

Why a fatherhood commission?

Because it is a vehicle to address multiple fatherhood goals that can be sustained year to year, and there is a good model (Ohio) from which to base a commission in Minnesota. Their brochure states their purpose is to: fund programs, develop policy recommendations, engage the community and train professionals. (The website also provides brochures and links for fathers, for example, tips for fathers in prison, 100 free things to do with your child, find a fatherhood program near you, etc.)

If you look at the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood, it funds fatherhood programs (\$1 million a year, across the state), it brings together state agencies to review their policies, practices and programs to become more father friendly, it engages the community to address fatherhood through their Ohio County Fatherhood Initiatives (requiring certain agencies be made a part of the work, like child support and child protection), and trains professionals (subcontracted to OPNFF) through conferences and other training events. The commission has an active role in reviewing legislation pending in Ohio for its affect on fathers (positive or negative). Ohio's commission is statutorily created and has broad bi-partisan support.

<http://fatherhood.ohio.gov/>

The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood is a state-wide commission whose **mission** is to enhance the well-being of Ohio's children by providing opportunities for fathers to become better parents, partners and providers.

Commissioners are appointed according to statute and represent all sectors of the community. Commissioners include directors of state agencies, the Governor's designee, bi-partisan members of the Ohio House and Senate and citizens chosen by the Governor because of their extensive involvement in fatherhood issues. Commission meetings are held five times a year and are open to the public. The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood is part of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and seeks to strengthen vulnerable Ohio families by funding community based programs that serve low-income fathers.

Many of the fathers served by OCF-funded programs were raised in father-absent homes and therefore lack experience in what it means to be a committed, involved and responsible father. These fatherhood programs help fathers and families:

1. **improve economic stability** when they help fathers prepare for, find and retain employment;
2. **foster responsible parenting** through skills-based classes and individualized mentoring; and
3. **promote healthy relationships** through conflict resolution and communications skills training.

In addition to funding fatherhood programs, the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood makes policy recommendations regarding fathers, engages the community and trains practitioners. This framework allows the Commission to strategically promote father engagement on all levels.

[Click here](#) to download a brochure about the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood.

Some policy accomplishments from Ohio include:

- Child support: changes to (1) license suspension and reinstatement laws to provide more consistency across the state in the use of this tool and allowing a mechanism for obligors to request that the suspension be removed from their record after it has been reinstated (subject to specific criteria); (2) enactment of a “waiver and compromise” program for arrears owed to the state; (3) sentencing reforms for felony non-support offenders (On Ohio’s website under Resources, Policy makers, Ohio laws)
- Changes in collateral sanctions laws that make it easier for former offenders to find employment and get a fresh start, such as a Certificate of Qualification of Employment (CQE) that makes it easier for someone on probation to get a job by specifying that an employer hiring someone with a CQE will not be subject to negligent hiring lawsuit; makes some changes to child support imputation of income after someone has been in jail or convicted (i.e. would not assume the person can make the same amount of money after prison as before), etc. (also under Ohio laws)
- The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood serves on the Maternal Care Committee of the Task Force on Infant Mortality and made recommendations to the committee (under Policy)

The Commission also works on pilot programs.

(1) Strengthening Fatherhood Program

The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood would like to see an emphasis on non-custodial fathers who have children in foster care or within care of children services. Therefore, the Commission has partnered with Urban Light Ministries to expand their father-strengthening fatherhood services from Clark County Children Services to Montgomery County Children Services. Working with this unique population makes this pilot project exceptional in many ways; and a successful project will allow Ohio to expand this model to other counties and assist with providing stability for children in their own homes.

After the completion of this pilot project we hope to see the following outcomes:

- Fathers complete a family engagement plan and establish stability for ongoing consistent visitation.
- Children in foster care be reunited with their biological fathers
- Fathers granted full custody or shared custody
- Children spend quality time with their fathers
- Children spending less time in foster care or in care of children services

Fathers and children in the pilot will conduct activities together and share a family meal;

followed by the fathers completing fatherhood classes similar to the Clark County program. Urban Light Ministries staff is working directly with Montgomery County Children Services staff (case managers) to receive referrals in addition to developing and implementing family engagement plans for each father to work toward receiving custody or consistent visitation, etc. A Family Engagement Plan is a plan designed to facilitate the relationship between a father and his children, the current foster parents and the mother. The plan will be tailored to each father and the specific circumstances surrounding their children. The Family engagement plan will, at a minimum:

- Outline a visitation schedule
- Establish two-way communication with foster parent and child (phone call, text, e-mail, public location)
- Establish a method to communicate and be involved with the school
- Provide steps toward obtaining shared or full time custody (particularly in cases of permanent removal)
- Establish a timeline for each step

During the 14 weeks fathers are working through their family engagement plans with the children services case manager, Urban Light Ministries staff and additional partners. Additionally, a relationship educator is helping to open the lines of communication among the father, the mother of the father's child/ren and the child/ren, and work with the parents on the dynamics of co-parenting.

(2) Parenting Time Opportunities for Children (PTOC12)

The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood is partnering with Fairfield County Child Support Agency (CSEA) and 11 other county CSEAs and state partners as part of a federal grant to increase parenting time opportunities for children in 12 pilot counties, hence the name PTOC 12. [Click here](#) to see a chart of the grant partners.

The purpose of the program is to increase safe parenting time opportunities for children by establishing parenting time orders at the same time as child support orders. The objective is to establish 2,000 orders over the four year period. If 40 months of services occur, this is an average of 50 orders per month.

Fairfield CSEA will lead a coalition of agency directors, members of the judiciary, domestic violence subject matter experts, access/visitation providers, professionals with a statewide perspective and other stakeholders. The mission of the coalition is to increase parenting time opportunities for children in Ohio. The coalition recognizes the critical importance of safe environments for children and families and also recognizes the need to open up multiple paths of coordination among administrative agencies and the judiciary in a complex structure of government. While the grant will immediately allow for establishment of more than 600 parenting time orders annually (when there is agreement among parents and no indication of family violence) with agencies who are connecting with the judiciary and immediately filing all child support orders upon establishment, there is much more work to be done.

During the planning phase, the coalition will determine the specific steps to take, including process changes and any necessary statutory authority, for establishment of parenting time orders at the same time as initial child support orders in all county structures in Ohio.

Ohio has a judicial process for the establishment of parenting time orders. Child Support orders are established administratively and/or judicially. The initial proposed process for establishing parenting time orders at the same time as child support orders is to use a judicial process facilitated by the administrative agency.

Cases involving initial disagreement will not be eligible for the administrative agency to facilitate the judicial establishment of a parenting time order. However, the coalition will be establishing a website that provides information about resources available for parents who are seeking mediation or other resources relating to parenting time, of which at least some options are available with the Access Visitation program. There are additional resources available throughout the state, and the coalition will organize a central source for information and referral. The plan is to organize community resources with a common goal of safe parenting time for children.

We are working on communications and building strong partners within the local bar and judiciary. The project proposal came with strong letters of support from a variety of stakeholders, including the judiciary.

The administrative agency staff and hearing officers are respected and trained. The project component addressing a domestic violence protocol adds credibility, especially at time when additional attention is placed on establishing parenting time orders.

There is no restriction for eligibility in the program, based on income or any other variable, except that the order for child support and parenting time are new orders.

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