



2009 Public Policy Agenda www.mnfathers.org

The **Minnesota Fathers & Families Network** enhances healthy father-child relationships by promoting initiatives that inform public policy and further develop the field of fatherhood practitioners statewide.

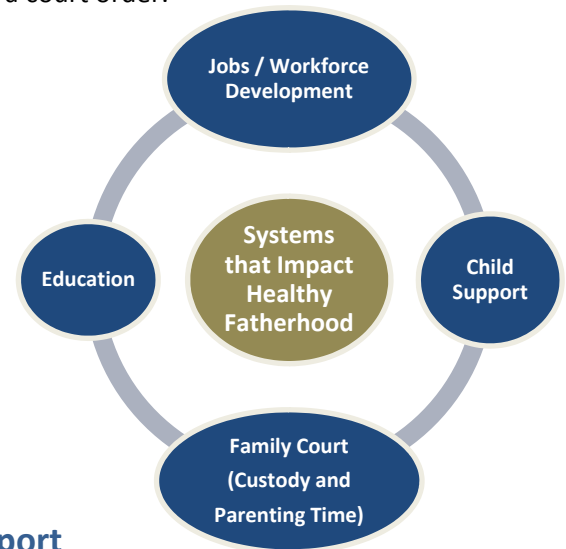
Paternity: Improve the paternity establishment system in Minnesota.

Rationale: Currently 1/3 of children in Minnesota are born to unmarried parents, up from 13 percent in 1983. Establishing paternity for children born to unmarried parents affects many aspects of a family's life such as child support, child custody, parenting time, and government benefits. Unfortunately, many later disputes that arise between parents result from a lack of accurate knowledge at the time they establish paternity. Many parents do not realize that the Recognition of Parentage does not provide child custody or parenting time rights, and they do not know the alternatives to signing this document. Additionally, many birth records are not being updated to reflect the father's information after paternity has been established via a court order.

Policy Initiative #1: Work with the Department of Human Services to ensure that parents are accurately informed of the two paternity establishment options and their different effects. *(Lead)*

Policy Initiative #2: Work with counties, courts, and other stakeholders to ensure that birth records are updated after paternity establishment to reflect the legal father. *(Lead)*

Policy Initiative #3: Explore how other jurisdictions provide opportunities for unmarried fathers to establish parenting rights with their children, through paternity establishment or other policies. *(Research and Inform)*



Child Support: Implement policies that allow child support agencies to respond quickly, efficiently, and flexibly to changes in family situations.

Rationale: Navigating the child support system is difficult and costly, especially for low-income parents. Research shows that setting the appropriate amount of support and keeping it right is important for low-income fathers to maintain financial and emotional involvement in their children's lives. Because retroactive modification of support orders is prohibited, changing orders quickly is key to the financial viability and stability of low-income families. Changes can often be done faster and more efficiently through the child support agency than by requiring one of the parents to seek a new court order, saving everyone involved time and money.

Policy Initiative #4: Identify and promote better resolutions of, and alternatives to, driver's license suspensions for parents who are unemployed, in treatment, or otherwise unable to pay the full amount of child support. *(Research/Lead)*

Policy Initiative #5: Identify and promote administrative resolutions for common and easily verifiable changes in family situations that require or qualify for changes to the support order, such as changes in public assistance, incarceration status, change in child's residence, or parent's income. *(Lead/Support)*

Education: Increase father involvement in early education, and support adolescent education on parenting and paternity awareness.

Rationale: When fathers are involved in their children’s schools, children learn more, perform better in school, and exhibit healthier behavior. Children with involved fathers are less likely to repeat a grade or to be suspended and are more likely to increase academic achievement and extracurricular participation. Likewise, when children learn about parenting before they graduate from high school, they are better prepared to understand the responsibilities of parenting and characteristics of healthy relationships.

Policy Initiative #6: Identify and eliminate legal/policy barriers to father involvement in schools. *(Research/Lead)*

Policy Initiative #7: Seek funding for adolescent education on parenting and paternity awareness. *(Support)*

Workforce Development: Increase job training and career programs for ex-offenders and noncustodial parents.

Rationale: The financial support of both parents, whether living together or not, is needed to lift most poor families out of poverty. Low-income noncustodial fathers face many of the same barriers to employment that affect low-income women, but often do not qualify for the same services. Many have additional barriers to employment because of criminal records. Parents need access to more programs that combine work and training to increase earnings.

Policy Initiative #8: Increase opportunities for noncustodial parents to access training programs, paid work experience, and other tangible assistance for those hardest to employ. *(Support)*

Policy Initiative #9: Make it easier for ex-offenders to obtain work through legislative and policy changes. *(Support)*

Services for Fathers: Increase services to low-income fathers and noncustodial parents to improve their financial and emotional involvement with children.

Rationale: Fathers’ financial and emotional involvement with children is especially needed in low-income families. A lack of long-term sustainable funding inhibits programs from meeting the needs. Funding is needed to provide a broader array of services including mental health, family law, child access, and assistance with co-parenting, and to provide services for fathers in many rural areas of Minnesota.

Policy Initiative #10: Appropriate state funds to provide services for low-income fathers and noncustodial parents in order to: (1) overcome barriers to employment or education, (2) access health and mental health services, and (3) access family law, child access, or co-parenting services. *(Support)*

Policy Initiative #11: Pass the federal **Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2007**. *(Support)* See our policy link at www.mnfathers.org for more information.

Policy Initiative #12: Increase federal funding for **Access and Visitation** grants to help noncustodial parents resolve access and parenting time issues. *(Support)* See our policy link at www.mnfathers.org for more information.

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