OHIO COMMISSION ON FATHERHOOD STRICKLAND/FISHER TRANSITION AGENCY REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT

JANUARY 24, 2007

Introduction

Deliverance. For those who understand – either intuitively or through familiarity with the relevant data – the critical role that a father plays in his child's development, Governor-elect Ted Strickland's call for a team of concerned Ohio citizens to review the operation of the neglected Ohio Commission on Fatherhood ("OFC") was precisely that . . . deliverance. What had for so long been self-evident to the state's "fatherhood" practitioners and advocates was, once again and finally, of concern to Ohio's chief constitutional officer.

The need for such an agency assessment was clear. Over the past decade a litany of studies have been conducted which conclude the obvious: children enjoy far better outcomes when their fathers are constructively engaged in raising, nurturing and supporting them. Where there is "father absence," a child is far more likely to drop out of school, encounter difficulties with legal authorities - both as a juvenile and as an adult - suffer from mental illness, become substance addicted, be consigned to a life of poverty and fall prey to a host of other social maladies.

In a state where in 2005, according to a study by Kids Count, twenty-five percent (25%) of children were being raised in "mothers only" households, the potential of nearly 730,000 minors were being significantly compromised solely as a result of paternal disengagement. Given national surveys revealing that forty percent (40%) of children in the United States live in homes where their biological father does <u>not</u> reside, the risk to children in Ohio posed by the "AWOL" dad is even greater than the Kids Count study suggests. Thus, attention to the issue of paternal involvement, if the best interests of Ohio's children are to be served, is required.

The Review Panel Process

Governor-elect Strickland appointed Cuyahoga County Commissioner Peter Lawson Jones to coordinate the review of the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood. Commissioner Jones, while a member of the Ohio House of Representatives, authored the amendment to the state's 2000 – 2001

biennial budget bill that created the OFC. Thirteen other individuals from throughout Ohio, all of whom had significant engagement – either as practitioners or advocates – in fatherhood programming agreed to serve on the panel. (Please see Appendix A for the committee roster).

In order to review the OFC and formulate a set of recommendations related thereto, the panel as a whole met on December 18, 2006, and January 5, 2007, in Ashland, Ohio. (See minutes of the meetings, Appendices I and J, respectively). In between said sessions, four subcommittees convened to prepare reports in several discrete areas of fatherhood programming: child support, child custody and visitation, juvenile and adult reentry and professional support. (Please see Appendices C, D, E and F, respectively). Following a brief and, we believe, necessary synopsis of the OFC's history, the review panel's primary overall and area-specific public policy recommendations pertaining to fatherhood issues will be set forth.

The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood

The OFC was established through the state's 2000 – 2001 biennial budget bill, effective July 1, 1999, and codified in Section 5101.34 of the Ohio Revised Code. (See Appendix B). The Commission was to be comprised of nineteen members, including, inter alia: six legislators, the governor or his designee, four cabinet officials or their representatives and five members of the general public with extensive involvement in fatherhood issues.

Per Ohio Revised Code Subsection 5101.342, the Commission's primary statutory responsibilities were to:

1. Organize a state summit on fatherhood every four years;

2. Prepare a report each year that identifies resources available to fund fatherhood-related programs and explores the creation of initiatives to do the following:

    a. Build the parenting skills of fathers;
    b. Provide employment-related services for low-income, noncustodial fathers;
    c. Prevent premature fatherhood;
    d. Provide services to fathers who are inmates in or have just been released from imprisonment in a state correctional or

in any other detention facility, so that they are able to maintain or reestablish their relationships with their families;

e. Reconcile fathers with their families; and
f. Increase public awareness of the critical role fathers play.

As well over a year elapsed before the OFC was duly constituted, the Commission did not actually convene until the second half of 2000. Within a matter of months, however, OFC members met in a retreat, developed a mission statement and allocated several million dollars to support established or promising community-based fatherhood programs. Because of its late start, however, the Commission expended only a fraction of the ten million dollars in TANF funds appropriated to the panel over the biennium.

Unfortunately, with the change in majority party leadership in the 124th Ohio General Assembly and the increasingly partisan tone in Columbus, the OFC – an entity chaired and established via a legislative proposal offered by a Democratic legislator – fell victim to this new hyper-politically charged environment. Although the agency was not decommissioned, neither was it funded in the 2002 – 2003 biennial budget. The OFC's status, despite recent measures like that authored by State Senator Ray Miller, remained unchanged.

General Recommendations

The OFC Strickland/Fisher Agency Review Committee seeks through its recommendations not only to resuscitate the moribund Commission but also to expand its reach and fortify it in its efforts to address the societal scourge that is father absence. Thus, we urge Governor Strickland to:

- Include in the Administration's upcoming state biennial budget proposal twenty million dollars in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families ("TANF") funding for the OFC in each of the next two fiscal years. Only if properly subsidized can the presently defunct Commission fulfill its critical statutory mission. As such an infusion of TANF dollars would not be subject to the recently enacted state appropriations limitation law and as the state has accumulated a shamefully corpulent TANF reserve, the requested allocation would not undermine the Administration's efforts to craft a fiscally responsible budget. Moreover, the recommended amount is, if anything, conservative. Cuyahoga County, which has constructed in three years what is arguably one of the nation's preeminent public sector-driven fatherhood initiatives, appropriated a million

dollars last year for its program alone. Had only the resources been available, Cuyahoga County could easily have tripled its budget in its effort to ensure an engaged father for every child.

- Appoint the twelve members of the OFC under the governor's direct and indirect authority by July 1, 2007, at the latest and encourage the Ohio General Assembly to make its six and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Ohio the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Chair of the Family and Children First Cabinet Council their single appointments by said date as well. Should the state legislature fund the Administration's budget request for the Commission, the panel must be ready to convene at the beginning of the next fiscal year. One of the problems that plagued the first iteration of the OFC was the laconic pace at which it was constituted.

- Order an audit of all state agencies to ensure that they are "father-friendly." Because of custom, tradition, history and inertia, the programs, policies and procedures of many government offices are structured, albeit without malice, in a manner that discourages, alienates and, sometimes, even discriminates against fathers. In fact, one of the first actions taken by the Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative was to contract with a private consultant to conduct just such an audit. One of the consultant's initial findings was that a national award-winning county program unintentionally discriminated against fathers by providing visits by registered nurses only to all new and teen "mothers" as opposed to all new and teen "parents." A thorough agency-by-agency, worksite-by-worksite assessment could eliminate the ways, both subtle and overt, that state government dissuades paternal involvement in their children's lives.

Although we view the above three recommendations as transcendent, the OFC review committee strongly suggests that whoever is charged with the responsibility of studying this report and, hopefully, implementing its recommendations also read the recently issued Ohio Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families ("OPNFF") Public Policy Agenda. The document, inter alia, sets forth additional ways in which prospects for fathers in our state might generally be enhanced. (See Appendix G).

Child Support Recommendations

As only the state's public education system impacts the lives of more children than the over 1.1 million minors affected by the child support system and as the vast majority of child support obligors are fathers, the OFC review committee concluded that reform of said system – consistent with the fundamental guiding principle of serving "the best interests of the child" – must be undertaken. Although all of the recommendations offered by the panel's Child Support Subcommittee are significant (see Appendix C), only the following will be discussed here:

- Change the culture and paradigm of the child support system by (1) supporting legislation to re-name each county's "Child Support Enforcement Agency" the "Child Support Services Agency"; (2) adopt policies and procedures that distinguish between obligors who cannot pay as opposed to those who refuse to pay; (3) pursue statutory, regulatory and procedural changes that enable more child support matters to be handled administratively rather than through the courts; (4) help replicate programs currently extant in Fairfield and Clermont Counties that divert delinquent obligors to job counseling services as opposed to jail; (5) better link child support and job placement agencies through co-location or other means; and (6) find ways to offer a "one stop" shop and develop "wrap around" and improved case management services for non-custodial parents who are grappling with the range of child support, custody and visitation issues. In short, the Administration must implement where it can and encourage otherwise the development of a child support system that is less expensive, and more equitable, rational, comprehensive and navigable.

- Support the updating of child support guidelines, including the provision of a "parenting time" credit and a fairer income imputation procedure, as well as a simplification of the child support order modification process to ensure that the "right" amount is determined initially and at all subsequent junctures during the tenure of the obligation. Particularly as regards incarcerated parents, child support obligations should be automatically suspended or reduced if the inmate's ability to pay has been adversely impacted as a result of his imprisonment. Otherwise, the chances of his successfully reentering society upon release will be greatly undermined by an overwhelming arrearage. Any child support suspension or reduction should be conditioned upon the

inmate's participation in parenting programs and compliance with other rules in the institution where he is serving his time.

- Support the development of a more sensible child support arrearage system. The state should be willing to waive or compromise uncollectible debt owed it and permit parties to more easily agree – as Hamilton County currently does – to arrears forgiveness. Such waivers or compromises should, again, be contingent upon the obligor's participation in parenting or other relevant programs.

- Pursuant to the federal Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, increase the pass through of child support paid to a recipient of public assistance and allow a larger disregard, for purposes of determining the obligee's TANF eligibility. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the money the state would forego by doing this is more than counterbalanced by the additional income taxes the state would receive from the non-custodial parent and the entire family's reduced reliance on public welfare.

- Finally, but, perhaps, most importantly, convene the key public, private and non-profit stakeholders to review the state's child support/custody/visitation laws, regulations and procedures to recommend and help implement the requisite reforms.

