



**Testimony of**

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Chairman McDermott, Mr. Linder and Subcommittee Members, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the role of responsible fatherhood programs in increasing financial support for children and strengthening the ties between non-custodial parents and their children. We recognize the Subcommittee's long-standing interest in strengthening America's families, including Congressman Davis's leadership on responsible fatherhood issues. All of us know that children need the emotional and financial support of both parents. In the best of circumstances children are raised by their parents in a healthy, supportive environment, and never experience disruptions in their parents' emotional and financial support. Unfortunately, all too often children do experience these disruptions through divorce or separation of their parents, or because their parents never formed a stable family in the first place.

Many statistics underscore the importance of addressing fatherhood in America:

- In 2007, 40 percent of all births in America were to unwed women<sup>1</sup>
- 1 out of every 3 children in America lives apart from his or her father<sup>2</sup>
- 1 out of every 4 children in this country, and 1 in 2 poor children, participates in the child support program<sup>3</sup>
- In 2008, 43 percent of children living in single mother families were poor<sup>4</sup>

President Obama, who grew up without his father, has spoken eloquently about the critical importance of responsible fatherhood. Last year, on Father's Day, he said:

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<sup>1</sup> Hamilton, B.E., Martin, J.A., and Ventura, S.J. (2009). Births: Preliminary data for 2007. *National Vital Statistics Reports*, 57(12). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

<sup>2</sup> Congressional Research Service (CRS) tabulations of the March 2009 Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS).

<sup>3</sup> Grall, Tim. (2009). Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2007. Current Population Reports. P60-237.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2009). POV02: People in Families by Family Structure, Age, and Sex, Iterated by Income-to-Poverty Ratio and Race: 2008

*In many ways, I came to understand the importance of fatherhood through its absence—both in my life and in the lives of others. I came to understand that the hole a man leaves when he abandons his responsibility to his children is one that no government can fill. We can do everything possible to provide good jobs and good schools and safe streets for our kids, but it will never be enough to fully make up the difference. That is why we need fathers to step up, to realize that their job does not end at conception; that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child but the courage to raise one.*

Economic downturns, such as the one we are now experiencing, make it even more difficult for parents to provide the emotional and financial support that their children need. While jobs are being added to the economy and the unemployment rate is starting to decline, we know that the American economy lost millions of jobs during this recession. Men have been hard hit, experiencing 70 percent of the job loss.<sup>5</sup> The long-term trends in the labor market are especially bleak for less-educated men. Employment and real wages for this group have been declining for some time. During the recession, the impact of these long-term trends has grown in the child support program where more child support orders go unpaid due to lack of resources. The accumulation of unpaid child support is sizable and much of it is uncollectible. Seventy percent of unpaid child support is owed by parents with no or low reported income.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2009). Employment, Hours, and Earnings from the Current Employment Statistics Survey.

<sup>6</sup> Elaine Sorensen, Liliana Sousa, Simone Schaner. (2007). Assessing Child Support Arrears in Nine Large States and the Nation. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/07/assessing-CS-debt/>

Responsible fatherhood programs can help address these concerns. They can help fathers find work and stay engaged in their children's lives, allowing fathers to support their children financially and emotionally. Ideally, fathers will have healthy relationships with mothers and form stable, two-parent families. But when this is not the case, then fathers can still provide essential financial support to their children and serve as parents in every sense of the word—engaged in all aspects of the lives of their children.

The Urban Institute found that child support is the second largest source of income for poor single mother-headed families who receive it, next to the mother's own earnings.<sup>7</sup> Along with payments through the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), child support has emerged as one of the main income supplements for low-wage, single mother-headed families.

The irreplaceable role of fathers in their children's lives goes well beyond income security. Children who have a quality relationship with their father are more likely to stay in school and pursue higher education, and are less likely to be sexually active, or give birth out of wedlock at a young age.

