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Fatherhood Initiatives: Connecting Fathers to Their Children

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Summary

In 2003, 24% of families with children were maintained by mothers. According to some estimates, 60% of children born during the 1990s will spend a significant portion of their childhood in a home without their father. Research indicates that children raised in single-parent families are more likely than children raised in two-parent families (with both biological parents) to do poorly in school, have emotional and behavioral problems, become teenage parents, and have poverty-level incomes. In hopes of improving the long-term outlook for children in single-parent families, federal, state, and local governments, along with public and private organizations, are supporting programs and activities that promote the financial and personal responsibility of noncustodial fathers to their children and increase the participation of fathers in the lives of their children. These programs have come to be known as “responsible fatherhood” programs.

Sources of federal funding for fatherhood programs include the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, TANF state Maintenance-of-Effort (MOE) funding, welfare-to-work funds, Child Support Enforcement (CSE) funds, and Social Services Block Grant (Title XX) funds.

Beginning with the 106th Congress, the House but not the Senate passed bills containing responsible fatherhood initiatives (in the 107th and 108th Congresses as part of welfare reauthorization bills). Moreover, from the start President Bush has been a supporter of responsible fatherhood programs; each of his budgets has included funding for such programs. In the 109th Congress, several welfare reauthorization bills that provide funding for responsible fatherhood grant programs have been introduced.

Most fatherhood programs include media campaigns that emphasize the importance of emotional, physical, psychological, and financial connections of fathers to their children. Most fatherhood programs include parenting education; responsible decision-making; mediation services for both parents; providing an understanding of the CSE program; conflict resolution, coping with stress, and problem-solving skills; peer support; and job-training opportunities (skills development, interviewing skills, job search, job-retention skills, job-advancement skills, etc.). To help fathers and mothers meet their parental responsibilities, many policy analysts and observers support broad-based collaborative strategies that go beyond welfare and child support agencies and include schools, work programs, prison systems, churches, community organizations, and the health care system.

The federal government’s support of fatherhood initiatives raises a wide array of issues. This report briefly examines the role of the CSE agency in fatherhood programs, discusses initiatives to promote and support father-child interaction outside the framework of the father-mother relationship, and summarizes the debate over whether fatherhood programs should include the “promotion of marriage.”

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Fatherhood Initiatives: Connecting Fathers to Their Children

Introduction

In 2003, 30% of families with children were maintained by one parent; this figure is up from 11% in 1970. Most of the children in these single-parent families were being raised by their mothers.¹ According to some estimates, 60% of children born during the 1990s will spend a significant portion of their childhood in a home without their biological father. Research indicates that children raised in single-parent families are more likely than children raised in two-parent families (with both biological parents) to do poorly in school, have emotional and behavioral problems, become teenage parents, and have poverty-level incomes as adults.² Nonetheless, it is widely acknowledged that most of these mothers, despite the added stress of being a single parent, do a good job raising their children. That is, although children with absent fathers are at greater risk of having the aforementioned problems, most do not experience them. In hopes of improving the long-term outlook for children in single-parent families, federal, state, and local governments along with public and private organizations are supporting programs and activities that promote the financial and personal responsibility of noncustodial fathers to their children and reduce the incidence of father absence in the lives of children.

The third finding of the 1996 welfare reform law (P.L. 104-193) states: “Promotion of responsible fatherhood and motherhood is integral to successful child rearing and the well-being of children.” Moreover, three of the four goals of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program are consistent with the components of most fatherhood programs. The three fatherhood-related goals are: ending welfare dependence by employment and marriage; reducing out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. Thus, states may spend TANF and TANF state Maintenance of Effort (MOE) funds on fatherhood programs. Further, any services that are directed to the goal of reducing nonmarital births or the goal of encouraging two-parent families are free of income eligibility rules.

¹ Jason Fields and Lynne M. Casper, *America’s Families and Living Arrangements: 2000*, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, P20-537 (June 2001), pp. 5-7.

² Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up With a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), see also L. Bumpass, “Children and Marital Disruption: A Replication and Update,” *Demography*, vol. 21(1984), pp. 71-82; Rebecca A. Maynard, ed., *Kids Having Kids: A Robin Hood Foundation Special Report on the Costs of Adolescent Childbearing* (New York, 1996).

With the exception of the federal Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program, fathers historically have been ignored with regard to their input or participation in welfare programs. Moreover, it was not until 1996 that Congress broadened its view to acknowledge the non-economic contributions that fathers make to their children by authorizing the use of CSE funds to promote access and visitation programs. With the enactment of the 1996 welfare reform law, which helped reduce the welfare rolls, increase the employment of low-income mothers, and strengthen the CSE program, Congress began focusing its attention on the emotional well-being of children. Historically, Congress had treated visitation and child support as legally separate issues, with only child support enforcement activities under the purview of the federal government. The 1996 law authorized an annual \$10 million entitlement of CSE funds to states to establish and operate access and visitation programs.³

It appears that a consensus has occurred regarding the need to connect or reconnect noncustodial parents to their children. During the 106th Congress, Representative Nancy Johnson, then chair of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources, stated: “To take the next step in welfare reform we must find a way to help children by providing them

While fathers must fulfill their financial commitments, they must also fulfill their emotional commitments. Dads play indispensable roles that cannot be measured in dollars and cents: nurturer, mentor, disciplinarian, moral instructor, and skills coach, among other roles.

Source: Executive Office of the President, *A Blueprint for New Beginnings — A Responsible Budget for America’s Priorities* (Feb. 2001), chap. 12, p. 75.

with more than a working mother and sporadic child support.” She noted that many low-income fathers have problems similar to those of mothers on welfare — namely, they are likely to have dropped out of high school, to have little work experience, and to have significant barriers that lessen their ability to find and/or keep a job. She also asserted that in many cases these men are “dead broke” rather than “dead beats” and that the federal government should help these noncustodial fathers meet both their financial and emotional obligations to their children.