Child Custody and Visitation Recommendations

In addition to advancing its own discrete set of recommendations, the OFC review panel's Child Custody and Visitation Subcommittee heartily endorses those of the Child Support Subcommittee which call for the creation of "one stop shop" opportunities for non-custodial parents with child support/custody/visitation concerns and for convening a series of stakeholder meetings. Moreover, the Child Custody and Visitation Subcommittee urges the Administration to:

- Support legislative, regulatory and procedural reform to "equalize" the rights of fathers and mothers, custodial and non-custodial parents. For example, current law grants custody of a newborn to the mother even if the father signs the birth certificate at the hospital or shortly acknowledges paternity. Under such circumstances neither parent should be afforded rights superior to the other, and both parties should be mandated to appear in juvenile court to mediate all custody, visitation and support issues.

Cooperative parenting programs, like the "Strong Start for Cuyahoga County's Families" pilot program, should be required of all unmarried new parents in Ohio.

- Advocate and work for the elimination of gender bias in the administration of state benefit programs and the enforcement of the legal rights, e.g., visitation, of non-custodial parents. In short, there exists a need to ensure that all units of state government are father friendly and supportive. Furthermore, regulations regarding custodial and non-custodial parents should be evaluated for fairness and the OFC should have the right to review all new such promulgations before they are adopted.

- Change the policy of the Children and Family Services county agencies that look first to place a child with his/her maternal grandparents as opposed to his/her father.

- Support legislative and procedural changes to require child support, custody and visitation issues to be resolved either directly or indirectly within the same time frame.

(Please see Appendix D for the remainder of the subcommittee's recommendations).

Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction/Ohio Department of Youth Services Reentry Subcommittee Recommendations

The reasons why a review of ODRC and ODYS policy must be included in any comprehensive assessment of the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood and fatherhood programming in our state is manifest. First, the Ohio Revised Code requires that the OFC provide services to incarcerated fathers. More importantly, given the states interest in ensuring optimal reentry outcomes for the nearly 30,000 inmates who are annually released back into Ohio's cities, towns and villages and the direct correlation between the successful reentry and the strength of the returnee's support system in the community to which he is being released, due attention must be paid to preserving familial bonds during their incarceration.

Based on a 2004 study, the state determined that nearly half of those imprisoned in state correctional facilities were fathers of minor children. Thus, on any given day, approximately 50,000 children have a parent in prison and, given the protean nature of the prison population, as many as 75,000 of Ohio's children will, in any year, lose a parent to incarceration.

Furthermore, although less than the national average of twenty-five percent (25%), a substantial number of the young men who have been committed to the state's juvenile facilities are fathers and many more will shortly become so after their release. Thus, the case for the need to provide comprehensive and effective fatherhood programming for "residents" of our correctional institutions is patently clear.

Therefore, the ODRC/ODYS Reentry Subcommittee recommends, in addition to the governor's support for the adoption of the ORDC's Ohio Plan for Productive Offender Reentry and Recidivism Reduction, that the Administration also, as regards the state's prison population:

- Expand, enhance and standardize the curriculum available in Ohio's adult correctional facilities to help inmates maintain their relationships with their minor children during incarceration. In order to achieve this objective, a fatherhood coordinator should be designated at each institution and the system-wide implementation of the "Inside Out Dad" and similar programs must be studiously considered.

- Enhance the quality of inmates' engagement with their children by expanding both play/interaction areas for parent-child visits and parent-child real-time teleconferencing opportunities.

- Family orientation programs should be conducted for an inmate's spouse/significant other and children at every reception center to prepare them for life without their loved one, assist them in sustaining their bond and link those left on the "outside" to community-based support services available during the period of incarceration.

- Extend membership to the OFC in both the State Agency Offender Reentry Coalition and the ODRC Family Council, the creation of which council has been proposed in the Ohio Plan. Clearly, the Commission must have a voice in all fatherhood-related programming decisions made at the state's penal institutions.

The ODRC/ODYS Reentry Subcommittee offered a series of similar recommendations to serve youth who have been committed to state detention centers. The suggested policy reforms include the following:

- Identify current and soon-to-be fathers in the ODYS system in order that parenthood-related services can be targeted to them.

- Implement a comprehensive curriculum at ODYS facilities that helps those who are or will imminently be fathers develop their parenting skills, deters the other young men at the institutions from premature fatherhood and assists both groups in forming healthier social relationships. A staff member should be designated at each facility to coordinate such programming.

- Ensure that every young man released from ODYS's custody has a reentry plan that includes education/employment and, where appropriate, parenting components. Each returnee should also be assigned a mentor. All local Family and Children First Councils should be required to join with the OFC to establish a reentry protocol that facilitates the effective reintegration of the youth back into his community.

Please see Appendix E for the remaining ODRC/ODYS Reentry Subcommittee recommendations not described in the above summary. The bottom line: a father, whether an adult or a minor, cannot successfully reenter the community if the need to maintain and nurture his relationship with his children is ignored during his detention.

Professional Support Subcommittee Recommendations

The series of public policy modifications which the OFC review panel has suggested will have far-reaching ramifications that will require virtually every state agency to rethink, at least as regards its programs that impact fathers, its service delivery system. Moreover, the community-based organizations that assist the state in delivering services must be equally father friendly. Such a change in culture will not occur without some stimulus.

Thus, the review team's Professional Support Subcommittee has recommended that at least $200,000 of the OFC's annual budget be reserved for professional development activities at both the state and local levels. The Administration is also being asked to strongly consider engaging the Ohio Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families in providing such technical support. Significant expertise in fatherhood-programming resides in both the organization and its membership, which knowledge should be fully utilized. Finally, the governor should also consider making the OPNFF president one of his OFC private citizen appointees.

Conclusion

The Strickland/Fisher Administration faces a daunting litany of challenges in its endeavor to return Ohio to preeminence: an under performing economy, a reeling public education system, skyrocketing tuition at the state's institutions of higher learning, a burgeoning and increasingly more expensive penal system and a far too large segment of the state's population whose aspirations are suffocated by substance abuse, mental illness and abject poverty. Although for every problem confronting Ohio, there exists a host of solutions, it is doubtlessly self-evident that, unless our state is strengthened at its most atomistic level – the family – success in "turning Ohio around" will be limited at best . . . and that critical to reinvigorating Ohio's families is combating the deleterious effects of father absence by re-engaging dads in a real and genuine way as providers and as parents.

The members of the Ohio Fatherhood Commission Strickland/Fisher Transition Agency Review Committee feel privileged to have been asked to serve both the Administration and the citizens of the State of Ohio. We have, understanding the connection between paternal involvement and a child's success, worked diligently to craft a set of coherent, comprehensive and viable recommendations to help the state's fathers and – more importantly – through them its families and children realize their potential. We are resolute and unambivolent in our belief that the adoption of our recommendations will lay the cornerstone in efforts to rebuild Ohio. Our dedication to ensuring the implementation of the suggested public policy reforms does not end with the submission of this report. We are imbued with the passion of the evangelical. Call upon us.

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§ 5101.34. Commission on fatherhood created.

(A) There is hereby created in the department of job and family services the Ohio commission on fatherhood. The commission shall consist of the following members:

(1) (a) Four members of the house of representatives appointed by the speaker of the house, not more than two of whom are members of the same political party. Two of the members must be from legislative districts that include a county or part of a county that is among the one-third of counties in this state with the highest number per capita of households headed by females.

(b) Two members of the senate appointed by the president of the senate, each from a different political party. One of the members must be from a legislative district that includes a county or part of a county that is among the one-third of counties in this state with the highest number per capita of households headed by females.

(2) The governor, or the governor's designee;

(3) One representative of the judicial branch of government appointed by the chief justice of the supreme court;

(4) The directors of health, job and family services, rehabilitation and correction, and youth services and the superintendent of public instruction, or their designees;

(5) One representative of the Ohio family and children first cabinet council created under section 121.37 of the Revised Code appointed by the chairperson of the council;

(6) Five representatives of the general public appointed by the governor. These members shall have extensive experience in issues related to fatherhood.

(B) The appointing authorities of the Ohio commission on fatherhood shall make initial appointments to the commission within thirty days after the effective date of this section. Of the initial appointments to the commission made pursuant to divisions (A)(3), (5), and (6) of this section, three of the members shall serve a term of one year and four shall serve a term of two years. Members so appointed subsequently shall serve two-year terms. A member appointed pursuant to division (A)(1) of this section shall serve on the commission until the end of the general assembly from which the member was appointed or until the member ceases to serve in the chamber of the general assembly in which the member serves at the time of appointment, whichever occurs first. The governor or the governor's designee shall serve on the commission until the governor ceases to be governor. The directors and superintendent or their designees shall serve on the commission until they cease, or the director or superintendent a designee represents ceases, to be director or superintendent. Each member shall serve on the commission from the date of appointment until the end of the term for which the member was appointed. Members may be reappointed.

Vacancies shall be filled in the manner provided for original appointments. Any member appointed to fill a vacancy occurring prior to the expiration date of the term for which the member's predecessor was appointed shall serve on the commission for the remainder of that term. A member shall continue to serve on the commission subsequent to the expiration date of the member's term until the member's successor is appointed or until a period of sixty days has elapsed, whichever occurs first. Members shall

serve without compensation but shall be reimbursed for necessary expenses.

HISTORY: 148 v H 283 (Eff 9-29-99); 148 v H 471. Eff 7-1-2000.

Not analogous to former RC § 5101.34 (139 v S 530; 141 v H 201; 142 v H 708), repealed 144 v H 298, § 2, eff 7-26-91.

The effective date is set by section 12(A) of HB 471.

[§ 5101.34.1] § 5101.341. Chairperson; staff; fund to support operations.