While parents are the most important influence on their children and parenting responsibilities must rest with families, the Administration strongly believes that government can and should play a role in providing resources to support paternal involvement. That is why we are taking action to increase investment in the development and assessment of responsible fatherhood

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<sup>7</sup> Elaine Sorensen and Chava Zibman. (2000) Child Support Offers Some Protection Against Poverty. Number B-10 in New Federalism: National Survey of America's Families Series. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

programs. I would like to use my time today to discuss the efforts that we have taken to capitalize on the strengths of both parents to help their children by instilling responsible fatherhood throughout our programs, and to discuss some recent research findings relevant to these efforts. Finally, I would like to discuss the President's FY 2011 Fatherhood, Marriage and Families Innovation Fund which was developed in response to emerging best practices and comports with recently released research findings.

### **Responsible Fatherhood Programs**

This Committee has been instrumental in advancing legislation that over the years has strengthened efforts to promote responsible fatherhood. Building on your work, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has been actively involved in promoting responsible fatherhood. ACF programs have worked to incorporate fathers into their service delivery model through grants, policies, and promotion of best practices; because social service programs and systems dedicated to meeting children's needs have not historically been organized to maximize fathers' contributions to child wellbeing.

In the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA), Congress established a five-year, \$150 million per year grant program for Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood. Of this amount, Congress allocated up to \$50 million per year for Responsible Fatherhood programs, the focus of my testimony today. In 2006, ACF awarded almost 100 five-year grants to public and private organizations to promote responsible fatherhood with a focus primarily on improving parenting skills. ACF awarded these funds on a competitive basis to States, territories, Indian tribes and

tribal organizations, and public and nonprofit community entities, including faith-based organizations.

These grants fund a range of activities including intervention services, such as fatherhood skill development groups, case management, and mentoring for young men who are fathers or expectant fathers, as well as prevention services, such as male mentoring and character development for youth aged 7 to 17. Projects support activities including: commitment to healthy marriage and/or co-parenting; conflict resolution skills; effective communication skills between partners and/or parents; financial literacy and budgeting skills; and ability to secure and retain employment. Grantees must ensure that participation in the programs or activities is voluntary, as well as consult with experts in domestic violence or relevant community domestic violence coalitions in developing the programs and activities. In addition to these projects, ACF also invested in national and community-based responsible fatherhood capacity-building initiatives, a national clearinghouse, media campaign, and training and technical assistance.

In addition to developing programs with funding specifically set-aside for these responsible fatherhood efforts, some States have used American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) resources provided through the TANF Emergency Fund to promote fathers' involvement in their children's lives and to strengthen families. For example, Texas is using ARRA funding to support its Strengthening Families Through Enhanced In-Home Support. This program targets impoverished families at-risk of having a child removed from their home. In order to help prevent the removal, the program provides short-term benefits to families to help them meet critical needs such as rent, food, and medication. Beyond these benefits, the program also provides family counseling. A philosophy of the program is that fathers, as well as mothers,

must be engaged and involved in this intervention process. During the counseling process, the parents are asked to identify their strengths and build successful interventions upon those strengths.

States also are using the TANF Emergency Fund to provide subsidized employment to out-of-work families across the country, including custodial and non-custodial fathers. To date, 32 States and seven Tribes have received nearly \$611 million in Emergency Funds for their subsidized employment programs and more States are on the way. Based on a survey of States reported by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, by the end of the year, 180,000 low-income parents and youth could be placed in subsidized employment using these funds. These subsidized programs can play a vital role in helping parents provide for their families, which also can help connect fathers to their children.

Another ACF program, Child Support Enforcement (CSE), also plays a critical role in promoting responsible fatherhood. Since its inception, the program has promoted responsible fatherhood by establishing and enforcing child support obligations for children who live apart from a parent, typically their father. Over time, Congress has strengthened the role of child support in helping families secure financial support for their children. In the Family Support Act of 1988, Congress authorized the first multi-State demonstration project aimed at improving the employment, child support, and parenting outcomes of unemployed, non-custodial parents of children receiving public assistance. Since then, the CSE program has been actively involved in developing and implementing policies and practices that promote responsible fatherhood by setting realistic child

support orders, reducing unmanageable child support debt, and passing through child support to families.