During the 106th, 107th, and 108th Congresses, legislation was passed by the House but not by the Senate that would have established categorical competitive grants to community and faith-based organizations for responsible fatherhood programs. Although a responsible fatherhood program has not yet been enacted, each

³ The child access and visitation program (Section 391 of P.L. 104-193) funded the following activities in FY2003: mediation, counseling, parental education, development of parenting plans, visitation enforcement, monitored visitation, neutral drop off and pickup, supervised visitation, and development of guidelines for visitation and custody. In FY2003, about 69,500 individuals received services. Most common services: supervised visitation, parenting education, and mediation. Most states used a mix of services. Most of the service providers were Human Service Agencies. Individuals were referred to services by the courts, CSE or welfare agencies, and others, as well as by self-referral. Services were both mandatory and voluntary, as determined by the state. Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement, *State Child Access and Visitation Grants: State Profiles (FY2003)* (Washington, July 2004).

of President Bush's budgets included grant programs for responsible fatherhood programs to help reconnect noncustodial parents to their children by providing job-related services to them and by improving their parenting and social interaction skills. During the period from 2002-2004, the responsible fatherhood bills that were passed by the House were part of welfare reauthorization legislation. As expected, the 109th Congress has introduced several welfare reauthorization bills that include funding for responsible fatherhood grant programs. (For a more detailed legislative history or recent fatherhood initiatives, see the discussion of Legislative Action, beginning on page 15 of this report.)

What Are Fatherhood Initiatives?

The realization that one parent, especially a low-income parent, often can't meet the financial needs of her or his children is not new. In 1975, Congress viewed the CSE program as a way to make noncustodial parents responsible for the financial support of their children. In more recent years, Congress has viewed the CSE program as the link that could enable single parents who are low-wage earners to become self-supporting. With the advent of welfare reform in 1996, Congress agreed that many noncustodial parents were in the same financial straits as the mothers of their children who were receiving cash welfare. Thus, the 1996 welfare reform law (P.L. 104-193) requires states to have laws under which the state has the authority to issue an order or request that a court or administrative process issue an order that requires noncustodial parents who were unable to pay their child support obligation for a child receiving TANF benefits to participate in TANF work activities. As noted earlier, the 1996 law also provided funding for states to develop programs that supported the noncustodial parent's right and responsibility to visit and interact with his or her children.

To help fathers and mothers meet their parental responsibilities, many policy analysts and observers support broad-based collaborative strategies that go beyond welfare and child support agencies and include schools, work programs, prison systems, churches, community organizations, and the health care system.

Although Congress has not authorized federal funding specifically earmarked for responsible fatherhood programs, many states and localities, private organizations and nonprofit agencies operate fatherhood programs.⁴ Most fatherhood programs include media campaigns that emphasize the importance of emotional, physical, psychological, and financial connections of fathers to their children. To counterbalance some of the procedural, psychological, emotional, and physical barriers to paternal involvement, most fatherhood programs include many of the following components:

- Parenting education — a course that describes the responsibilities of parents to their children; it discusses the need for affection, gentle guidance, financial support; the need to be a proud example and

⁴ National Governors Association, *Promoting Responsible Fatherhood: An Update* (Washington, Aug. 3, 1998).

- respectful of the child's mother; and the need to recognize developmentally appropriate behavior for children of different ages and respond appropriately to children's developmental needs;
- responsible decision-making (with regard to sexuality, establishment of paternity, and financial support);
 - mentoring relationships with successful fathers and successful couples;
 - mediation services (communicating with the other parent, supervised visitation, discipline of children, etc.);
 - providing an understanding of the CSE program;
 - conflict resolution, coping with stress, problem-solving skills;
 - developing values in children, appropriate discipline, participation in child-rearing;
 - understanding male-female relationships;
 - peer support;
 - practical tasks to stimulate involvement — discussing ways to increase parent-child interactions such as fixing dinner for children, taking children to the park, playing a game, helping children with school work, listening to children's concerns, setting firm limits on behavior; and
 - job training opportunities (skills development, interviewing skills, job search, job retention skills, job advancement skills, etc.).

Although most people refer to programs that seek to help fathers initiate or maintain contact with their children and become emotionally involved in their lives as “fatherhood” programs, the programs generally are gender-neutral. Their underlying goal is participation of the noncustodial parent in the lives of his or her children.

Funding

For FY2001, Congress appropriated \$3 million for a nongovernmental national fatherhood organization named the National Fatherhood Initiative (P.L. 106-553), and an additional \$500,000 for the National Fatherhood Initiative and \$500,000 for another non-governmental organization called the Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization (P.L. 106-554). However, the House and Senate failed to reach agreement on H.R. 4678 in the 106th Congress, a bill that included funding for a nationwide fatherhood grants program (\$140 million over four years). Similarly, during the 107th and 108th Congress the House and the Senate did not reach agreement on legislation that included a responsible fatherhood grant program.

Nevertheless, several sources of federal funding for fatherhood programs already exist. They include the TANF program, TANF state Maintenance-of-Effort (MOE) funding, welfare-to-work funds, CSE funds, and Social Services Block Grant (Title XX) funds.⁵ According to HHS, about half of all states use TANF funds for

⁵ “Funding Sources for Fatherhood Programs,” *Welfare Information Network*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Jan. 2001).

responsible fatherhood programs.⁶ In addition, many private foundations are providing financial support for fatherhood programs.