(A) The Ohio commission on fatherhood annually shall elect a chairperson from among its members. The department of job and family services shall provide staff and other support services for the commission.

(B) The commission may accept gifts, grants, donations, contributions, benefits, and other funds from any public agency or private source to carry out any or all of the commission's duties. The funds shall be deposited into the Ohio commission on fatherhood fund, which is hereby created in the state treasury. All gifts, grants, donations, contributions, benefits, and other funds received by the commission pursuant to this division shall be used solely to support the operations of the commission.

HISTORY: 148 v H 283 (Eff 9-29-99); 148 v H 471. Eff 7-1-2000.

The effective date is set by section 12(A) of HB 471.

[§ 5101.34.2] § 5101.342. State summits on fatherhood; annual report.

The Ohio commission on fatherhood shall do both of the following:

(A) Organize a state summit on fatherhood every four years;

(B) (1) Prepare a report each year that identifies resources available to fund fatherhood-related programs and explores the creation of initiatives to do the following:

(a) Build the parenting skills of fathers;

(b) Provide employment-related services for low-income, noncustodial fathers;

(c) Prevent premature fatherhood;

(d) Provide services to fathers who are inmates in or have just been released from imprisonment in a state correctional institution, as defined in section 2967.01 of the Revised Code, or in any other detention facility, as defined in section 2921.01 of the Revised Code, so that they are able to maintain or reestablish their relationships with their families;

(e) Reconcile fathers with their families;

(f) Increase public awareness of the critical role fathers play.

(2) The commission shall submit each report prepared pursuant to division (B)(1) of this section to the president and minority leader of the senate, speaker and minority leader of the house of representatives, governor, and chief justice of the supreme court. The first report is due not later than one year after the last of the initial appointments to the commission is made under section 5101.341 [5101.34.1] of the Revised Code.

HISTORY: 148 v H 283. Eff 9-29-99.

The effective date is set by section 162 of HB 283.

[§ 5101.34.3] § 5101.343. Exemption from expiration provisions.

Sections 101.82 to 101.87 of the Revised Code do not apply to the Ohio commission on fatherhood.

HISTORY: 148 v H 283 (Eff 9-29-99); 148 v H 548. Eff 3-22-2001/D.

The provisions of § 12 of HB 548 (148 v -) read as follows:

SECTION 12. Sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 of this act shall take effect on January 1, 2001.

Â The effective date of section 1 of HB 548 (148 v -) differs from the effective date set for the section by section 12 of the act. See the provisions of OConst Art II, §§ 1c and d.

Draft Recommendations, 01.04.07
Ohio Fatherhood Commission, Child Support

The Ohio Fatherhood Commission transition/agency review committee recommends the state create a "one stop" service designed to reintegrate the father into the family, specifically targeting men who have child support, custody/visitation, or court involved issues, using a holistic approach and offering comprehensive case management programs designed to accommodate the psychological, physical and social support needs of fathers falling within the low to no-income range.

Child Support

The child support program touches the lives of more than 1,118,382 children - more children than any other program in Ohio, except public education. It is imperative that child support leadership work with both parents in order to help ensure the healthy development of Ohio's children, our future. The Ohio Fatherhood Commission transition/agency review committee recommends that the state of Ohio focus its efforts on *innovations* for the child support program to serve the needs of both parents for the best interest of the children in our state.

Because child support has many different partners or stakeholders, the state should bring together key stakeholders, such as the courts, prosecutors, attorneys, parents, advocates, practitioners, legislators, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (the Office of Child Support), the federal government (the Office of Child Support Enforcement), county agencies (Child Support Enforcement Agencies), professional associations, and others involved in the child support program to create a "Stakeholder Group" charged with developing a specific, collaborative action plan to:

1. ***Increase early education and outreach efforts*** about child support for both parents.

2. ***Help ensure the "right" child support order is established*** by updating the child support guidelines (including credit for parenting time), making the modification process as simple as possible, and developing an agreed upon process for the imputation of income. Courts and the CSEAs need to work together to put in place orders that reflect realistic incomes and the ability to pay. It is critical that the support guidelines for low-income non-custodial parents take into account his or her needs for basic life necessities. An obligor without adequate resources for food, clothing and shelter is not likely to maintain lawful employment. This increases the likelihood for participation in the underground economy and, therefore, incarceration. This is not in the best interest of the child.

3. **Increase the pass-through of child support to families receiving public assistance and disregard that income for the purposes of calculating eligibility for TANF** benefits as permitted under the federal Deficit Reduction Act of '05. This will motivate non-custodial parents to more readily pay their child support while helping whole families move out of poverty. There is significant research to prove that the dollars that the state does not receive by increasing the pass-through will be more than offset by improved outcomes elsewhere, such as income taxes paid by non-custodial parents and less reliance on state social services by the entire family. (For detailed guidance on what is permissible, possible and advisable under the DRA of '05, refer to materials available from Center for Law and Social Policy | Vicky Turetsky | 1015 15th Street, NW, Suite 400 | Washington, D.C. 20005 | (202) 906-8000 | vturet@clasp.org| www.clasp.org/http://www.clasp.org/publications.php?id=4#0)

4. ***Develop an intelligent arrears management system, relieving uncollectible debt owed to the state with participation in OPNFF-certified responsible fatherhood training programs and/or employment counseling.*** The team recommends the establishment of a simplified administrative procedure to allow obligees/custodial parents to compromise or completely forgive arrears. Hamilton County Child Support Services has a highly successfully model of this in place currently which ensures that obligees are freely and knowingly waiving their rights to arrears. Reduction of uncollectible arrears helps avoid unnecessary, tax-draining incarceration of low-income obligors while improving the state's child support performance statistics that must be reported to the federal government. Moreover, creating a procedure for obligees to forgive arrears improves family relationships and increases the likelihood that obligors will participate in the child support system going forward; all of this is ultimately in the best interest of the child and the whole family.

5a. ***Draft legislation to deal more productively with incarcerated obligors***. Current case law does not permit child support orders to be reduced while an obligor is incarcerated. When released, parents are faced with a large arrearage coupled with difficulty in finding employment. This makes it increasingly likely that the formerly incarcerated obligor will end up in jail again on a child support contempt charge, thus sabotaging any incremental progress he may have made at putting his life back together after incarceration. There is abundant evidence from around Ohio that this is ultimately *not* in the best interest of the child as it decreases the likelihood that child support will be paid while increasing the relational friction between the obligee and obligor. Some states have systems that reduce or suspend orders during the period of incarceration. Just as with the arrears management recommendation (see #3 above), this recommendation could be tied to in-prison participation in fatherhood and/or other programming. Ohio should have a meaningful arrears management program and should also increase services to incarcerated parents and to parents re-entering society, to help them meet the financial and emotional needs of their children. Implementing this reform would be in the best interest of Ohio's children.

5b. ***The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction's Omnibus Reentry legislative proposal outlines community alternative punishments for non-violent offenders such as those who are sent to prison for non-payment of support.*** This legislation, in conjunction with job assistance services discussed below, will keep former offenders in the community where they can maintain employment and family ties.

5c. ***Also, design a pilot program where inmates are able to earn income,*** perhaps equal to an amount to support a full child support payment, in exchange for work and participation in parenthood and/or other programming so that incarcerated parents are able to pay an existing child support order for a current order or for an arrearage, if that order is not resolved by legislation. There are intangible benefits, of a family stability and self-esteem, that would be advantageous to the parents and the children. The actual cost of such a program would be offset by the avoidance of public assistance costs, and a pilot program, showing the tangible and intangible benefits should be implemented.

6. ***Help CSEAs connect with community partners to help parents address parenting time and cooperative parenting issues, which are emotionally connected with child support, although not legally connected.*** CSEAs are not legally able to help with visitation or custody issues, yet the agencies should stay connected with community resources, such as legal clinics and family support or visitation centers so that appropriate, valuable referrals can be made to help parents.

7. ***Develop specific job assistance services connected with child support agencies so that parents can overcome employment challenges and provide for their children's healthful development***: Coordinators of such job assistance services will give parents equal opportunity to engage in an active, intensive approach for seeking work, increasing job retention, achieving self-sufficiency, and managing their child support cases. The state should review and consider replicating models that are in Fairfield and Clermont Counties, where obligors in default are first referred to job counseling services, *as a measure to help prior to contempt actions and potential sentencing of jail time.* The programs should include a component for cooperative parenting classes or referrals for cooperative parenting resources.

   8a. ***Change the name of the Child Support Enforcement Agency in every county to Child Support Services to emphasize a more holistic approach.*** This would require a legislation. Georgia is an example of a state that has changed its name to Child Support Services to more accurately reflect the mission of the program.

   8b. ***As a further measure, consider and improve the viability of the administrative processes within Child Support Services to review, modify and enforce orders to decrease the involvement of the courts and prosecutors' offices.*** This will help mitigate the unnecessarily punitive image that child support has gained in the general public and allow for a more productive response to low-income obligors who are struggling to support their children.

9. ***Involve both parents in developing post-TANF transition plans, including the role of child support*** in remaining independent of public assistance, the review and modification of orders, and compromising of arrears, when appropriate.

10. ***Customize enforcement approaches, distinguishing between those who refuse to pay and those who simply cannot pay.*** Again, this will be easier to do if initial enforcement hearings are done administratively and do not involve prosecutors, but rather properly trained child support professionals (see #8 above).

