

**THE ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD
2021 ANNUAL REPORT**

December 31, 2021

www.responsiblefatherhood.com
Phone: (312) 296-8656

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MEMBERS

Name	Date appointed	County of residence
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
Timothy S. O'Grady (deceased)-*	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>

***-Timothy S. O'Grady** died Feb. 6, 2021 at age 50. Tim was a treasure to anyone who met him. He loved and was beloved by his children and his parents. The Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood is grateful for his service on the Council and his advocacy on behalf of fathers and children.

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 substantial 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.

2021 ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD ACTIVITIES

This year continued to be challenging. Even though a coronavirus vaccine became available, it was still inadvisable or difficult for groups of people to meet – which made exchanging ideas and promoting fatherhood a challenge.

The pandemic continued to place extraordinary demands on fathers, and many rose to meet the challenge. With schools being sporadically open and closed, and the threat of in-school virus spread still a concern throughout the year, single and divorced fathers were called upon to take responsibility for their children's education – academic, social and religious. Fathers kept their children focused on their online lessons, and, in the absence of the socialization that school normally provides, fathers imparted to their children the lessons from their lived experience.

In addition to the annual statewide symposium, details on which are below, the Council completed the following activities in 2021:

- The Council posted on social media in support of the annual symposium, both before and after, and also recognized fathers on Fathers Day and Labor Day, and offered affirmations and positive thoughts for fathers.
- The Council promoted the urging of former President Barack Obama that fathers get vaccinated for coronavirus.
- In addition to the media appearances in support of the annual symposium, noted below, Chairman Leving appeared on WQAD-TV and WQPT-TV in Moline, discussing the mission of the Council.

Statewide Symposium

For the second time, the ICRF annual symposium was presented via Zoom, 2-4 p.m. June 12, 2021. This allowed for a statewide conference to proceed without gathering a crowd in a room, which was still inadvisable due to the coronavirus pandemic while this symposium was being planned. The Council gathered an excellent lineup of speakers who were knowledgeable about the needs of fathers in Illinois, and the obstacles they can face.

Chairman Leving, in his opening remarks, addressed the important topic of discrimination against fathers.

"I've seen plenty of it, practicing family law for 40 years, and doing a fair amount of criminal law as well," he said. "I've felt for these four decades that there are fathers who receive unfair treatment. I discussed this with President Obama when I served on his National Finance Committee."

"I see discrimination against many of my clients – based on gender, race, income, or based on the fact that they have blue-collar jobs. There is work to be done. Justice should not be a luxury. I think exposing bias helps create accountability, awareness and fairness."

“Discrimination due to disability is another trouble spot where we need to fight for justice. I helped a father who was paralyzed from the waist down. His daughter’s mother reportedly refused to let him see his child, and thwarted his daughter’s efforts to contact him. I feared the mother was embarrassed by my client’s disability. We won parenting time for him. It was a great victory for this father. It was a victory for his daughter – but it was a battle that he should not have had to fight.”

“Recently, I represented a father who had a good-paying job, but he became disabled and could no longer work. His disability benefit wasn’t even enough for him to pay his own expenses, let alone to pay child support based on his previous income. We won him a significant reduction, so he could survive financially, but not without a fight. These men shouldn’t be pushed through the hoop to get the fair treatment they deserve.”

The chairman then introduced State Rep. **LaShawn K. Ford**, who has initiated legislation to make Illinois a better place for children. Ford talked about the importance of state lawmakers and state agencies seeing the need to promote responsible fatherhood, and the benefit to the state when we achieve it.

The following speakers then delivered presentations that were informative, personal, emotional and beneficial to the fathers of Illinois:

- **Adam Ballard**, a disability rights advocate, talked about the obstacles that disabled dads face, and what they can do to overcome. It was an excellent report, which subsequent speakers discussed.
- Attorney **Arthur S. Kallow** of the Fatherhood Educational Institute – a great lawyer who has been appointed by many judges as a guardian *ad litem* to protect children, and to advise judges on how to protect children – spoke about parental alienation, which is when one parent badmouths the other to the children. This can be extremely harmful, both to the victimized parent and to the children, because it can rob them of an opportunity to have a full, loving relationship with that parent. Those who may not have been aware of parental alienation got an education from Art.
- Dietitian **Erin Smitley**, from Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Center in Mattoon, did a great job providing meal preparation tips to dads. Her report included several pages of handouts which were emailed to attendees.
- **Matt Stanton**, division chief in the state’s attorney’s office in Lake County, talked about conviction integrity. This means reviewing criminal convictions that may have been wrongfully obtained. This is crucial – nobody should be in jail, separated from their children, for a crime they didn’t commit. We need accountability, awareness and fairness.
- **Desmond Clark**, the former Chicago Bears tight end, gave a great presentation, hitting on important points for divorced fathers. If parents break up, why should a man have to break up with his children? He should not. If both parents love and care for their children, we should want that. The best parent is both parents – and fathers should not be kicked to the curb.

- Pastor **David Philemon** of Church on Fire International in Cicero gave a great sermon to bring us home: A lot of encouragement for dads to stay with their kids, and fight if they have to, because fathers are indispensable. His enthusiastic message was well received.

Chairman Leving concluded: “For me, as chairman of this council, the fight for fathers and children is a day-to-day battle which we’re winning. So let’s stay optimistic, let’s stay positive and let’s stay strong. Never give up hope. There’s nothing more precious in life than the time a great father spends with his children.”

Media coverage

The symposium was promoted via a press release distributed by IIS and a public announcement distributed through a private email list. Members of the Council also promoted the event to their contact lists.

The symposium was brought to the attention of the public through WGN-TV in Chicago, the Belleville *News-Democrat* (Belleville was the site of the 2019 symposium), MyRadioLink in Mattoon, Charleston and Effingham, and StL.News in the Metro East area.

Chairman Leving gave radio interviews on KMOX (St. Louis) and WSIU (Carbondale) in support of the symposium.

The announcement also was publicized by the University of Illinois at Chicago (<https://dscc.uic.edu/events/virtual-statewide-fatherhood-symposium/>).

Attendance was truly statewide, with Zoom viewers from Grayslake to Eldorado and from Alton to Joliet.

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.

Council Committee Work

Legislation

The Council continued in 2021 to give attention to needed reforms and legislation 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, and council members advocated legislation that would begin child custody proceedings with the presumption that shared parenting is in the best interest of the child.

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 has received recognition from the president of the United States and the governor of Illinois.

Council Website

The development and refinement of the Council's website continued throughout 2021. The Council's website at www.responsiblefatherhood.com is a 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.

Resource Guide

Copies of a summary resource guide were made available by the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood. 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>

2022 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 2022 symposium will take place on the afternoon of Oct. 1 at the Joliet Public Library, 150 N. Ottawa St., Joliet.

A priority for 2022 will be distribution of the new pamphlet educating new single Fathers on establishing paternity, so they can be a part of their children's lives.

The Council intends to assess the benefits and ideas gained 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. 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 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

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 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.
- 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.
- 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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