



Leading Minnesota's campaign for healthy fatherhood.

March 30, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

We, the Board of Directors and staff of the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network, are pleased to learn that you created the White House Council on Women and Girls. The Council marks another milestone of progress towards gender equality in America. We applaud this remarkable decision and anticipate the many successes that will benefit women and girls across this nation.

As a network of professionals, the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network supports efforts to strengthen families. That's why we believe in the importance of the various programs that have been created for women and girls over the last half century. These important programs and services deserve our continued support. Additionally, we believe that families are strengthened when fathers and mothers have equal opportunities to develop their capacity as responsible, engaged parents.

As advocates for fathers and families, we were happy to see that the Executive Order establishing the White House Council on Women and Girls states:

These issues do not concern just women. When jobs do not offer family leave, that affects men who wish to help care for their families. When women earn less than men for the same work, that affects families who have to work harder to make ends meet. When our daughters do not have the same educational and career opportunities as our sons, that affects entire communities, our economy, and our future as a Nation. (March 11, 2009)

We believe that the White House Council on Women and Girls will be most effective if it looks to **men as allies** for improved gender equity, to **fathers as resources** for early childhood development, to **boys and girls as companions** in the quest for a brighter, healthier future for children and families. In fact, we believe that increasing the level of healthy father involvement is a very effective way to help lift-up women and girls.

By viewing men as part of the solution, the Council of Women and Girls will be able to advance the work of the feminist movement and the pro-feminist men's movement. The Council will be able to examine our public policies and federal safety net programs that have been set up in a manner that creates unreasonable barriers for either gender.

We know that a healthy father-child relationship promotes benefits for children such as increased cognitive competence, decreased juvenile delinquency, and lower rates of teen pregnancy. At the same time, healthy father involvement increases health benefits for themselves and mothers, creates wider opportunities for mothers, lends greater support to schools and civic activities, and promotes safer communities.

As you know, fathers face numerous challenges to stay involved with their children. This is particularly true for those fathers who do not live with their children and especially for those who are poor. Boys and men face significant hurdles (some of our own making) that



inhibit healthy father-involvement and family success. These include:

- Men comprise approximately 93 percent of all individuals under the jurisdiction of state or federal prison authorities (2006, Bureau of Justice);
- Males graduate from high school at a rate 8 percent lower than female students (2004, Urban Institute);
- Men comprise 42 percent of college enrollees – trailing women’s enrollment in associate, bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral programs (2006, Department of Education);
- College graduation rates are 60 percent for women and 54 percent for men (2004, U.S. Department of Education);
- Boys comprise 80 percent of students labeled emotionally disturbed, 70 percent of those labeled learning disabled, and 60 percent of those labeled developmentally disabled (2006, National Association of Special Education Teachers);
- Employment forecasts predict that 2009 will mark the first year in U.S. history that women will outnumber men in the workforce, creating a new challenge and opportunity for millions of men who may become their children’s primary caretaker (2009, American Society for Training and Development);
- Various federal programs, such as WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) and child support, are meant to help parents (regardless of their gender) raise healthy families – but the programs’ names or enrollment policies inhibit father engagement.

We recognize your tremendous support of fatherhood issues. We thank you for sponsoring the Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act and for making improved father involvement an important priority in your administration. We know you “get it” when it comes to healthy fatherhood, which is why we call upon you now to consider how the Council on Women and Girls and the rest of your administration can utilize men and boys as part of the formula for success.

We encourage the White House Council on Women and Girls, and all other Executive agencies, to understand the broad, complex and often subtle issues of gender as they go about their work. We know that the well-being of women is tied to the well-being of men, and that girls are better off when boys are healthier. Indeed, it is true in this situation that a *rising tide raises all boats*.

In the 21st Century, the American family and workplace are more gender-balanced than at any time in the past. In Minnesota, single father households with children are growing faster than any other family form with children. Never-married parents, who are often in romantic relationships, are giving birth to over one-third of American children. Women will soon outnumber men in the workplace. The gender distinctions in our homes and jobs are changing. We challenge your administration to meet these changes head-on and to address the full complexity of gender in America.

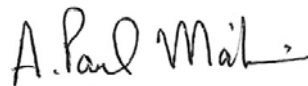
In these difficult times, America must rely fully on every woman, every man, and every child to live to his or her full potential. We believe that the Council on Women and Girls can be a first-step toward seeing gender as a means to improve the lives of all women, girls, men, and boys across America.

Thank you for your consideration.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and Staff of the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network,



Joe Kelly
President, Board of Directors



A. Paul Masiarchin
Executive Director