

THE ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD
2022 ANNUAL REPORT

December 31, 2022

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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
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 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.

2022 ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD ACTIVITIES

Though the COVID pandemic ended during 2022, the disease was still endemic, and Illinois was still feeling the effects of 2½ years of once-in-a century social upheaval. By late 2022, Illinois reached 40,000 dead from COVID since the pandemic began in February 2020. For perspective, World War 2 resulted in the deaths of 17,521 Illinoisans in military service from Dec. 7, 1941 through Sept. 2, 1945.

Some of those 40,000 who died of COVID were fathers of young children and teenagers, leaving a vacuum in the lives of those children. Even those who overcome this tragedy and grow up to have successful lives will be diminished by the premature death of their father, and it goes without saying that some of these children will struggle because of their father's death. Sadly, this damage is permanent.

The good news is, that with COVID on the wane and COVID restrictions largely behind us, fathers were able to engage with their children in ways that the pandemic may have prevented. For example, schools were open, along with extracurricular activities such as sports and performing arts, giving fathers an opportunity to support their children, and single and divorced dads no longer faced COVID restrictions as an ostensible reason to be denied their court-ordered parenting time.

Throughout Illinois, life began to return to normal, though there was still economic disruption. In the spring, there was a severe shortage of infant formula, due to a global supply problem. The rising cost of housing and motor fuel placed a burden upon many low and moderate-income families.

Homelessness, on the decline pre-pandemic, is rising, with more than [10,000 homeless people in Illinois](#). Many of these people are fathers, and if they're homeless, it's highly doubtful that they have any kind of constructive relationship with their children. While resolving homelessness is not within the purview of the Council, we will look for ways to help where we can, because we know this issue affects fathers and families.

In addition to the annual statewide symposium, the Council completed the following activities in 2022:

- The Council presented its first Outstanding Illinois Father Award, details on which are below.
- The Council posted on social media in support of the annual symposium, both before and after, and also recognized fathers on Father's Day and Labor Day. The Council marked Black History Month, and offered affirmations and positive thoughts for fathers.

Statewide Symposium

For the first time since the Belleville symposium in 2019, the ICRF annual symposium was presented in person, from 1:30-3:30 p.m. Oct. 1, 2022 at the Joliet Public Library. The Council was pleased to involve the Joliet-area community. 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 **Jeffery M. Leving**, in his opening remarks, called the symposium a “celebration” of the good that fathers do – but noted the societal obstacles that still exist for single and divorced dads.

“My philosophy has always been that just because a man breaks up with his wife or girlfriend, it shouldn’t mean that he has to break up with his children. When I tell people that, most everyone agrees. When I do public speaking, or go to community events where I meet and talk to everyday people, there is unanimity that fathers should and must have a role in the upbringing of their children.”

“But this is abstract. When real situations arise, sometimes folks think differently.”

“Let’s suppose a married man is attentive to his children. He meets their teachers on parent-teacher night, he helps them with their homework, he walks them to school, he attends their soccer games or performing arts events, he takes them to the doctor, the dentist, the movies. He’s a great dad, by all accounts.”

“But if he’s divorced and wishes to continue to do all these things, somehow some people believe he’s up to no good. He doesn’t know when to go away. He should just write that child support check every month and keep quiet.



Judge Jessica Colon-Sayre

I think that’s totally the wrong attitude, and divorced dads are doing the right thing when they continue to raise their children even after divorce. We as a society should WANT this. We should PROMOTE this type of fatherhood, not frown upon it,” Leving said.

The first speaker was Will County Judge **Jessica Colon-Sayre**, who, at the time of the symposium, sat in Family Court.

“I know, based on my own personal experience, how important it was to have my father in my life,” Judge Colon-Sayre said. Just as her father played an important role in her upbringing, her husband is instrumental in raising their children now.

Judge Colon-Sayre said that when the law and the facts allow, she favors equal shared parenting.

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

- **Doug Kasper** of Non-Violent Cities Project – Joliet, a father, grandfather and foster father, talked about the importance of fathers in stopping violence on the streets of Joliet.
- Environmental organizer **Deonte Moore**, who delivered personal testimony about his life. He said his father was a gangster who was murdered, but his uncle was the first black student to graduate from the University of Florida and later became a federal judge.
- **Maureen Gorman**, president of the Fatherhood Educational Institute, announced the Institute’s intention to implement a scholarship program to help fathers who need a community college-type course to upgrade their skills or gain certification to qualify for a better job.
- Imam **Charles Muhammad** of Al-Aqsa Community Center in Plainfield, talked about the role of fathers in the Islamic tradition.

Chairman Leving concluded by citing Nobel Prize laureate Nelson Mandela: “A winner is a dreamer who never gives up.”

“So let’s not give up,” Leving said. “We know how important fathers are. Let’s continue to spread the word.”

Media coverage

The symposium was promoted in the Joliet Herald-News, on WGN-TV in Chicago, and in SuburbanChicagoland.com. Members of the Council also promoted the event to their contact lists.

After the symposium, there was coverage in the [Joliet Patch](#), LocalToday.news, and in the publications in the next section regarding the Outstanding Illinois Father Award.

Outstanding Illinois Father Award

The Council had been considering giving an award to an Outstanding Illinois Father for several years, and this year was the year we decided to do it. Chairman Leving presented the award to the recipient at the symposium in Joliet on Oct. 1.

The criteria for this award are that the winner must be a father and he has to live in Illinois, and he must be outstanding, in some way.

The first Outstanding Illinois Father Award was given to **Dave Dahl** of Chatham, Illinois, father of sons Clifford, 25, and Isaac, 19 (ages as of the date of the symposium).

Chairman Leving, in presenting the award:

“Dave was given a challenge almost 20 years ago when Clifford was diagnosed with [Batten Disease](#). I have been informed that as Clifford’s condition worsened over the years, Dave did everything he could to help him live and enjoy life as much as he could. He takes him to Cardinals games in St. Louis. He listens to University of Illinois basketball games with him on the radio.”

“Clifford probably has a waning capacity to enjoy all this, but to Dave, this is still his boy. This is his son, and he’s going to do father-and-son activities with him.”

Meanwhile, Dave’s younger son Isaac serves in the National Guard, and he’s attending Southern Illinois University in Carbondale.



Dave Dahl receives the Outstanding Illinois Father Award from Council Chairman Jeffery M. Leving at the annual symposium in Joliet on Oct. 1.

The Outstanding Illinois Father Award garnered media coverage in the (Springfield) State Journal-Register, the Chatham Courier, WCIA-TV (Champaign) and WMBD-AM Radio (Peoria), as well as supportive tweets from politicians, including Gov. JB Pritzker, Illinois House Speaker Chris Welch, and State Rep. Tim Butler.

On Nov. 29, the Illinois House of Representatives adopted a resolution, H.R. 1013, sponsored by the speaker, honoring Dave for receiving the recognition.

The Council will be looking for a father to honor with this award in 2023, and will consider nominations from the public.

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 2022 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 2022. 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>

2023 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 2023 symposium is tentatively being planned for Galesburg, with a date and exact location to be determined.

A priority for 2023 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

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(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.

Jeffery M. Leving, Chairman
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