As mentioned earlier, states can use TANF block grant funds and state MOE funds on programs or services that accomplish the broad purposes of the TANF program. These sources of funding are potentially the largest sources of funding for fatherhood initiatives.⁷ To review, P.L.104-193 created the TANF block grant program which provided grants (approximately \$16.5 billion annually) to states through FY2002 to meet the broad purposes of the program. The TANF program also has a MOE requirement that states continue to spend at least 75% (80% if they fail to meet TANF work requirements) of what they spent under prior law cash welfare-related programs in FY1994 on families that meet TANF eligibility requirements. The 75% MOE is about \$10.4 billion.

The cash welfare caseload declined from a peak of 5.0 million Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) families in FY1995 to 2.2 million TANF families in FY2003. The nearly 60% reduction in the cash welfare caseload together with the fixed block grant funding means that funds which otherwise would have been spent for cash assistance are now available for other purposes. These other purposes could include fatherhood initiatives, which are allowable uses of TANF and state MOE funds. Moreover, fatherhood initiatives are not subject to the requirements that apply to spending for ongoing cash assistance such as work requirements and time limits.⁸

Research and Evaluation

Research findings indicate that father absence affects outcomes for children, in terms of schooling, emotional and behavioral maturity, labor force participation, and nonmarital childbearing. These findings hold when income is taken into account, so the negative effects of father absence are not limited to those created by reduced family income.⁹

Both advocates and critics of the CSE program agree that parents should be responsible for the economic and emotional well-being of their children. They agree that many low-income noncustodial parents are unable to meet their financial

⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *HHS Fact Sheet: Promoting Responsible Fatherhood* (Washington, Apr. 26, 2002).

⁷ In addition to long-term welfare recipients, the \$2.7 billion in welfare-to-work funds appropriated for FY1998 and FY1999 could have been used to provide services for certain noncustodial parents who were unemployed, underemployed, or having difficulty making their child support payments. States and localities were allowed to continue to spend their welfare-to-work funds through FY2004.

⁸ Dana Reichert, *Broke but Not Deadbeat: Reconnecting Low-Income Fathers and Children* (Washington, National Conference of State Legislatures, July 1999).

⁹ *Meeting the Challenge: What the Federal Government Can Do to Support Responsible Fatherhood Efforts — A Report to the President [...]* (Washington, Jan. 2001), [<http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/guidance01>].

responsibility to their children and are barely able, or unable, to support themselves. They also agree that some noncustodial parents do not know how to be responsible parents because they were not taught that knowledge or were not exposed to enough positive role models that they could emulate. Below are several examples of demonstration programs that seek to, or sought to, help low-income men become responsible fathers by helping them to gain employment or job mobility and by teaching them life skills so that they might reconnect with their children in a positive sustained manner.

MDRC Parents' Fair Share Demonstration Project

The Parents' Fair Share (PFS) Demonstration was a national demonstration project that combined job training and placement, peer support groups, and other services with the goal of increasing the earnings and child support payments of unemployed noncustodial parents (generally fathers) of children on welfare, improving their parenting and communication skills, and providing an opportunity for them to participate more fully and effectively in the lives of their children.¹⁰

Between 1994 and 1996, over 5,000 noncustodial parents who were eligible to participate in the seven-site PFS demonstration were randomly assigned to either a program (experiment) group that would receive PFS services or a control group that would not receive PFS services. The interim report on the PFS demonstration, which was designed by MDRC and conducted and funded by public and private organizations, found that parents who received PFS services were more likely to pay child support through the CSE system than those who remained in the control group. In all seven sites, the proportion of parents who paid child support during the 18-month follow-up period increased significantly; but the amount of child support paid over the 18 months increased by a statistically significant amount in only two of the seven sites.

The final report on the PFS demonstration concluded that the program did not significantly increase employment or earnings among the full sample of PFS participants during the two years after they entered the program. However, the program did increase earnings among a subgroup of men who were characterized as "less employable" (i.e., those without a high school diploma and with little recent work experience).¹¹ In addition, another of the final reports found that although PFS did not affect the frequency of fathers' visits with their children, it did increase the level of disagreement between parents about child-rearing. According to the researchers, this finding might suggest that some noncustodial parents were

¹⁰ The Parents' Fair Share (PFS) demonstration was funded by a consortium of private foundations (the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Ford Foundation, the AT&T Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, and the Northwest Area Foundation) and federal agencies (the U.S. Department of Human Services and the U.S. Department of Labor). The PFS demonstration was conducted in seven cities: Dayton, Ohio; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Jacksonville, Florida; Los Angeles, California; Memphis, Tennessee; Springfield, Massachusetts; and Trenton, New Jersey.

¹¹ John M. Martinez and Cynthia Miller, *Working and Earning: The Impact of Parents' Fair Share on Low-Income Fathers' Employment* (New York: MDRC, Oct. 2000).

becoming more involved in new areas of decision-making about the child, which the researchers viewed as a positive development. The report noted that the increased level of disagreements between the parents was not accompanied by an increased level of aggressive forms of conflict or domestic violence which researchers surmise might indicate that the parents were able to distinguish between legitimate parental differences of opinion versus latent animosity in their male-female relationship.¹²

One of the reports noted the following as lessons learned from the PFS demonstration.