The Stakeholder Group will identify the action plans and resources needed for the implementation of the recommendations. For all recommendations, and particularly for recommendations 4,6,7,8,9 and 10, ***stakeholder relationships*** will be important for success. CSEAs and child support partners must connect and collaborate on a regular basis. ***Legislation*** will be needed for recommendations 2,3,5 and 8. ***Funding*** will be needed to provide additional services, such as with recommendations 1,5 and 7.

Ohio Fatherhood Commission Strickland/Fisher Transition Agency Review Committee

Custody and Visitation Recommendations

(Al Grimes, Susan Organiscak, Muqit Sabur)

The Ohio Fatherhood Commission transition agency review committee recommends that the state implement the recommendations below that will help remove barriers that fathers face in acquiring the opportunity for custody and visitation. A particularly serious problem for unwed fathers is that Ohio state law gives sole custody of a child born to unwed parents to the mother, thus creating an immediate legal barrier to a father's relationship with his child. There is no provision for a process that gives the father equal opportunity for custody or visitation. Another serious problem is that the child support system is completely separate from the juvenile court system which handles custody issues involving unmarried parents. These custody/visitation issues and others are addressed in the following recommendations.

1. Update legislation to give unmarried fathers rights as soon as paternity has been established especially if they sign the birth certificate in the hospital and acknowledge. Do not allow mother's rights to be superior or have all the power. Fathers should not be considered below mothers on any scale. Eliminate the prejudice that fathers face.

2. New mechanisms to aid in the enforcement of court ordered parenting time, especially a mandatory monetary penalty for the non-complier. Courtrooms need to send the right message that the court orders must be complied with. Currently nothing is done to the party that refuses to follow the agreement and there is no real incentive to make them. The message must be clear and a mandatory outcome must be established.

3. Mandate cooperative parenting programs, which would outline unmarried parents legal issues, responsibilities, needs of the children and the importance of parental cooperation. "Divide and conquer does not work" A parental communication workshop can also be implemented to assist parents in addressing issues together for the sake of the children.

4. Fathers and mothers should both have the right to enroll their children in their own school district, **primary residential parents** without having to refile for legal custody every time the child moves residences. Schools should be mandated to allow either parent to enroll the child as long as they prove that they are the legal parent and that they live in the respective school district. This will help both the parents and the child.

5. Mandatory initial mediation, both parents must appear upon the application to determine custody filing and mediation for post decree motions filed in Juvenile Court.

6. Legal assistance for **income qualified** fathers. Can be a sliding scale charge determinative upon income levels.

7. Father's should have the same access to benefits and assistance programs as mothers. Caseworkers should consistently handle their cases in the same manner be it the mother or the father seeking benefits. Either party must be able to establish that they have **possession** of the children.

8. More collaborative efforts by Juvenile Court, Children Family Services and CSEA. CFS should consider fathers first when placing children. They currently look first to maternal grandmother and or her side of the family without even asking about the father. CSEA should make every effort to order child support against mothers, and collect when fathers have the children.

9. One stop shop to deal with Custody/Paternity/Support issues efficiently. Will have a pro se center to assist with paperwork to get things started, mediation program to work on parenting plans and child support assistance.

10. Visitation Centers- used for drop off and pick up so as to monitor compliance when it is an issue. This isn't for supervised visitation. This would be a referral when one party is not complying thus creating a record for the court of non-compliance.

11. Custody and child support should be handled in the same time frame. Legislation doesn't allow them to be handled together but there should be a direct referral to work on parenting plans and other processes to raise the child.

Final Draft 1/2/07

The Ohio Fatherhood Commission Transitioning Team
ODRC/DYS Reentry Sub-Committee
(Rona Dorsey, Scott Neely, Tony Panzino, Tecca Thompson)

Currently, 1.4 million individuals are behind bars in America's state and federal prisons and more than 600,000 individuals, about 1,600 per day, will be released. These prisoners are parents to 1.5 million children. The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) is the 7th largest correctional system in the United States and confines more than 48,000 adult felons. Many of these are parents who lack the skills and resources to successfully reunite with their children and spouses upon release. A statistical profile completed in 2004 of almost 1,000 inmates found that nearly half of the sample (498) is fathers of 1084 children (17 years or less). This number equates to approximately 50,000 children across Ohio who on any given day has a parent in the state prison system. However, the ODRC is a dynamic system and deals with upwards of 75,000 inmates per year and consequently, 75,000 kids are impacted by incarceration a year, or 750,00 kids in a decade.

In 2005, nearly 27,000 offenders were released from Ohio prisons. Several studies have shown that continued contact with family members during and following incarceration can reduce prisoner recidivism and foster reintegration into the community, a fact that has broad benefits for all involved. The effects of father absence or neglect on children are well documented. Less reported is the challenges men face today in fulfilling their roles as responsible and committed fathers. While all fathers face challenges, they are especially prevalent in low-income and ex-offender populations.

The effects of adult incarceration can be seen in the incarcerated youth populations. While DYS reports that the number of incarcerated fathers falls below the national average of 25%, it is also true that a significant number of male youth suspect that they are uninformed fathers and that most incarcerated males reenter their community with an eye toward fatherhood. Third party analysis of incarcerated youth repeatedly shows that well over half of all inmates have grown up in father absent – father uninvolved homes and that the percentage of father absence increases with the severity of crimes involving both physical and sexual aggression. While the connection between father absence, crime and the lack of fatherhood education and skill building resources in prisons has become increasingly obvious to policy makers and legislators, a competing community charge for increased public safety has led to tougher youth sentences particularly for tougher crimes. The natural consequence to longer periods of incarceration is that these youth mature at the same time they are most connected to a sophisticated network of criminal peers and consequently to the

most available resource in our prison systems today – the culture of anti social attitudes and beliefs.

The Ohio Fatherhood Commission can greatly impact the incarcerated father, and future generations, by supporting key recommendations in The Ohio Plan For Productive Offender Reentry and Recidivism Reduction developed by the ODRC. The Ohio Plan calls for a coordinated systems approach to offender reentry involving every phase of the correctional system. The plan has 44 recommendations and includes specific recommendations for family involvement.

The OFC can also assist the DYS by supporting statewide initiatives to build a family sensitive culture both within DYS and within a youth's committing county. The OFC can assist the ODRC and DYS by developing a capacity building program to bring the fatherhood practitioner to the service level in prison. Prisons are in desperate need of qualified fatherhood practitioners to assist the incarcerated fathers, their children and spouses and the department in meeting the complex demands of the incarcerated father and their families.

The following are recommendations from the Ohio Plan that directly impact fathers and families. Following this listing are ways in which the OFC can support the DYS to address the incarcerated juvenile father.

ODRC Reentry and the Ohio Plan for Productive Offender Reentry:

Recommendation #10

The recommendation discusses the need for evidenced based programming and the need for staff to be trained and qualified to offer the program. The OFC, with help from the OPNFF, should identify a validated and standardized fatherhood curriculum (such as, the Inside Out Dad Program) that would be offered at every institution for the incarcerated father. Funding for the program and a staff coordinator would be necessary.

Recommendation #15

Recommends that a Family Orientation Program be implemented at each reception center (3) with information disseminated on community resources. The OFC could assist the ODRC in expanding their current program by offering a comprehensive integrated family orientation program involving the spouse, children and community agencies/resources. ODJFS, Child Support, mentoring services, or a Fatherhood/Family Preservation Specialist should be made available to the family at the beginning of the father's incarceration.

Recommendation #16 and #24

Recommends community-based support groups be developed for family members. The OFC should advocate for family support services/centers for children and spouses of the incarcerated. The OFC should explore a 1-800 (or 211 system) for statewide use and support to family members of the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated fathers.

Recommendation #17

The recommendation established the ODRC Family Council to address offender/family issues across the reentry continuum. The OFC and OPNFF should have regular interaction with the ODRC Family Council to assist in developing father/family sensitive policies and practices for the ODRC.

Recommendations 18 – 24

Recommends expanding parenting curriculums to inmates, expanding visitation areas and establishing family involved programming inside of the institutions. Family Life Education and Reunification Centers would be developed to accomplish this goal. The OFC should support these initiatives and in particular, the expansion of the family visitation areas in prisons to include age appropriate parallel-play areas to permit parent-child interaction.

Recommendation #25 and #26

The recommendations discuss the need for collaborative relationships between the State Departments of Education and Job and Family Services to address school/parent issues associated with the children of the incarcerated, and to develop cross system ties between the agencies. One of the ways to foster these interagency relationships and to identify current policies and practices that present barriers to focusing on and supporting family needs during offenders' incarceration and after release is through a workgroup entitled the "State Agency Offender Reentry Coalition. This group was established through Executive order in November 2004, and consists of various agencies including Education, ODJFS, Aging, Development, Health, DMH, MRDD, ODADAS, OCJS, Public Safety, Regents, and DYS. The Department's proposed Omnibus Reentry legislation would strengthen the effectiveness of this workgroup, by codifying its mission and membership, and requiring it to complete and annual review of reentry barriers to the Governor and legislative leadership. The OFC should be named in the Executive Order and the Director or Designee should participate in the workgroup.

DYS Reentry: DYS Roadmap to Reentry Recommendation # 4, 19 and 20:

The recommendations cite the need for the Department of Youth Services to establish a REENTRY sub-group through each of the 88 existing county Family and Children First Council collaboratives (See ORC # 121.37 for OFCF Legislation) These sub-groups would serve to enhance county service delivery plans, engage the community to educate and assist families and nontraditional families in preparing for a youth's return home and assist communities in developing resources where gaps and services are identified as lacking.