Through its discretionary grants and performance incentive funds, the CSE program also helps support employment-oriented programs for fathers in the child support program, realizing that these programs benefit the children they serve. As we know, many low-income fathers face significant barriers to employment and self-sufficiency. These include limited education and employment skills, health problems, and incarceration. Throughout the nation, there are many ongoing efforts to engage fathers in the lives of their children. These programs vary in size, setting, populations of focus, and services provided. Some programs target their services to incarcerated fathers, others focus on teen fathers, while still others focus on fathers behind in their child support or recently released from prison. Many of these programs have matured, but sustained funding remains a challenge.

Fatherhood programs that serve fathers behind in their child support are particularly active. About half of State child support programs have developed partnerships with at least one fatherhood program. While research funds to evaluate these initiatives have been limited, many States continued funding these programs despite budget cutbacks because of their promising results. Evaluations of these and earlier responsible fatherhood programs almost always found that participants pay more child support, but they rarely had the funding to examine other child outcomes.

Some examples of these programs include:

- New York has a program called Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers, which operates in eight locations across the State. This program provides both intensive employment services and parenting services to participants. They accept court referrals, but many of the participants are self-referrals. One program operates a One-Stop Career Center in New York City and discusses the fatherhood program as part of its daily orientation. As a result, it is able to enroll large numbers of fathers in its fatherhood program.
  
- Texas operates a program called NCP Choices. The CSE program identifies non-custodial parents behind in their child support and requests a court hearing. The presiding judge reviews the case and decides whether to order the father into a work program, which is run by the local workforce development board. Workforce staff are in the courtrooms to meet immediately with the fathers ordered into the program. The fathers are given intensive employment services through the workforce agency, closely monitored by the CSE program. As a result of this program, which is being evaluated by the University of Texas, participant outcomes are significantly higher than a comparison group. Participants are 47 percent more likely to pay their child support and 21 percent more likely to become employed.<sup>8</sup>
  
- The South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families, evaluated by the University of South Carolina, targets fathers in the child support program with funding from the Healthy

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel Schroeder and Nicholas Doughty. (2009). Texas Non-Custodial Parent Choices: Program Impact Analysis. Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources. Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs. The University of Texas at Austin

Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood DRA Grants. The program works with local fatherhood programs to provide a 24-week holistic program. It provides intensive case management, peer support, parenting education, legal services, and employment-oriented services, including job readiness training, job referrals, and links to job training programs. Early findings show that 63 percent of participants unemployed at enrollment obtained employment and 79 percent of participants with child support arrearages reduced their arrears.<sup>9</sup>

- One of the few statewide fatherhood networks in the country, the Georgia Fatherhood Program, enables participants to contribute to the economic wellbeing of their children. It is a partnership between the Georgia Division of Child Support Services, the Georgia Department of Labor, and the Technical College System of Georgia. It began in 1998 and has served over 34,000 non-custodial parents. The program provides education, training and job placement services for non-custodial parents who are unemployed or underemployed.<sup>10</sup>
  
- Ohio established the Ohio Fatherhood Initiative, which is managed by the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood. The main goal of the Ohio Fatherhood Initiative is to enhance the well-being of children by funding organizations to provide fatherhood skills training to improve the parenting skills of fathers. In 2010, the Initiative is funding nine

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<sup>9</sup> President's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. (2010). A New Era of Partnerships: Report of Recommendations to the President.

<sup>10</sup> Georgia Department of Human Services. (2010). Georgia Fatherhood Program Fact Sheet.

fatherhood programs to provide direct services to fathers to promote strong, healthy relationships between fathers and their children.