Low-income noncustodial fathers are a disadvantaged group. Many live on the edge of poverty and face severe barriers to finding jobs, while those who can find work typically hold low-wage or temporary jobs. Despite their low, irregular income, many of these fathers are quite involved in their children's lives and, when they can, provide financial and other kinds of support.... Some services, such as peer support proved to be very important and valuable to the men and became the focal point of the program. Other services, such as skill-building, were hard to implement because the providers had little experience working with such a disadvantaged group; it was difficult to find employers willing to hire the men, and the providers were not equipped to deal with the circumstances of men who often were simply trying to make it from one day to the next. Finally, we learned about the challenges of implementing a program like PFS, which involves the partnership of various agencies with different goals, and about the difficulty of recruiting low-income fathers into such a program.¹³

Some of the recommendations for future programs included structure the program to encourage longer-term participation and to include job retention services; provide fathers who cannot find private sector employment with community service jobs; earmark adequate funding for employment services, involve custodial mothers in the program and provide fathers with legal services to help them gain visitation rights; and encourage partnerships between CSE agencies and fatherhood programs.¹⁴

Some researchers of the PFS approach contend that a broader array of intensive employment services, such as skills training combined with part-time work and community service employment for persons who were unable to get job, might have improved the outcomes of the program. Other analysts maintain that most of the fathers who participated in the PFS demonstration were estranged from their children when they entered the program and that some of them participated in lieu of serving time in jail. They assert that new unwed fathers are generally very attached to their children around the time of the child's birth and probably are more motivated than

¹² Virginia Knox and Cindy Redcross, *Parenting and Providing: The Impact of Parents' Fair Share on Paternal Involvement* (New York: MDRC, Oct. 2000).

¹³ Cynthia Miller and Virginia Knox, *The Challenge of Helping Low-Income Fathers Support Their Children: Final Lessons from Parents' Fair Share* (New York: MDRC, Nov. 2001), pp. v-vi.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. v.

fathers of older children to take advantage of the opportunities and/or services offered by fatherhood programs.¹⁵

Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study

A “fragile” family consists of low-income children born outside of marriage whose two natural parents are working together to raise them — either by living together or frequent visitation. According to the 1997 National Survey of America’s Families (NSAF), 25% of poor children under the age of two who were born outside of marriage lived with both of their biological parents; another 35% lived with their mother and saw their father at least every week.¹⁶

The Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study is designed to sample new births in 20 U.S. cities.¹⁷ The study began in January 1997 and was scheduled to end in June 2004. The total sample size is 4,700 families, including 3,600 unmarried couples and 1,100 married couples. The data will be representative of nonmarital births in each of the 20 cities, and they also will be representative of all nonmarital births in U.S. cities with populations over 200,000. Follow-up interviews with both parents are scheduled for when the child is 12, 36, and 60 months-old to collect data on the child’s health and development. The study is expected to provide previously unavailable information on questions such as:

- What are the conditions and capabilities of new unwed parents, especially fathers? How many of these men hold steady jobs? How many want to be involved in raising their children?
- What is the nature of the relationship between unwed parents? How many couples are involved in stable, long-term relationships? How many expect to marry? How many experience high levels of conflict or domestic violence?

¹⁵ Sara McLanahan *Testimony before the Mayor’s Task Force on Fatherhood Promotion*, National Fatherhood Summit, Washington, D.C., June 14, 1999.

¹⁶ Elaine Sorensen, Ronald Mincy, and Ariel Halpern, *Redirecting Welfare Policy Toward Building Strong Families* (Washington: Urban Institute, March 2000).

¹⁷ The Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study is supported by grants from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and the Office of Population Research at Princeton University and by funding provided by: California Health Care Foundation, the Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society at the University of Pennsylvania, Commonwealth Fund, Ford Foundation, Foundation for Child Development, Fund for New Jersey, William T. Grant Foundation, Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Hogg Foundation, Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation, Kronkosky Charitable Foundation, Leon Lowenstein Foundation, John D., and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, A.L. Mailman Family Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, National Science Foundation, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Public Policy Institute of California, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, St. David’s Hospital Foundation, St. Vincent Hospital and Health Services, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

- What factors push new unwed parents together? What factors pull them apart? How do public policies affect parents' behaviors and living arrangements?
- What are the long term consequences for parents, children, and society of new welfare regulations, stronger paternity establishment, and stricter child support enforcement? What roles do child care and health care policies play? How do these policies play out in different labor market environments?¹⁸

Initial analysis of the baseline data collected in 16 of the 20 cities from April 1998 through August 2000 indicate that 51% of unmarried parents live together (i.e., are cohabiting), and another 31% are romantically involved with each other. Further, 74% of the participant mothers said that they expect to marry the baby's father. The data also indicate that 30% of fathers had earnings of less than \$10,500 per year, and 62% of mothers had earnings of less than \$10,000 per year; about 43% of the mothers and 38% of the fathers lacked a high school degree. Although the data indicated that 85% of mothers and 98% of fathers worked at some point during the past year, 20% of fathers said that they were out of work during the week before the interview. The initial analysis also showed that 39% of the mothers drank alcohol, used drugs, or smoked during their pregnancies.¹⁹

Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) Responsible Fatherhood Programs

The federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) provided \$2.0 million to fund Responsible Fatherhood demonstrations under Section 1115 of the Social Security Act. The programs operated in eight states between September 1997 and December 2002. The following eight states received Section 1115 grants or waivers from OCSE/Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to implement and test responsible fatherhood programs: California, Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, Washington, and Wisconsin. These projects attempted to improve the employment and earnings of under- and unemployed noncustodial parents, and to motivate them to become more financially and emotionally involved in the lives of their children. Although the projects shared common goals, they varied with respect to service components and service delivery. OCSE also provided about \$500,000 for an evaluation of the demonstration projects. A report on the implementation of the programs (from initial start-up in late 1997 through December 1999) noted the following:

The success of the Responsible Fatherhood Demonstration Projects appears to be tied to the commitment of the staff. Reaching alienated and disenfranchised

¹⁸ Irwin Garfinkel and Sara McLanahan, "Fragile Families and Child Well-Being: A Survey of New Parents," *Focus* (University of Wisconsin-Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty), vol. 21, no. 1 (spring 2000), pp. 9-11.