- DYS envisions enhancing and formalizing our collaborative efforts with local Family and Children First Councils as a fundamental part of juvenile reentry by forming a specific Reentry Sub-committee under the umbrella of each of the 88 local councils. While DYS will work to assure that appropriate criminogenic - centered services are provided, the OFC should assist local councils to build council capacities to include fatherhood education, supports and services as a standing contribution to male youth offenders entering the community.

- Similarly to the ODRC, the OFC should assist the DYS in identifying or developing a responsible fatherhood education and skill building curriculum that has been shown to educate and equip incarcerated dads about the responsibilities associated with responsible fatherhood as well as the consequences of premature fatherhood. (E.g.; Long Distance Dads, Doctor Dad) The identified program should be offered at each institution. Funding for the program and a central staff coordinator would be necessary.

- The DYS should systematically collect data and information on the number of young fathers entering the system and data should be captured in the unified case plans. A review of family friendly parenting procedures for visitation should be completed, as well as the development of innovative approaches/practices to connect youth to their children living in the community.

- Institutional/Regional Unified Case Plans should clearly indicate a re-entry plan for all fathers returning to the community under the Family Circumstance Domain. It should be the goal of DYS that when young fathers leave the institution they are already linked with a mentor that will help them seek-out local services to fathers within their committing community. (Especially services related to child custody, paternity and child wellness)

- A pilot program should be established creating at least one unit specific program for all DYS institutions that focuses on the programming and case management needs of young fathers.

- Training for social service and regional parole staff working directly with young fathers should be made available through OPNFF and other recognized fatherhood entities at treatment and parole conferences.

Draft Recommendations 1/2/07
Ohio Fatherhood Commission: Fathers, Families and Professional Support

Creating an environment of responsible fatherhood requires adequate funding for the education and training of professional fatherhood practitioners as well as for programs of fatherhood training. Professional service providers are central to helping fathers develop in ways that enhance the lives of all family members. These professionals have the knowledge, skills and expertise to work with fathers of all ages, races, education and income levels. Through the work of these professionals, fathers gain the skills necessary to be nurturing and supportive parents. A qualified corps of fatherhood professionals to work with fathers in need of family strengthening skills is essential to realizing the goals of the Ohio Fatherhood Commission.

Towards that end, it is recommended that the OFC exploit the professional fatherhood expertise resident in the Ohio Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families (OPNFF) by establishing a formal relationship with OPNFF that would allow OPNFF to:

- Coordinate professional training as well as public policy and issue forums related to fatherhood in each of the five OPNFF regions around the state;

- Provide community mobilization training and technical assistance to communities in said regions;

- Host a statewide conference for fatherhood practitioners and stakeholders;

- Provide professional development training and opportunities for public, community and faith-based agencies that serve fathers and their families; and

- Verify, assess and certify that programs and initiatives around the state are legitimate, comprehensive and outcome focused.

Ohio Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families

Public Policy Agenda

The Ohio Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families (OPNFF) is committed to the well being, stability, and strengthening of all families in Ohio. As such, we recognize the crucial role of fathers as integral parts of each family and as essential to the social and emotional development of their children.

For researchers, practitioners, and fathers themselves, the challenges facing low-income fathers are interrelated. If fathers are unemployed or underemployed, it is much harder to pay child support and maintain necessary health insurance for themselves and their families. Also, many low-income fathers are incarcerated, which makes it extremely difficult to provide financial support for their families. Upon reentry, their criminal records have a negative impact on their ability to find and hold jobs which, in turn, makes it more difficult to connect or reconnect with their children. These interrelated problems often result in fathers being estranged or isolated from their families. The result is devastating for fathers who lose the opportunity to play a positive role in their families and even more devastating for their children who miss out on all the nurturing, caring, teaching, and guidance that fathers have to offer.

First, we must recognize that fatherlessness and its consequences for children is a critical problem in Ohio and throughout the United States. It is estimated that 80 percent of inner-city children grow up with a single mother, thus not benefiting from their other parent who potentially has much to offer them. The problems cited above all contribute to this situation. "What is little understood is that all of these—single fatherhood, domestic abuse, unemployment, crime, and incarceration—are in effect the same problem. They are all part of a destructive pattern of drift, of a tendency for men to stumble through life rather than try to tame it, a drift whose inevitable consequence is the deadbeat dad and fatherless children." (1)

Since the early 1990's, when the Clinton Administration recognized the seriousness of these problems, governments have begun to address the role of fathers in the lives of their families and children. However, the landmark welfare reform law, ***The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996***, mostly addressed the needs of single mothers and has resulted in millions of women emerging from welfare dependency. What the Act lacked was an understanding of the impact of policy change on fathers. By moving women into the workforce, the Act greatly increased the need for child support from fathers and child care funding from the federal and state

governments. Welfare reform has undermined family unity by treating fathers as irrelevant and pushing them out of the home.

When the 1996 welfare reform law was finally reauthorized this past year (the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, P.L. 109-170), it included a Responsible Fatherhood provision, with mandated funding for states, local and community organizations. Various national fatherhood organizations worked with members and committees of Congress to advocate for this landmark provision, the first of its kind in federal law.

Along with greater governmental awareness and attention to responsible fatherhood, organizations have been formed at the local, state, and national levels that have worked to increase the awareness of social service professionals, political leaders, and the general public about issues relating to fathers and families and what can be done to address them. In addition, a great amount of research has been conducted that has demonstrated the problems of father absenteeism and the importance of fathers to the well-being of their families and the positive development of children.

OPNFF has reviewed various issues and policies relating to fathers and families in the state of Ohio. We have found that, in a number of areas, current public policies are not helping to alleviate the problems faced by men, particularly low-income individuals, who want to be responsible fathers. In some cases, the problem is a lack of funding. In other cases, the problem is that the basic design and approach of the public program is making the situation worse, not better. We have developed this public policy agenda for the purpose of informing public officials, human service professionals, and other interested individuals and groups, about the problems facing fathers and the public policies that are needed to address these problems.

These issues and policies are, of course, not unique to Ohio. They exist in every state and community in the nation, although the seriousness of the problems vary depending on demographic, social, economic, and political factors. Often the problems are more severe in urban environments where there is a higher concentration of low-income and minority populations. But throughout the nation, the trend for decades has been in the direction of declining father presence and involvement with their children. And governmental policies, no matter how well intended, have clearly contributed to this unfortunate trend.

A 2002 report prepared for the National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families (NPNFF), ***Expanding the Goals of Responsible Fatherhood Policy***, found that "low-income, non-custodial fathers need assistance with finding jobs and mediating their relationships with the mothers of their children in order to spend more 'quality' time with their children. This suggests an alternative to the historic philosophical approach that many agencies have developed over the years – a philosophy driven in large part by the same public policies that

established and sustained the nation's public welfare system for more than 40 years." The report concluded that "it is incumbent upon policymakers to develop public policies, and for traditional human service agencies to implement practices, that enhance their ability to assist fathers as well as mothers and their children." (2)

Many governmental policies and programs *are* relevant to the participation of fathers in the lives of their children, including welfare reform, child support, child care funding, education and training, health insurance, and prisoner re-entry. All relate to efforts underway in states and at the federal level that are aimed at furthering responsible fatherhood and strengthening families.

The following five areas represent some of the key issues and policies identified by fatherhood and family leaders in Ohio. A survey was conducted among OPNFF board members. Many of their issue concerns and policy solutions are reflected in this document.

Child Support

The child support system is in need of reform. As it is currently set up, the system works against the best interests of children and their families. The pressure of child support obligations and the accumulating debt that results have the effect of driving fathers away from their families and alienating the mothers of their children. Many low-income fathers who are incarcerated - for short or long periods of time in jails and state prisons - do not have the ability to earn money needed to meet their child support obligations.

We do not argue that fathers should be relieved of their family financial obligations, only that such obligations should be grounded in reality by taking into consideration the situation of the individuals involved. As one scholar has stated:

> "Certainly, fathers should be made to contribute to their children's upbringing, but some fathers do not have the financial ability to pay more than trivial amounts of child support. A narrow focus on punishing nonsupporting fathers without any measures to make it easier for poor fathers to make regular child support payments might be an appealing symbolic way to enforce personal responsibility, but it does little to promote the welfare of American children." (3)

The current system is self defeating. It operates to debase fathers and divide families instead of enhancing the potential of men to be good fathers and of family members to be closer and stronger in their relationships with spouses, partners, and children. The state views incarceration as "voluntary unemployment," which allows it to continue to enforce child support orders during incarceration. Reforms needed include:

- higher legal standards to be met before incarcerating fathers;
- ending arrears accumulation during incarceration;
- a state-owed arrears forgiveness program;
- a meaningful child support arrearage forgiveness program linked to participation in OPNFF-certified responsible fatherhood training programs;
- greater allowance for child support modifications that take into consideration the totality of family circumstances.

What this amounts to is that the state needs to adopt a more supportive set of policies to replace the enforcement and punitive policies that now exist. Some counties already have developed some progressive child support ideas and a committee of the Ohio Child Support Directors Association has developed a pilot plan. But we believe that leadership at the highest levels of state government is needed to change the direction of child support policies in ways that will strengthen fathers and the relationships they have with family members, especially with their children. This can only happen through meaningful reforms aimed at ending the current regressive child support system and replacing it with a pro-father and pro-family system.

Job Training and Employment

Unemployment and underemployment of low-income men, especially among young minorities in our nation's cities, is a serious and growing problem. In order for families to be strong and to provide for the needs of children, financial security is of obvious importance. Financial security depends on one or both parents being able to find and retain good paying jobs. And, in order for this to be possible, there must be adequate opportunities for education and training that can lead to such jobs.

