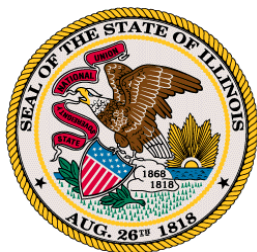


# ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD

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CHAIRMAN JEFFERY M. LEVING

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Jeffery M. Leving

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June 14, 2010

House Committee on Ways & Means  
Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support

1102 Longworth House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515

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Mr. Chairman,

The deterioration of responsible fatherhood during the last half-century has had a devastating effect on American families. At least 25 million children in America are living without their biological fathers. Countless studies and mounting anecdotal evidence continues to demonstrate how children who grow up in father absent homes are much more likely to be poor, use drugs, experience educational, emotional and behavioral problems, be victims of child abuse, and engage in criminal behavior.

We must never forget children need their dads. When fathers are absent, something is lost. Mounting evidence supports benefits of effective male "father figures"/mentors in children's lives whose biological fathers are unavailable for a variety of 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 has continued working toward one clear and measurable goal: 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.

The Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood is one of the first government programs of its kind and continues to serve as a model for other states across the country seeking to restore responsible fatherhood and positive, effective male involvement in the development of the education and social/emotional welfare of youth as a societal norm in all communities.

The Council succeeded in addressing men's health issues in December 2009 with a Health Fair. The event was spearheaded by the Illinois Department of Public Health/Office of Men's Health, along with several organizations pooling resources to support the various activities, health screenings and resource fairs.

The Council has held five regional forums in Illinois focused on fatherhood issues in different geographic areas of the state: Two in Chicago (January 19<sup>th</sup> and April 26<sup>th</sup>); one event in Chicago Heights (February 16<sup>th</sup>); one event in DesPlaines (March 1<sup>st</sup>) and one event in Rockford (November 15<sup>th</sup>). The regional meetings have helped us build a statewide network of supportive groups and individuals; pinpoint challenges that hinder father involvement in their children's lives; develop ideas for programs that would support fathers; and identify the means of bringing about legislative reform. To accomplish this, the Council reached out to lawmakers, judges, churches, community and faith-based organizations, social service agencies, educational institutions, and individuals in these geographic areas to participate in the forums. From the positive comments of attendees, all five meetings were considered a success and generated important feedback

The Council, in collaboration with Congressman Danny K. Davis, convened a statewide symposium themed "Fathers Who Care Expo for Today's Man" on June 5, 2010. This was the 10<sup>th</sup> year of this event and we had approximately 450 attendees. The largest number of attendees to date, which displays the importance of fathers in the lives of their children. Congressman Danny K. Davis led a group of panelists consisting of Illinois State Senator Kimberly Lightford; Illinois State Representative LaShawn Ford; Norris Stevenson, Deputy Administrator for the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services for Field Operations in the Division of Child Support Enforcement and Jeffery Leving, Chair of the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood. The goal was to educate and empower fathers to be more responsible parents and to provide them with resources to make positive changes in their lives.

Gov. Patrick Quinn has signed into law four Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood (ICRF) supported bills that passed both houses of the General Assembly.

Highlights of the legislation:

**SB 1628**, sponsored by Sen. Iris Martinez and in the House by Rep. Deborah Mell, accomplishes two things: It amends the Paternity Act and other Acts, to insure that both parties be informed of their right to DNA testing before an adjudication of paternity can be made either through a voluntary acknowledgment of paternity or court or administrative proceedings. It also amends the visitation interference section of the Criminal Code and sets forth that it is now a criminal offense to deny the other parent their right to parenting time or custody time. Previously, only visitation interference was a crime.

**SB 1590**, sponsored by Sen. Pamela Althoff and in the House by Rep. Sandra Pihos, and unanimously passed, allows children and non-custodial parents to use electronic visitation technologies such as email, telephone, internet and video conferencing. Illinois is the fifth state to pass Virtual Visitation Legislation which can open the door to virtual visitation for incarcerated parents in Illinois.

**HB 4008**, sponsored by Rep. Jehan Gordon and in the Senate by Sen. Iris Martinez, includes the paternity provisions of SB 1628. It amends the Paternity Act to insure that both parties be clearly informed of their right to DNA testing before a voluntary acknowledgment of paternity is signed or the paternity order is entered in an administrative proceeding or by the court.

**HB 2266**, sponsored by Rep. Ken Dunkin and in the Senate by Sen. Iris Martinez, amends the visitation interference section of the Criminal Code with the use of terms used in family cases today (i.e. parenting time and custody time). (Signed into law: August 25, 2009)

The \$500 million proposal by President Obama would be a lifeline to fathers everywhere. This funding is essential for the many organizations that promote responsible fatherhood to ensure that we end this cycle of fatherlessness.

Sincerely,

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