¹⁹ Sara McLanahan, Irwin Garfinkel, Nancy E. Reichman, Julien Teitler, Marcia Carlson, and Christina Norland Audigier, *The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study: Baseline Report* (Princeton: Bendheim-Thoman Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, Aug. 2001; rev. Mar. 2003), at [<http://crew.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies/nationalreport.asp>].

populations and convincing them to change their attitudes and behaviors is hard work. It takes time, persistence, repeated contacts, fast action, patience, firmness, and endless resourcefulness. Programs need to recruit key program staff who are inspired and inspiring. They also need to be knowledgeable about community services in order to maximize opportunities for participants. First-hand knowledge is key. The best referrals are not made out of directories, but result from long-standing familiarity with community services, eligibility requirements, available resources, and relevant personnel. Dedicated, knowledgeable, and energetic staff can better counsel and steer parents into a course of action that makes them more financially and emotionally responsible for their children.²⁰

A second, outcome report on the programs found that (1) low-income noncustodial fathers are a difficult population to recruit and serve; (2) many of the participants found jobs with the programs' help, but they were low-paying jobs and relatively few of the participants were able to increase earnings enough to meet their financial needs and those of their children; (3) child access problems were hard to define and resolve, and that mediation should be used more extensively; (4) child support guidelines result in orders for low-income noncustodial parents that are unrealistically high; (5) CSE agencies should collaborate with fatherhood programs and pursue routine enforcement activities, as well as adopt policies and incentives that are responsive to low-income fathers; and (6) criminal history was the norm rather than the exception among the program participants, many participants faced ongoing alcohol and substance abuse problems, many did not have reliable transportation, and many lacked a court-ordered visitation arrangement.²¹

On a more positive note, the outcome report found that employment rates and earnings increased significantly especially for noncustodial parents who were previously unemployed. In addition, child support compliance rates increased significantly especially for those who had not been paying previously. Moreover, the report found that 27% of the fathers reported seeing their children more often after completion of the program.

Partners for Fragile Families Demonstration

HHS has an ongoing partnership with the private-sector initiative called Partners for Fragile Families (PFF). The Partners for Fragile Families Project is an initiative of the National Center for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership (NPCL), a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C. The PFF was designed to help poor single fathers pull themselves out of poverty and build stronger links to

²⁰ Jessica Pearson and Nancy Thoennes, with David Price and Jane Venohr, *OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Programs: Early Implementation Lessons* (Washington: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Center for Policy Research and Policy Studies, June 2000) p. 9.

²¹ Jessica Pearson, Nancy Thoennes, and Lanae Davis, with Jane Venohr, David Price, and Tracy Griffith, *OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Programs: Client Characteristics and Program Outcomes* (Washington: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Center for Policy Research and Policy Studies [HHS Contract No. 100-98-0015], Sept. 2003).

their children and their children's mothers. The PFF was established in 1996 to provide support for these "fragile families," which are defined as low-income, never-married parents and their children. Research indicated that although many of the fathers in these families are involved with their children during the early childhood years, this involvement tends to diminish over time, often with negative consequences for the children. The PFF initiative is aimed at helping fathers work with the mothers of their children in sharing the legal, financial, and emotional responsibilities of parenthood.

In March 2000, HHS approved ten state waivers for the three-year Partners for Fragile Families Demonstration projects. The demonstration projects sought to develop new ways for CSE agencies and community-based nonprofit and faith-based organizations to work together to help young noncustodial fathers obtain employment, health, and social services; make child support payments to their children; learn parenting skills; and enable them to work with the mothers of their children to build stronger parenting partnerships. The demonstration project sites were located in California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.²² According to HHS, of the \$9.7 million in federal funding budgeted for the projects, \$7.1 million was spent. An additional \$1.4 million was spent for an evaluation of the projects.

Issues

An underlying tension in the debate on fatherhood initiatives is the concern of some women's and mothers' rights groups, such as the National Women's Law Center and the National Organization for Women (NOW), that an emphasis on the importance of fathers may lead to undervaluing single-parent families maintained by mothers, that services for fathers may be at the expense of services for mothers, and that the "pro-fatherhood" discourse might give fathers' rights groups some leverage in challenging child custody, child support, and visitation arrangements. Some analysts contend that the policy debate on fatherhood initiatives must be based on the view that the welfare of fathers, mothers, and children are intertwined and interdependent; otherwise, the debate will be very divisive and unproductive.²³

Many issues are associated with the federal government's support of fatherhood initiatives. A few examples are Is the goal of federal policy to promote and support the involvement of fathers in their children's lives regardless of the father's relationship with the children's mother? What if the father has children by more than one woman? What is the federal policy with regard to incarcerated parents and parents recently released from prison? Does the federal government support

²² See [<http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/index.shtml>] and [<http://www.npcl.org/program/pff.htm>].

²³ William J. Doherty, Edward F. Kouneski, and Martha Farrell Erickson, *Responsible Fathering: An Overview and Conceptual Framework — Final Report* Washington, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Center for Policy Research and Policy Studies [HHS-100-93-0012], Sept. 1996).

counseling, education, and supervised visitation for abusive fathers so that they can reconnect with their children?

The discussion below examines two issues that will likely impact the success of congressional fatherhood initiatives. The first deals with the role of the CSE agency in fatherhood programs. Presently, the CSE program is the starting place for many fatherhood programs. Some analysts contend that since many noncustodial parents have a negative view of the CSE program, the use of the CSE program to recruit fathers does not bode well for the success of such programs. Several of the fatherhood bills would make competitive grants available to community organizations and other groups that have experience in working with low-income men. All of the fatherhood bills introduced in the 107th and 108th Congresses included evaluation components. The second issue examines father involvement in the context of the father's relationship to the child's mother. The second issue is based on the premise that formal marital relationships last longer and are more conducive to long-term interaction between fathers and children than other types of relationships.