In Ohio, the loss of thousands of manufacturing jobs once held by low-skilled, undereducated men has been damaging to the capacity of this population to provide financial support for their families. Little has been done to either replace these jobs or to provide alternative employment opportunities for the men who once held them. When fathers can't find work that will allow them to provide subsistence for their families, they often leave or are forced to leave by the mothers of their children. Some turn to crime. Joblessness is a significant contributor to father absence. And, as many studies have shown, father absence is a significant contributor to problems in the lives and behavior of children and youth – problems like poor educational performance, juvenile delinquency and crime, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and even higher rates of suicide.

It is well known that unemployment is a greater problem among blacks than among whites and that it is worse still among young black men. Long-term trends are worrisome. In recent years,

- the number of unemployed black workers increased by nearly a quarter of a million (214,000);
- the black unemployment rate has increased four times faster than the rate for white workers (1.2 percent versus .3 percent, respectively);
- black teenage unemployment has risen from 30 percent to 40 percent in just one year (between 2002-2003) – in what economists call a jobless economic recovery. (4)

More recent data show that unemployment in Ohio is a full percentage higher than in the U.S. as a whole. (5)

As pointed out in the discussion of child support, that system contributes to high rates of incarceration and the inability of men to find and hold jobs. The child support system and the problems of finding and holding jobs are interlocked in a vicious cycle that undermines men's self-esteem and the potential to be supportive and caring fathers.

Reforms that are needed include:

- More funding for job training so that men can gain the skills needed to obtain and retain gainful employment.
- Addressing the problems and challenges created by the child support and criminal justice systems for fathers in becoming gainfully employed so that they can contribute to their family's financial well-being.
- Incarcerated men should be given job training and help with job attainment as part of their reentry into society and into the lives of their families. Policies should be developed that will alleviate the restrictions placed on ex-offenders in attaining jobs.
- All working men and women in the state of Ohio should receive a "living wage."
- Ohio government – both the legislature and the executive branch – should focus attention on the disproportionately high unemployment rates among low-income minority males. A goal should be set to reduce unemployment in this population to less than 10 percent within three years.

Welfare Reform/TANF

Traditionally, women have been viewed as nurturers and men as providers. This perception is changing as society has modified the social and economic roles of men and women. In the past thirty years, women have entered the workforce in huge numbers and have become important financial contributors to their families. For fathers, along with the traditional provider role, there is a newer emphasis on the caretaker and nurturer role. This role is seen more and more as a shared responsibility, especially as women spend more time than ever in the workforce and away from home.

In the past, family has been operationally defined as centering on mothers and children. Welfare reform and other federal and state policies have not, until recently, viewed the father as a central part of the family structure. Yet, the deficiencies of these policies and changing attitudes toward men and fathers, have led to an understanding that public policies must recognize the crucial role of fathers in the building of strong and healthy families.

The 2006 welfare reform reauthorization includes a Responsible Fatherhood provision which recognizes that "Children do better academically, emotionally and socially when both parents are involved in their lives. Resources are provided to find "innovative ways to promote responsible fatherhood through marriage promotion and divorce reduction, parenting skill building, and where appropriate, expanded opportunities for strengthening the employment opportunities of low income fathers." This provision is targeted at families with incomes below 150 percent of poverty. (6)

The state of Ohio needs to take full advantage of reforms in national welfare policy that has made responsible fatherhood into a federally funded program. Policy recommendations include attention to these areas:

- State and local governments in Ohio should be actively pursuing demonstration and other grant opportunities through the federal Responsible Fatherhood program that is part of the recent TANF reauthorization.
- More TANF funds should be used for fatherhood and cooperative parenting programs, as was proposed in Ohio SB 241.
- Federal TANF policy allows funding for two-parent families and non-custodial fathers. Yet, Ohio has done little to take advantage of these policies, even though there is nearly a billion dollar TANF surplus. State officials should recognize the potential of pro-family policies and use available resources to implement programs that will benefit low-income families.

- Public officials must recognize that there needs to be a shift away from the past bias toward single mothers in welfare and family-related programs. In designing and funding programs, they must recognize the key role that fathers play in strengthening families.

Fathers, Families and Professional Support

Ohio, like most states, has not provided the resources and programs to equip fathers for the difficult but necessary and rewarding challenge of responsible fatherhood. The system is highly dysfunctional because the lack of resources contributes to welfare, unemployment, incarceration, and loss of productivity. This is highly cost ineffective for society and financially, socially and emotionally damaging for families.

A particularly serious problem for unwed fathers is that of custody and visitation. Ohio state law gives sole custody of a child born to unwed parents to the mother, thus creating an immediate legal barrier to a father's relationship with his child. There is no provision for a process that gives father the opportunity for custody or visitation. And, the child support system is completely separate from the juvenile court system which handles custody issues involving unmarried parents.

Fatherhood training is necessary in order to foster personal maturity, motivation, self-esteem and confidence, self sufficiency, and skills that will enable men to be supportive, caring, and nurturing parents to their children. Fathers must understand their parental rights and responsibilities. These are topics that are not well understood by many individuals, especially young and immature men. Creating an environment of responsible fatherhood will require adequate funding for education and training of professional fatherhood practitioners as well as for programs of fatherhood training.

Professional service providers are central to helping fathers develop in ways that enhance the lives of all family members. These professionals have the knowledge, skills and expertise to work with fathers of all ages, races, education and income levels. Through their work, fathers gain the parenting skills necessary to be nurturing and supportive parents. A qualified corps of fatherhood professionals to work with fathers in need of parenting skills is essential to realizing the goals of responsible fatherhood and healthy families.

Policy proposals:

- The Ohio legislature should appropriate $20 million annually during fiscal years 2007-2009 to support local fatherhood programs.

- The legislature should appropriate $500,000 annually during fiscal years 2007-2009 for the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood.
- Additional funding should be provided for fatherhood training so that young men will understand the need for accepting social and financial responsibility when they have children
- Mentoring programs should be established for boys who themselves are fatherless; these programs would help to lessen the likelihood that they will continue this pattern of the absent father.
- Adequate funding should be provided for the training of qualified professional fatherhood trainers and service providers.

Incarceration and Reentry

Incarceration is at record levels in the United States. More than half of the men in prisons are fathers and nearly half of them have lived with their children prior to incarceration. Over 10 million children have a parent or parents who were incarcerated at some point in their lives. (Family and Corrections Network, "Every Door Closed: Barriers Facing Parents with Criminal Records," 2002). (7)

Research has shown that, during a parent's incarceration, children often suffer from depression, withdrawal, poor academic performance, and engage in antisocial and aggressive behaviors. Reentry into the family following incarceration too often does not improve the family environment. Fathers, often with little education and few skills, have a difficult enough time finding employment, but the stigma of a prison record, makes landing a job even more difficult. Many owe large amounts in child support, which further estranges them from the mothers of their children. For these reasons, instead of being a joyful reuniting with family, for many fathers, re-entry is a socially and economically traumatizing experience.

In Ohio, as elsewhere, as prison populations have grown, so have the numbers of ex-offenders. Unfortunately, these individuals are too often released without the rehabilitation necessary to make a successful reentry into community and family life. In its mission statement, ***The Ohio Plan for Productive Offender Reentry and Recidivism Reduction***, states that the goals of reentry and recidivism involve a joint effort to be "accomplished through associations with community partners, families, justice professionals and victims of crime." Among the report's recommendations are for additional family visitation in the rehabilitative process. The plan's slogan "Going Home to Stay" makes clear the central role of family in the entire reentry process. (8)

In large urban areas, like Cuyahoga County and particularly the city of Cleveland, the ex-offender population is disproportionately high. It is forecast that approximately 4,000 ex-offenders will be returning to Cleveland on an annual

basis. Many of them are fathers who want to return to their families. But in order to give them the opportunity to reenter the community and be able to provide financial support for their wives or partners, and children, re-entry services, especially help in obtaining employment, are needed.

Policy recommendations:

- The state legislature should provide adequate authorization and funding to implement key recommendations of the ODRC Ohio Plan for Productive Offender Reentry and Recidivism Reduction.
- Programs and services should be established to help individuals make a positive adjustment that gives them the opportunity to remain out of the criminal justice system. These programs should include mentoring, coaching, and self-sufficiency training that will help men understand their past actions, accept responsibility for these actions and learn from them.
- Families should play a central role in the lives of incarcerated fathers through increased child visitation and family involvement in the rehabilitation process.
- Funding should be provided job training and job placement services to help ex-offenders who want to become legitimate wage earners, enabling them to be supportive of their families.
- The Ohio Fatherhood Commission should play a key role in reentry policies.

Conclusion

In this Public Policy Agenda, the Ohio Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families has focused on some of the key issues and policies facing fathers and families in Ohio. We have highlighted five issue and policy areas: Child Support; Employment and Training; Welfare Reform/TANF; Fathers, Families, and Professional Support; and Incarceration and Reentry. This is not an exclusive list. But it is representative of the issue and policy priorities of leaders in the fatherhood and family field in Ohio.

As the foregoing issue descriptions and policy recommendations show, there is a lot of work to be done in Ohio in order to create a society of responsible fatherhood and strong and healthy families. Good parenting involves both mothers and fathers and it does not just happen. In times of social strife and economic hardship, when forces beyond individual control push against the related objectives of responsible fathers and healthy families, government can play a positive role. This does not mean that these policy objectives are only the responsibility of government. There need to be cooperative relationships between private organizations devoted to fathers and families and public

agencies. Organizations like OPNFF have the expertise to advise and work with public officials in developing legislative proposals, planning and implementing public programs that address the issues and policies outlined in this document. Among our recommendations are some that call for increased spending of state and federal dollars to create new and enhance existing programs. We believe that these are funds that will be cost effective in the long run because they will save the state much more in remedial services. Funding for job training and fatherhood training among ex-offenders, for instance, will reduce the incidence of recidivism. Not only will public funds be saved but lives will be enriched. We hope that this report will help both the public and government officials in the state of Ohio in policy efforts that promote responsible fatherhood as an essential part of family and community well-being.