- Maryland has several programs that address the needs of low-income fathers. Most recently, the Child Support program partnered with the Center for Urban Families to operate a project that helps fathers in Baltimore navigate the child support system, become compliant with their child support orders, and participate in the City's arrearage reduction program.
  
- Local family courts also have been very active in linking unemployed and underemployed non-custodial parents behind in child support to services, and carry out CSE "pay or work" statutory requirements. Many are operating what are called Problem Solving Courts for their child support caseload. These courts address the underlying reasons for non-payment of child support, which is usually a lack of employment. Judges refer unemployed fathers to workforce agencies and employment programs, which, in turn, help fathers find and keep a job. Many jurisdictions have these types of courts, including several counties in Pennsylvania, Missouri, North Carolina, Alabama, Nevada, and California.

The Office of Child Support Enforcement also administers the \$10 million Access and Visitation State formula grant program to improve the ability of non-custodial parents to maintain relationships with their children when it is safe to do so. The President's 2011 budget proposes

to increase funding for this program to \$12 million per year, recognizing that healthy families need more than financial support. This funding increase also would support, for the first time, funding to tribal child support programs for access and visitation programs.

Moving beyond the TANF and Child Support funded programs, ACF also funds smaller fatherhood efforts as a component of other ACF programs. For example, both the Office of Head Start and the Children's Bureau are leaders in this regard, recognizing that fathers are a tremendous resource to the children they serve. Over the past two decades, the Head Start and Early Head Start programs have invested considerable resources to highlight the significant roles of fathers as parents and primary educators in the lives of their children. This includes promotion of early literacy through increasing the involvement of fathers in local Head Start programs and their children's lives, and a focus on increasing the engagement of Hispanic fathers. In 2006, the Children's Bureau launched a National Quality Improvement Center to build evidence on how the involvement of non-custodial fathers and paternal relatives of children in the public welfare system impacts child safety, permanence and well-being.

The Administration for Native Americans (ANA) also funded grants to help American Indian and Native American fathers overcome barriers to positive involvement in their children's lives through development of culturally appropriate fatherhood curricula. Responsible fatherhood was a component of several of the ANA's healthy relationship grants that provided relationship and marriage education for both parents.

Other ACF grants focus on fathers who are incarcerated or re-entering society, and their partners. A rising number of children are affected by the incarceration of a parent – about 10 percent of all children have a parent incarcerated or under correctional supervision. Families affected by parental incarceration face many challenges: separation, disruption in the home environment, and the loss of family income. These challenges are associated with negative outcomes for children, including poor parental bonding, internalizing and externalizing disorders, and low school achievement. The responsible fatherhood programs focusing on incarcerated and re-entering fathers are attempting to strengthen father-child bonds through parenting, co-parenting, and relationship-building classes; child-friendly visitation; and communication support. Recognizing the importance of material stability for successful parenting, some programs also work to address their participants' career and financial needs through education, case management, and job placement assistance. In addition, the Mentoring Children of Prisoners program provides grants to support one-to-one mentoring relationships for children of incarcerated parents. Each mentoring program ensures that mentors provide young people with safe and trusting relationships, through healthy messages about life and social behavior, appropriate guidance from a positive adult role model, and opportunities for increased participation in education, civic service, and community activities.

ACF and the Department of Labor (DOL) Employment and Training Administration have developed a close collaboration on emerging issues of employment and training research, focusing closely on investments in transitional jobs demonstrations and evaluation of subsidized employment. ACF has provided technical assistance to DOL specifically on how pertinent aspects of child support enforcement policy would affect program approaches in the upcoming

DOL Transitional Jobs demonstrations program for low-income non-custodial parents. Further, DOL and ACF have consulted on ACF evaluation investments in the next generation of subsidized employment programs and will continue to work together as these projects move forward.

I would now like to turn to a discussion of recent research findings.