CSE System and Noncustodial Parents Often At Odds

During the period FY1978-FY2003, child support payments collected by the CSE agencies increased from \$1 billion to \$21.2 billion. Moreover, the program has made significant improvements in other program measures as well, such as the number of parents located, paternitys established, and child support orders established. Advocates of the CSE program say that this dramatic program performance is aside from the indirect and intangible benefits of the program, such as increased personal responsibility and welfare cost-avoidance. Critics of the CSE program contend that even with an unprecedented array of "big brother" enforcement tools such as license (professional, driver's, recreational) and passport revocation, seizure of banking accounts, retirement funds, and lottery winnings, and automatic income withholding from pay checks, the program still collects only 18% of child support obligations for which it has responsibility and collects payments for only 50% of its caseload.

Although the CSE program has historically been the policy answer to the problem of father absence, because its focus until recently was exclusively on financial support, it has had the practical effect of alienating many low-income fathers who are unable to meet their child support obligations. Some policy analysts maintain that fathers are in effect devalued when their role in their children's lives is based solely on their cash contributions. They argue that public policies are needed to support the father's role as nurturer, disciplinarian, mentor, and moral instructor.²⁴

Information obtained from noncustodial fathers for various surveys and studies consistently tells the same story. Not surprisingly, noncustodial parents, especially low-income fathers, prefer informal child support agreements between themselves

²⁴ Wade F. Horn and Isabel V. Sawhill, *Making Room for Daddy: Fathers, Marriage, and Welfare Reform*, Brookings Institution Working Paper (Washington, Apr. 26, 2001), p. 4.

and the child's mother wherein they contribute cash support when they can and provide noncash aid such as taking care of the children from time to time and buying food, clothing, presents, etc. as often as they can. Many noncustodial fathers maintain that the CSE system is dismissive of their financial condition and continues to pursue child support payments (current as well as arrearages) even when it knows that many of them can barely support themselves. They argue that for welfare families, the CSE program generally does not improve their child's well-being because their child support payments are used to benefit the state and federal government (i.e., welfare reimbursement) rather than their child. They contend that the CSE program causes conflicts between them and their child's mother because the women often use it as leverage by threatening to report them to CSE authorities, take them back to court, have more of their wages garnished, or have them arrested.²⁵

Many observers maintain that noncustodial parents and the CSE program have irreconcilable differences and that the most that should be expected is for the noncustodial parent to clearly understand the purposes of the CSE program, the requirements imposed on the custodial parent, the noncustodial parents' rights to have their child support payments modified if they incur a financial change in circumstances, and that they as noncustodial parents have a moral and societal responsibility to have (to build) a loving relationship with their children.²⁶ If the CSE program continues to be the entrance to fatherhood programs, most observers contend that the fact that the CSE program has not been effective in gaining the cooperation and trust of many noncustodial parents must be acknowledged and addressed. Several analysts suggest that to be successful, fatherhood programs may need to operate independently of the formal CSE system.

Others assert that more than any other agency of state government, the CSE program has the responsibility and is in the position to reach out to fathers who need supportive services. They state that CSE agencies are already involved in forging relationships with fathers through partnerships with community-based organizations. They also note that CSE agencies provide a natural link to coordinate with TANF agencies to help families achieve self-sufficiency.²⁷

Although we do not have any evaluations on the effectiveness of fatherhood programs that are delivered through a CSE framework versus fatherhood programs that place little emphasis on the formal CSE system, all of the fatherhood bills introduced in the 107th and 108th Congresses included funding for evaluation. The fatherhood bills pending in the 109th Congress also include funding for evaluation.

²⁵ Maureen Waller and Robert Plotnick, "A Failed Relationship? Low-Income Families and the Child Support Enforcement System," *Focus* (University of Wisconsin-Madison. Institute for Research on Poverty), vol. 21, no. 1 (spring 2000), pp. 12-17. See also *Family Ties: Improving Paternity Establishment Practices and Procedures for Low-Income Mothers, Fathers and Children* (Washington: National Women's Law Center and Center on Fathers, Families, and Public Policy, 2000), pp. 9-11.

²⁶ Waller and Plotnick, "A Failed Relationship?"

²⁷ National Child Support Enforcement Association, *Resolution on Fatherhood Initiatives*, adopted by the NCSEA Board of Directors on July 29, 2000, [<http://www.ncsea.org/pdf/2000fatherhood.pdf>].

Noncustodial Father Involvement vs. Promotion of Marriage vs. Maintenance of Fragile Families

The first finding of the 1996 welfare reform law is that marriage is the foundation of a successful society. The second finding is that marriage is an essential institution of a successful society which promotes the interests of children.²⁸ However, some child welfare advocates argue that marriage is not necessarily the best alternative for all women and their children. It is generally agreed that single-parent families are a better alternative for children than living with an abusive father. Many observers caution that government must be careful about supporting programs that provide cash incentives to induce people to marry or that coerce people into marrying. They note the problems associated with child-bride marriages and the short-term and often unhappy nature of the so-called “shot gun” marriage. Others respond that many long-lasting marriages were based on financial alliances (e.g., to increase economic status, family wealth, status in the community, etc.). They also point out that most government programs are sensitive to the issues of domestic violence and include supports to prevent or end such actions.

Many young children live with both of their parents who are not married but who are cohabiting. Noting this, some analysts argue that coercive policies designed to promote certain types of family structures (e.g., nuclear families) at the expense of others may undermine nontraditional family relationships. They contend that more emphasis should be placed on trying to meet the needs of these fragile families to enable them to stay together for longer periods of time. They maintain that if these parents wanted to be married they would be married.²⁹ They also point out that because of the complexity of many family relationships, there are no easy answers. A single-focus policy, no matter whether it aims to support traditional family relationships or fragile families, can place children in less desirable situations. For instance, promoting marriage of biological parents may result in supporting situations where some children in the household have a stepparent if all the children are not from the same union. Similarly, promoting fragile families also could result in supporting situations where a biological parent is absent if all of the children in the household are not all from the same union.