This Report was prepared for the Ohio Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families by Roger P. Kingsley, Ph.D.

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5. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, July 2006.

6. Responsible Fatherhood section of Deficit Reduction Act of 2005.

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Ohio Fatherhood Commission

Strickland/Fisher Transition Agency Review Committee Meeting

December 18, 2006

11:30 AM-3:30 PM

MINUTES

Attendees: Peter Lawson Jones, Luis Vazquez, Aldonis C. Grimes, Stephen Johnson Grove, Calvin L. Williams, Renee L. Thompson, Steve Killpack, Carri Brown, Tecca Thompson, Rona Dorsey, James McDonald, Tony Panzino, Muqit Sabur and Marie Perez.

Call to Order

Cuyahoga County Commissioner Peter Lawson Jones, Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:30 am. Each committee member received a notebook with background information on the key agenda items.

Self-Introductions

All present introduced themselves with their name, title, and occupation. They also spoke of their current involvement with and motivation for working on fatherhood issues.

Committee Charge (Commissioner Jones)

Commissioner Jones explained that the committee's charge - beyond evaluating the operation of the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood (OFC) and suggesting how the agency might be improved - was to deliver public policy that makes a difference in the lives of the state's fathers, their families and their children. The committee must prepare a written report to Governor-elect Ted Strickland which offers a series of recommendations on how state government can play an important role in assisting fathers, which report should be 5-10 pages in length and submitted by January 4, 2007, if possible.

Commissioner Jones indicated that a line item appropriation for the OFC is desired, as opposed to funding the agency through independent legislation. The group agreed that a line item appropriation is the best approach to secure funding for the commission because it inserts the program directly into the budget, thereby, decreasing the need to seek a subsidy later. Commissioner Jones also offered his opinion that the governor-elect is interested in adequately funding the commission.

Review of the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood Enabling Statute

(Commissioner Jones)

Commissioner Jones reviewed the statute that established the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood. According to the statute the OFC shall do the following:

A. Organize a state summit on fatherhood every four years.

B. Prepare a report each year that identifies resources available to fund fatherhood related programs and explores the creation of initiatives to do the following:

(a) Build the parenting skills of fathers.

(b) Provide employment-related services for low-income, non-custodial fathers.

(c) Prevent premature fatherhood.

(d) Provide services to fathers who are inmates in or have been released from imprisonment in a state correctional institution, or in any other detention facility, so that they are able to maintain or reestablish their relationships with their families.

(e) Reconcile fathers with their families.

(f) Increase public awareness of the critical role fathers play.

Commissioner Jones discussed some of the difficulties that were encountered in past efforts to implement the OFC statute. Tony Panzino, former director of the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood, also recounted the problems that were faced in getting the commission started. Five million in TANF funding was originally allocated for fatherhood programming for fiscal years 2000 and 2001; however, because of the delay in constituting the commission, only a portion of the appropriation was expended. No money has been allocated for the OFC since then. Mr. Panzino, like Commissioner Jones, suggested that seeking a line item appropriation for fatherhood programming increases the likelihood that these activities will be fully funded.

A question was raised about the state budget's due date. The administration must submit its budget to the Ohio House of Representatives by March, 2007, but there exists the possibility of an earlier submittal. Therefore, the committee must complete its funding request as soon as possible in order to ensure its inclusion in the governor's budget as the legislature is more likely to be supportive of programs for which funding is recommended in the first budget proposal. The next biennial budget becomes effective July 1, 2007.

A question was then raised about the statute and whether or not it can be amended. The statute can be modified by a vote of the General Assembly. Another question was raised about the boundaries of the review committee. Commissioner Jones responded by stating that there are no constraints on ideas at this point.

There was a discussion of how much funding from TANF will be needed for fatherhood funding each year. The committee agreed that a yearly allocation of $20 million should be requested.

Finally, there was consensus that the committee should recommend that all appointments to the OFC be made by August 1, 2007.

Report on the 1st Hearing on Senate Bill 241 (Al Grimes)

Mr. Grimes gave a report on the first hearing on Senate Bill 241, which meeting he attended. The hearing was held December 5, 2006, at the Statehouse. If adopted, the bill would require the Ohio General Assembly to earmark $10 million dollars of TANF funds per year to be used to support fatherhood programs with $300,000 per year set aside to be used to support the activities of the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood.

Senator Ray Miller, the bill's sponsor was very persuasive. He discussed personal issues involving his father, introduced Mr. Grimes and spoke about the success of the Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative.

All of the senators were very supportive of the purpose of the bill. Senators John Carey, Tom Roberts and Eric Kearney made favorable comments about the OFC and asked for more information on the Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative. Senator Niehaus mentioned that he would like to see some of the outcomes from the fatherhood programming. Mr. Grimes provided the review committee with a list of the Senate Finance and Financial Institutions Committee members.

After the meeting, Senator Eric Kearney sent a note to Mr. Grimes stating that he was impressed with Cuyahoga County's fatherhood efforts and his desire to see some of its programming replicated statewide. Scott Neely, a legislative liaison at the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (ODRC) and an Ohio Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families (OPNFF) board member, also attended the hearing and reported back to the OPNFF group that he felt the hearing went very well. The review committee agreed to keep Senator Miller informed of the progress that it is making and to give him a list of the final recommendations.

Report on the Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative (Al Grimes)

Mr. Grimes then reported on the Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative. The mission of the Cuyahoga County fatherhood Initiative is to ensure that every father in the county

will have a productive and positive relationship with his children because "FATHERS MATTER." The goals of the Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative are to:

- Promote public awareness of the role of fathers;
- Provide linkages to other public systems and improve our current service delivery to fathers;
- Fund fatherhood-related programs on the county level; and
- Host an annual conference.

The Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative emphasizes that it does not exclude mothers but encourages mothers to participate in its programs. Research has shown that when fathers are not involved in the lives of their children, the children are more likely to drop out of school, commit crimes, abuse drugs or alcohol and do poorly in school.

The Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative Public Awareness Campaign has been responsible for generating over 5000 phone inquiries from fathers to Cuyahoga County's First call for Help Line seeking services to assist them in becoming better dads. The campaign uses radio, billboard and bus advertisements to promote fatherhood programs and related services.

To date, the Initiative has spent $2.5 million on programs and services to help fathers in Cuyahoga County. Additional funding in the amount of $500,000 is allocated for programming through July 1st, 2007.

As a part of the Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative an audit was conducted of every county department to ensure that fathers are treated fairly when seeking services and included in the process when there are issues affecting children.

In June, 2005, the Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative hosted the first ever public sponsored forum created specifically to promote healthy father-child relationships, address the social problems that result from father absence and strategize as to what the community can do to ensure that every child has a dad in his or her life. Over 2400 dads and their children attended the two-day event. The second annual Fatherhood Conference, held in June, 2006, attracted over 3,000 fathers and their children. The first day of events includes a community resource fair, funders and legislators breakfast, town hall meeting, workshops and a luncheon with a keynote speaker and a tribute to local fathers. The second day is held at the zoo for fathers and their families. Zoo admission, breakfast and activities are provided at no charge to parents and children.

Mr. Grimes also reviewed some of the individual community programs that the Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative sponsors. Mr. Grimes stated that the key to the success of a lot of the programs and the Initiative was providing sustained funding so the programs have time to develop and can be adequately evaluated. Several counties have called to find out how to start a Fatherhood Initiative program in their county. The committee suggested that the state conduct an audit of its departments similar to the one performed in Cuyahoga County to ensure that its services and departments are "father-friendly."

Overview of the Ohio Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families (OPNFF) Public Policy Agenda (Muqit Sabur)

Mr. Sabur gave a report on OPNFF Public Policy Agenda. The OPNFF is committed to the well being, stability, and strengthening of all families in Ohio. There are approximately 300 active members.

For researchers, practitioners, and fathers themselves, the challenges facing low-income fathers are interrelated and often result in fathers being estranged or isolated from their families. The result is devastating for fathers who lose the opportunity to play a positive role in their families and even more devastating for their children who do not receive the nurturing, caring, teaching and guidance that fathers can provide.

Mr. Sabur reviewed the recommendations made in the OPNFF Public Policy Agenda in the areas of: Child Support, Job Training and Employment, Welfare Reform/TANF, Fathers, Families and Professional Support and Incarceration and Reentry.

There was discussion regarding the appropriate level of TANF funds allocated for outreach training. $200,000.00 per year was the amount agreed upon by the committee.

Carrie Brown led a discussion on some child support ideas incorporated in a pilot plan developed by a committee of the Ohio Child Support Directors Association. She suggested changing the term from "arrears forgiveness" to "arrears management" when we discuss child support. The group concurred. Stephen Johnson Grove presented and reviewed a document on Child Support Reform Thoughts. Steve Killpack then presented and reviewed a document on Increasing Access Points for Fathers in Public and Community Health and Social Service Systems.

Rhona Dorsey led a discussion on the ODRC Reentry Initiative and the "Ohio Plan for Productive Offender Reentry and Recidivism Reduction" mentioned in the OPNFF Public Policy Agenda document. 28,000 of the ex-offenders who return home each year are fathers and 52% of fathers in prison have school aged children. Commissioner Jones stated that fully funding the "Ohio Plan for Productive Offender Reentry" does not have to come out of the Fatherhood Budget.