### **Research on Responsible Fatherhood**

While we know that family income, family structure, and the quality of family relationships matter to child well-being, our knowledge about what services and interventions can impact these areas is limited. Some studies suggest that a combination of workforce, parenting, and supportive services may help low-income fathers maintain employment and support their children. In addition, emerging research suggests that child support policies and practices such as setting realistic child support orders, reducing child support debt, and passing through child support to families may contribute to positive employment and child support outcomes. Further, marriage and couples relationship education is a potential strategy for strengthening the relationship between parents, reducing conflict, and improving child well-being. We have identified promising practices, but more research is needed to understand the best mix and intensity of services provided to improve outcomes for low-income fathers, mothers, and their children.

ACF recently released an impact evaluation report on the Building Strong Families demonstration that involved programs providing relationship and marriage education, case management, and referrals to other services for low-income unmarried expectant and new parents in eight sites. A fifteen month impact evaluation found that in seven of the eight sites, programs failed to yield better outcomes for participants than for a control group that did not have access to the program on measures of living arrangements, relationship status, relationship quality, extent of father involvement with his child, domestic violence and economic well-being. One program did show positive benefits in relationship quality and father involvement for participants compared to a control group. In another site, however, participants in the group with access to program services experienced more break-ups and a decrease in support and affection from their partners and women experienced an increase in violence. This finding led us to quickly engage national experts to conduct a safety assessment of the program and implement corrective actions to promote women's safety.

We look forward to longer-term impact results which will be published in 2012, along with the results from two additional evaluations on Supporting Healthy Marriage Demonstration and the Community Healthy Marriage Initiative, which looks at programs administered through child support waivers. Additional reports highlighting the results of these evaluations will be released as they become available over the next three years. In the meantime, findings from the impact evaluation on the Building Strong Families Evaluation suggest several important conclusions: first, the fact that relationship education services did demonstrate positive impacts in one of eight sites suggests that there may be lessons to be learned about how to deliver such services effectively; second, the fact that there were no impacts or negative impacts in seven sites

strongly suggests the need to take an approach that is broader and more comprehensive than one that principally relies on relationship services, case management and referrals; and third, the very troubling negative impacts in one site suggest the crucial need to address domestic violence concerns more effectively in all future efforts.

This evidence suggests that the kinds of programs that could be supported through the existing Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood funds are not sufficient to produce improvements in child well-being. Therefore, our FY 2011 budget request proposes \$500 million in funding for a new Fatherhood, Marriage, and Family Innovation Fund.

### **Fatherhood, Marriage, and Family Innovation Fund**

The goal of the Innovation Fund is to build a strong evidence base about what service intervention models work to remove barriers to employment and increase family functioning and parenting capacity, and identify best practices that could be replicated within the TANF, Child Support Enforcement, and other state and community-based programs. The Innovation Fund will provide for comprehensive programs that can meet the multiple needs that fathers and their families face.

In recent years, a number of community-based organizations that began working with just one parent have found it helpful to expand their efforts and work with both parents together to provide high-quality comprehensive services aimed at strengthening the family as a whole. While the 2005 Deficit Reduction Act in large measure treated fatherhood and marriage

programs as two different strategies, some responsible fatherhood grantees included healthy relationship and marriage education in their programs. Their experience and that of others suggested that the most promising fatherhood programs also seek to address relationship skills, and that programs providing relationship skills can be more effective if they adopt a broader approach and help individuals with the tools they need to be better financial providers and parents as well. Thus, a key goal of the Fatherhood, Marriage and Families Fund is to encourage fatherhood and marriage programs to integrate services or otherwise work together, along with other community resources, in efforts to develop more comprehensive approaches that may include assisting parents with employment, child support payment, and parenting and relationship skills.