Some pro-marriage analysts point out that about 75% of children born to cohabiting parents will see their parents separate before they reach age 16, compared to about 33% of those born to married parents. Some observers note that even with supports it is unlikely that fragile families (unmarried couple) will remain together as long as married families. Thus, they argue that the promotion of marriage should

²⁸ The majority of pre-TANF evaluations of welfare initiatives that examine family formation decisions have found little, if any, impact of state policies on decisions to marry. One recent exception is an evaluation of the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP). In this program, compared to those who were subject to the AFDC requirements, more single-parent participants subject to new policies under MFIP got married and fewer of the two-parent participants had divorced within three years after the program began.

²⁹ See “Is Marriage a Viable Objective for Fragile Families?” *Fragile Families Research Brief 9* (Princeton: Bendheim-Thoman Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, July 2002).

be incorporated into fatherhood programs if the goal is lifetime involvement of fathers in the lives of their children.

In contrast, fatherhood initiatives are sometimes viewed as incompatible with initiatives that encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families, and with initiatives that promote marriage. In fact, many observers argue that the focus should be the participation of fathers in their children's lives, regardless of the marital status of the parents. As mentioned earlier, the TANF law states that the second purpose of the block grant is to "end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage." The fourth purpose of the TANF block grant is to "encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families." There has been some discussion about whether the fourth purpose means married-couple families or just two parents who are involved in their children's lives, regardless of whether they are married or even living together. In late 1999, the Clinton Administration issued A Guide on Funding for Children and Families through the TANF program which broadly interpreted two-parent families to mean not only married-couple families, but also never-married, separated, and divorced parents, whether living together or not. Thus, many states classify their fatherhood programs and programs that encourage visitation by noncustodial parents under the rubric of fulfilling the purposes of the TANF program.³⁰

In addition, it should be noted that recent research indicates that there may be a racial component in the marriage promotion versus fatherhood involvement debate. In 2003, 68.5% of black births were to unmarried women whereas only 23.5% of white births were to unmarried women. Given this demographic reality of black and white families in the U.S., the authors of the study³¹ contend that proposals that earmark five times as much money for marriage promotion as for responsible fatherhood promotion³² seem "racially insensitive."

Legislative Action

During the 106th Congress, President Clinton's FY2001 budget included \$255 million for the first year of a proposed "Fathers Work/Families Win" initiative to help low-income noncustodial parents and low-income working families work and support their children. The "Fathers Work/Families Win" initiative would have been

³⁰ Wade Horn, "Wedding Bell Blues: Marriage and Welfare Reform," *Brookings Review*, summer 2001, pp. 40-41.

³¹ Ronald B. Mincy and Chien-Chung Huang, *The M Word: The Rise and Fall of Interracial Coalitions on Fathers and Welfare Reform*. Bowling Green State University Working Paper 02-7 (Feb. 25, 2002), pp. 1-5, 32.

³² H.R. 4737 as passed by the House in the 107th Congress authorized \$100 million annually for five years for competitive matching grants that require a dollar-for-dollar match for marriage promotion activities, resulting in total funding of \$200 million dollars annually for five years. Further, an additional \$100 million per year for five years was authorized for research and demonstration grants and technical assistance related to the healthy marriage promotion activities. In contrast, H.R. 4737 authorized \$20 million annually for five years for responsible fatherhood grants.

administered by the Department of Labor (DoL). The “Fathers Work” component (\$125 million) would have been limited to noncustodial parents (primarily fathers) and the “Families Win” component (\$130 million) would have been targeted more generally to low-income families.

The proposed “Fathers Work” grant program was designed to help low-income noncustodial parents who were not living with their children carry out their financial and emotional responsibilities to their children. The proposed “Families Win” grant program was designed to help “hard-pressed” working families obtain the supports and skills they need to get a job and succeed in the job and avoid TANF assistance. These funds were intended to leverage existing resources to help families retain jobs and upgrade skills and get connected to critical work supports, such as child care, child support, health care, food stamps, earned income tax credit, housing, and transportation. Neither the House nor Senate FY2001 appropriations bill (H.R. 4577, 106th Congress) for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies included funding for the Fathers Work/Families Win proposal.

From the beginning of his presidency, President Bush has indicated his support for responsible fatherhood initiatives. President Bush’s FY2002 budget (issued in February 2001, 107th Congress) proposed \$64 million in 2002 (\$315 million over five years) to strengthen the role of fathers in the lives of families. This initiative would have provided competitive grants to faith-based and community organizations that help unemployed or low-income fathers and their families avoid or leave cash welfare, as well as to programs that promote successful parenting and strengthen marriage. The initiative also would have funded projects of national significance that support expansion of state and local responsible fatherhood efforts.

President Bush’s FY2003 budget proposed \$20 million (for FY2003) for competitive grants to community and faith-based organizations for programs that help noncustodial fathers support their families to avoid or leave cash welfare, become more involved in their children’s lives, and promote successful parenting and encourage and support healthy marriages and married fatherhood.

President Bush’s FY2004 budget proposed \$20 million annually (for FY2004-FY2008) for promotion and support of responsible fatherhood and healthy marriage. The funding was expected to promote and support involved, committed, and responsible fatherhood and encourage the formation and stability of healthy marriages. The FY2004 budget proposal also would have increased the annual funding of the CSE access and visitation grant program gradually from \$10 million annually to \$20 million annually by FY2007.

President Bush’s FY2005 budget proposed \$50 million (for FY2005) for 75 competitive grants to faith-based and community organizations, together with Indian tribes and tribal organizations, to encourage and help fathers to support their families, avoid welfare, improve fathers’ ability to manage family business affairs, and support healthy marriages and married fatherhood.

