cook
Merri Ex	12/12/2014	Cook
Kirk Harris	1/10/2005	Cook
David Hirsch	1/17/2005	Cook
Faustino Hurtado	12/12/2014	Cook
Leon Intrader	8/22/2005	Lake
Madelyn James	12/12/2014	Cook
Lekevie Johnson	12/12/2014	Champaign
Howard Lathan	7/22/2004	Cook
Gregory Lawrence	12/12/2014	Cook
Mark McConell	12/12/2014	Peoria
Tim O'Grady	4/28/2005	Cook
Jorge Ortiz	12/12/2014	Lake
Yolanda Peppers	9/2/2005	Cook
Lois Rakov	1/24/2005	Cook
Cathy Reed	6/6/2005	Union
Norris Stevenson	6/13/2005	Cook
David Velez Carillo	12/12/2014	Cook

<https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/bac/SitePages/AppointmentsDetail.aspx?BCID=965>

## 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 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 from 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 out of wedlock were involved at the birth of their child. The need is great to help those fathers stay involved with their children as the child grows, so that the children don't become fatherless.

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 toward one clear and measurable goal: to significantly increase the proportion of children growing up with an involved and responsible father or a responsible "father figure/mentor" in the state of Illinois. Efforts of the Council are geared to fulfill the mission of the Council: to promote the positive involvement of both parents in the lives of their children.

## 2019 ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD ACTIVITIES

In 2019, 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 concerned itself 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. In July, Gov. J.B. Pritzker sent a letter to be included on the agenda for the Council's annual symposium, welcoming members and urging them to continue their mission. In addition, the Council worked with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services on the issue of foster care.

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 and adolescents who benefit from male adult presence and involvement in youths' lives.

### *Statewide Symposium*

On July 27, 2019, the Council hosted its annual statewide symposium at the Belleville Public Library in Belleville, IL, from 1:30-4:30 p.m. Belleville was selected as a site in order to assure the participation of people in the Metro East area in the statewide symposium, and we were successful in that.

In attendance were community leaders, clergy, and representatives of academic institutions, state agencies and non-profit organizations dealing with children and families, as well as interested members of the general public.

Council Chairman Jeffery M. Leving opened the symposium by welcoming attendees, and pointing out the paradox that our society presents: Fathers whose relationship with their children's mother ends are too often considered suspect and of dubious value as parents, and they're frequently forced to fight to have any involvement in their children's lives, other than sending in a monthly check or child support. Yet when children struggle – academically, emotionally, behaviorally – the absent father stereotypically gets the blame.

The chairman then introduced Belleville Mayor Mark W. Eckert, who welcomed the Council, the speakers and the audience to the city, and who spoke about his fight as a father: He was a litigant in a landmark Illinois child custody case, *Eckert vs. Eckert*, which the Illinois Supreme Court decided in 1988. In the case, Eckert's ex-wife petitioned the court to allow her to remove the couple's son to Arizona; the Supreme Court said no. "Several witnesses testified that Mark is an exceptional parent and that he spends a great deal of quality time with [his son]," the court said in its ruling.

The next speaker was Leander Spearman, director of the Belleville Public Library, who was exceptionally helpful in making this symposium occur at this time and place. Mr. Leving donated copies of his books, *Dads' Rights*, *Divorce Wars* and *How to be a Good Divorced Dad*, which Mr. Spearman received and placed in general circulation at Belleville's two libraries.

The keynote speaker was Antwan Turpeau of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, who addressed foster care, including his personal experience as a foster child, as well as juvenile delinquency, and the role of fathers in causing or preventing it.

We then had a panel discussion on fatherhood in difficult situations, featuring Anita Bazile Sawyer of the Illinois Department of Corrections in East St. Louis, Gary Friedrich of the Gay and Married Men's Association in Belleville, Craig McIntosh of the Family Advocacy Program at Scott AFB in Belleville, and Maria Sanchez-Ley, an immigration lawyer in Collinsville.

The next speaker was John Bouc, the campus minister at Althoff Catholic High School in Belleville, on teaching our young men to grow up to be good fathers.

In closing remarks, Chairman Leving talked about the progress that we've made, in society and our legal system, in recognizing the importance of fathers and that even if their relationship with their children's mother breaks up, that doesn't mean they should be excluded from their children's lives as well.

The symposium was an opportunity to share the mission of the Council with community leaders and members, who had the opportunity to ask questions about the status of fathers in the community, the range and diversity of federal, regional, state and local fatherhood programs, and the need for legal assistance for fathers to gain access and visitation with their children. The symposium generated public awareness regarding the impact of father absence on children and the serious effect on children of all ages throughout the state and nation.

### *Council Areas of Concern*

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

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 also plans to seek funding and identify person(s) from the Council, partners and the community who are able to collaborate to pursue grant opportunities. This is helpful 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](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 plan 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.



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Jeffery M. Leving, Chairman  
Illinois Council on Responsible  
Fatherhood

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