Specifically, the Fatherhood, Marriage, and Families Innovation Fund would provide two equal streams of competitive three-year grants to States to encourage the implementation of proven and promising strategies to help fathers and mothers succeed as parents and in the labor force. The first funding stream would be for State-initiated comprehensive responsible fatherhood initiatives, including those with a marriage component, that rely on strong partnerships with community-based organizations. The second funding stream would be for State-initiated comprehensive family self-sufficiency demonstrations that seek to improve child and family outcomes by addressing the employment and self-sufficiency needs of parents with serious barriers to self sufficiency, and which also may address the needs of children in families that are “child-only” TANF cases.

Grantees for comprehensive responsible fatherhood programs would be States or multi-State consortia. Applicants could be a single State or a multi-State collaborative that proposes to bring a particular responsible fatherhood strategy to scale across a larger geographic area, in partnership with a network of experienced community-based organizations providing one or more fatherhood or marriage components to the collaborative. The lead agency for a State could be the State's TANF agency, workforce agency, child support agency, or another entity, with a strong application reflecting the collaboration of multiple agencies as well as community partners. There will be a strong preference for applicants that will make resources available to community-based organizations to help implement components of these initiatives because of the important role that these organizations play in reaching out to fathers and engaging them in the steps required to become a better father. Successful applicants will need to demonstrate strong linkages with States' Child Support Enforcement programs, and will need to ensure that the programs address issues related to domestic violence and have in place a plan to reduce the risk of domestic violence. These plans should include strong partnerships with state domestic violence coalitions.

The Administration believes that the Innovation Fund is the right direction for moving the responsible fatherhood field forward. We believe that families will benefit from a comprehensive package of services that helps fathers succeed as providers as well as provide parenting and relationship education. The explicit goal of the Fund is to encourage comprehensive, multi-faceted efforts that are not narrowly focused on parenting or relationship skills alone, or on employment and employability efforts alone.

The proposed Innovation Fund will focus on outcomes to be achieved and encourage applicants to develop and put forward innovative and comprehensive proposals to address these outcomes. As such, we do not propose a prescribed list of activities as was the case under the DRA approach to marriage and fatherhood.

Nonetheless, we anticipate that core elements of a comprehensive fatherhood service delivery network would include such services as: peer support; relationship skill-building (which can include marriage education); co-parenting services; conflict resolution; child support case management; job training and other employment services; employment preparation services; training subsidies; financial incentives; earning supplements; legal services; substance abuse and mental health treatment (typically, through partnerships with public agencies and community-based providers); linkages to domestic violence prevention programs; and linkages to public agencies and community-based providers offering housing assistance, benefits enrollment, and other services.

All initiatives will be required to establish meaningful performance goals, such as higher family earnings and improvements in factors that relate to child outcomes, and to measure progress toward those goals. Grantees will be required to agree to participate in a rigorous evaluation as a condition of funding.

Through the Fund, the Administration seeks to build on the experience of community-based efforts across the country to move to the next phase of service delivery—creating a network of community-based programs working in partnership with States to provide comprehensive

services to parents at a broader scale than an individual program can provide alone. The Fund aims to break down program silos and reduce service fragmentation to create a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to serving low-income parents. The strongest State applications will be ones that actively partner with community-based organizations to combine direct services with the development of effective policy strategies. The Administration believes that public-private partnerships that will be supported by the Fund will have the greatest potential for resulting in comprehensive and lasting efforts to support families.

### **Conclusion**

Too many children continue to grow up without the benefit of a father in their lives. The need to expand and strengthen services to more fathers is something I believe we can all agree on.

The President's Innovation Fund will build on what we have learned from evaluations and program experience and seek to develop a more extensive evidence base by fostering innovation and instituting rigorous evaluation so we can learn more about what will improve outcomes for children and families. We look forward to working with this Subcommittee to further strengthen the positive impact that fathers have on their children's financial and emotional well-being.

Again, Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to discuss these important programs with the Subcommittee. I would be happy to answer any questions.