The group agreed that the report to be presented to Governor-elect Ted Strickland would be modeled around the same issues covered in the OPNFF Public Policy Agenda.

Next Steps

Three subcommittees were then formed. They are Incarceration and Reentry, Custody and Visitation and Child Support.

Incarceration and Reentry

1. Rona Dorsey
2. Tony Panzoni
3. Stephen Johnson Grove
4. Tecca Thompson

Custody and Visitation

1. Muqit Sabur
2. Aldonis Grimes

Child Support

1. Carrie Brown
2. Stephen Johnson Grove
3. Calvin Williams

All members of the subcommittees will seek assistance from other experts in their respective areas. Commissioner Jones requested that each subcommittee, by the full committee's next meeting, prepare a short report to be included in the final report to be presented to the Governor-elect. The recommendations of the ONPFF, the individual members of the Ohio Fatherhood Commission Strickland/Fisher Transition Agency Review Committee and its three subcommittees will comprise the final report to Governor-elect Strickand, which document Commissioner Jones will be responsible for assembling and submitting.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held January 3rd, 5th or 8th depending on schedules of the individual committee members.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Ohio Fatherhood Commission

Strickland/Fisher Transition Agency Review Committee Meeting

January 5, 2007

11:15 a.m. – 2:50 p.m.

MINUTES

Attendees: Peter Lawson Jones, Luis Vazquez, Aldonis C. Grimes, Stephen Johnson Grove (via telephone), Calvin L. Williams, James Whitfield, Carri Brown, Rona Dorsey, James McDonald, Anthony Panzino, Muqit Sabur, Michelle Robinson and Gary Norton.

Call to Order

Cuyahoga County Commissioner Peter Lawson Jones, Coordinator, called the meeting to order at 11:15 a.m. Each person present introduced himself/herself, providing name, title and affiliation.

Approval of the Minutes from the Meeting of December 18, 2006

A motion to approve the minutes from the meeting of December 18, 2006, was made by Muqit Sabur, seconded by Calvin Williams and passed unanimously by the body.

Report on the January 3rd Ohio Fatherhood Commission Agency Review Committee Briefing to Governor-elect Strickland

Commissioner Jones and committee members who attended the January 3rd briefing indicated that the session went extremely well. Attendees provided an oral overview of the OFC committee's priorities and recommendations, which included, among other things to be further refined in the committee's report to Governor-elect Strickland, a desired line item appropriation of $20 million in TANF funds annually for the OFC in the state budget, as opposed to funding the agency through independent legislation. The team reported that Strickland was engaged in the conversation, very interested in developing public policy around fatherhood issues and pleased to learn that the OFC still exists in state statute. Commissioner Jones also reiterated his opinion that the governor-elect is interested in adequately funding the commission.

Child Support Subcommittee Report

Carri Brown presented the child support subcommittee's ten (10) recommendations to the body. Of these, the following seven (7) were agreed to be the most significant:

- Help ensure the "right" child support order is established by updating the child support guidelines (including credit for parenting time), making the modification process as simple as possible, developing an agreed upon process for the imputation of income and considering realistic ability to pay.

- Increase the pass-through of child support to families receiving public assistance and disregard that income for the purposes of calculating eligibility for TANF benefits as permitted under the federal Deficit Reduction Act of 2005.

- Develop an intelligent arrears management system, relieving uncollectible debt owed to the state upon the obligor's participation in OPNFF-certified responsible fatherhood training programs and/or employment counseling. Hamilton County has a successful model in place.

- Draft legislation to deal more realistically with incarcerated obligors by adjusting support orders during incarceration based on their assets and ability to pay.

- Per the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections Omnibus Reentry legislative proposal, encourage the use of community alternative sanctions, in lieu of incarceration, for non-violent offenders, i.e., those sent to prison for non-payment of support.

- Establish closer linkages between child support agencies and job training/placement services, including co-location of services and, to some extent, cross-training of staff.

- Promote culture change involving the agency's name, mission and perspective to allow for a more productive response to low-income obligors who struggle to support their children.

Incarceration and Reentry Subcommittee Report

Mr. Panzino stated that the subcommittee's desire is to focus on minimizing the tendency of correctional institutions to "tally" the number of incarcerated teen fathers because most imprisoned youth, if not fathers already, will eventually father children and because most of them tend to exhibit socially deviant behavior toward both females and each other, which conduct must be addressed. Programming aimed at increasing appropriate treatment of others can help incarcerated youth develop caring relationships before they become parents. He provided the following recommendations:

- Identify a committed individual who would coordinate fatherhood initiatives at each ODRC and ODYS facility.

- Require a comprehensive discharge plan for young fathers, including employment training and assistance.

Rona Dorsey indicated that community culture often dictates that incarcerated fathers do not require the same supports and child interaction opportunities afforded to incarcerated mothers. As a result, she offered the following recommendations, which are contained in the Ohio Plan for Productive Offender Reentry:

- Provide fatherhood-related programming inside of prisons, especially for fathers of adolescent children. Strong consideration should be given to implementing the "Inside Out Dad Program," a curriculum designed to bridge the gap between an inmate and his children.

- Expand options for father-child interaction beyond sterile visitation room spaces. Examples include improved recreational facilities and enhanced tele-parenting opportunities via high speed, real-time video conferencing equipment.

- Increase opportunities for incarcerated parents to participate in their children's academic development and school issues via OFC's inclusion in the State Agency Offender Reentry Coalition.

Custody and Visitation Subcommittee Report

Al Grimes and Muqit Sabur provided several recommendations on child custody and visitation, the most significant of which, per committee discussion, are as follows:

- Recommend legislation to give unmarried fathers rights, comparable to the mother's rights, as soon as paternity is established. Extend the time period (currently 30 days) during which men can register with the State of Ohio if they believe they have fathered a child and want to acknowledge fatherhood.

- Provide the same access to benefits and assistance programs for fathers as that provided for mothers. This includes equal treatment and caseworker consistency irrespective of the parent's gender.

- Mandate cooperative parenting programs, which would outline unmarried parents' legal issues, responsibilities, children's needs and the importance of parental cooperation.

- Help to ensure the enforcement of court ordered parenting time. Courtrooms need to send the right message regarding compliance with court ordered visitation. The message must be clear and a mandatory outcome must be established.

- Custody and child support should be handled in the same time frame. Legislation doesn't allow the cases to be handled together but there should be a direct referral system and a one stop shop approach to dealing with Custody/Paternity/Support issues efficiently.

Brainstorming

Ms. Brown raised the issue of the cost of implementing the recommendations. Commissioner Jones replied that some of the recommendations are OFC specific, while other suggestions involve other agencies. As a result, the OFC should expect to fund its specific items and contribute only partial funding, if any, to recommendations directed at other state agencies and commissions.

James McDonald offered a document proposing changes to the statute governing the OFC. After discussion, the committee reached a consensus that the current law, as written, would not preclude the adoption of Mr. McDonald's recommendations; thus, his suggestions will be offered as refinements to the OFC's mission statement and/or actual operations, not to the enabling legislation itself.

Finally, Ms. Dorsey, Mr. Grimes and Mr. Sabur indicated that the OFC should engage the OPNFF or another agency to provide training and services to fatherhood practitioners and that, towards said end, approximately $200,000 of the OFC budget should be set aside each year. This will support small, grassroots organizations already involved in local fatherhood activities throughout the state.

Final Report

Commissioner Jones indicated that the committee's final report will include four subsections and will contain the five most significant recommendations from each subcommittee report. The final report's appendix will contain all subcommittee reports in their entirety.

Commissioner Jones will distribute a draft of the final report via e-mail on Monday, January 8th. Comments from committee members should be submitted by Tuesday, January 9th. The final report will be hand-delivered to Governor-elect Strickland's staff on Friday, January 12th.

Next Steps

Following submission of the final report, committee members may be asked to testify at budget hearings in Columbus during the spring. The committee will re-convene in March, after the governor's budget has been submitted to the legislature.

The meeting adjourned at 2:50 p.m.

Proposed Revision of Either the Statute Establishing the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood or of the Agency's Mission, Goals and Objectives

Rationale for changes:

1. With slight modifications, the original duties of the commission remain in tact.
2. Item "B" creates the opportunity to introduce the OPNFF Public Policy Agenda to the legislature.
3. It targets four areas that the commission would support at grass root levels.
4. Program evaluation is introduced.

Section 5101.342 revisions
The **OHIO COMMISSION ON FATHERHOOD** shall do the following:

A. Organize an annual state summit/training;

B. Review family-related public policy and submit recommendations that will enhance father-child relations;

C. Prepare a report each year that identifies best practice fatherhood-related programs and resources to fund them; and

D. Fund grass roots, city/county and statewide initiatives that:

   1. Increase **public awareness** of the critical role fathers play in the lives of their children and communities.

   2. Augment **father readiness** with programs that:
      i. prevent premature fatherhood;
      ii. improve employment prospects for low-income fathers;
      iii. educate about skills and behaviors conducive to successful parenting;
      iv. facilitate access a family suitable housing.

   3. Promote and enhance ongoing **father-child access**, particularly in programs that address:
      i. paternity
      ii. child birth
      iii. child support
      iv. custody
      v. visitation
      vi. incarceration and reentry,
      vii. and that help transform family service organization and schools into father-friendly environments.

4. Develop **relationship skills** of fathers to strengthen their capacity for employment, marriage, and co-parenting

E. Evaluate programs and services to which funds are awarded.