President Bush’s FY2006 budget proposes \$40 million (for FY2006) for a grant program to public and nonprofit community organizations, including religious

organizations, and Indian tribes and tribal organizations, for demonstration service projects to help noncustodial fathers become more involved in their children's lives and to encourage and support healthy marriages between parents raising children.

106th Congress

During the 106th Congress, legislation was twice passed by the House (but not acted on by the Senate — H.R. 3073, the proposed Fathers Count Act of 1999, and H.R. 4678, the proposed Child Support Distribution Act of 2000) that would have authorized funding (\$140 million over five years in H.R. 3073 and million over four years in H.R. 4678) to establish a program (usually referred \$140 to as fatherhood initiatives) to make grants to public or private entities for projects designed to promote marriage, promote successful parenting and the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children, and help fathers improve their economic status by providing job-related services to them.

107th Congress

During the 107th Congress, several bills (H.R. 1300/S. 653, H.R. 1471, S. 685, S. 940/H.R. 1990, H.R. 2893, H.R. 3625, H.R. 4090³³, S. 2524, and H.R. 4737) that included fatherhood initiatives were introduced, but none were enacted.

The purposes of the fatherhood programs in the bills introduced generally were the same: fatherhood programs must be designed to promote marriage through counseling, mentoring, and other activities; promote successful parenting through counseling, providing information about good parenting practices including payment of child support, and other activities; and help noncustodial parents and their families avoid or leave cash welfare by providing work-first services, job training, subsidized employment, career-advancing education, and other activities.

However, the structure of the fatherhood programs differed. For example, H.R. 4737 as amended and passed by the House would have added a new part C to Title IV of the Social Security Act to provide competitive grants to public and private entities to operate an array of fatherhood programs. The competitive grants would have been administered by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The appropriation amount for the fatherhood grants was set at \$20 million a year for each of the five fiscal years FY2003 through FY2007; up to 15% of the annual

³³ H.R. 4090, as amended, was ordered reported by the House Ways and Means Committee on May 2, 2002 (H.Rept. 107-460, Part 1). The bill would have provided \$20 million in grants per year for a five-year period (FY2003-FY2007) to public entities and nonprofit community entities, including religious organizations, and to Indian tribes and tribal organizations to promote responsible, caring and effective parenting and to encourage positive father involvement, including the positive involvement of nonresident fathers; enhance the abilities and commitment of unemployed or low-income fathers to provide support for their families and to avoid or leave welfare; improve fathers' ability to effectively manage family business affairs; and encourage and support healthy marriages and married fatherhood. **Note:** H.R. 4737, a bill that included identical "fatherhood" provisions, was passed by the House on May 16, 2002.

appropriation was to be available for the cost of various demonstration projects and evaluations of the competitive grants.

In contrast, H.R. 4737 as amended in the nature of a substitute by the Senate Finance Committee appeared to have more of an emphasis on helping low-income noncustodial parents find and retain work. It would have amended part D of title IV of the Social Security Act (i.e., the Child Support section) to provide grants to states to (1) establish a noncustodial parent employment grant program and (2) conduct policy reviews and develop recommendations, and conduct demonstration projects with the goals of obtaining and retaining employment for low-income noncustodial parents, increasing child support payments, increasing the involvement of low-income noncustodial parents with their children, and coordinating services for low-income noncustodial parents. The HHS Secretary and the Secretary of Labor would have jointly awarded grants to eligible states for the purpose of establishing, in coordination with counties and other local governments, supervised employment programs for noncustodial parents who have a history of irregular payment or nonpayment of child support obligations and who are determined to be in need of employment services in order to pay their child support obligations. The appropriation amount for the noncustodial parent employment program was set at \$25 million a year for each of the four fiscal years FY2004 through FY2007. The appropriation amount for the grants, administered by the HHS Secretary, to states for policy reviews, recommendations, and demonstration projects also was set at \$25 million a year for each of the four fiscal years FY2004 through FY2007.

Although H.R. 4737, amended, was passed by the House on May 16, 2002 (H.Rept. 107-460, Part 1), and reported favorably in the nature of a substitute by the Senate Finance Committee (S.Rept. 107-221) on July 25, 2002, it was not passed by the full Senate.

108th Congress

The 108th Congress introduced several bills that included responsible fatherhood provisions (i.e., S. 5, S. 448, S. 604, and S. 657, S. 1443, and S. 2830; H.R. 4 and H.R. 936). None of the bills became law.

On February 13, 2003, the House passed H.R. 4 (108th Congress), a welfare reauthorization bill (that was essentially identical to H.R. 4737 as passed by the House in 2002) that would have provided \$20 million per year for each of FY2004-FY2008 for a responsible fatherhood grant program.

On September 10, 2003, the Senate Finance Committee approved its version of H.R. 4 (S.Rept. 108-162), which would have established a \$75 million responsible fatherhood program comprised of four components for each of the fiscal years 2004-2008: (1) a \$20 million grant program for up to 10 eligible states to conduct demonstration programs; (2) a \$30 million grant for eligible entities to conduct demonstration programs; (3) \$5 million for a nationally recognized nonprofit fatherhood promotion organization to develop and promote a responsible fatherhood media campaign; and (4) a \$20 million block grant for states to conduct responsible fatherhood media campaigns. Although H.R. 4 was debated on the Senate floor

during the period March 29-April 1, 2004, consideration of the bill was not completed when a motion to limit debate on the bill failed to garner the needed 60 votes. The Senate did not bring the bill back to the floor before the end of the session.

During the period from 2002-2004, the responsible fatherhood bills that were passed by the House were part of welfare reauthorization legislation. (The funding for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, mandatory child care, and the abstinence education block grant — which were part of the 1996 welfare reform legislation (P.L. 104-193) whose funding authority expired on September 30, 2002 — has continued under a number of temporary extension measures.)

109th Congress

The 109th Congress has introduced several welfare reauthorization bills that include responsible fatherhood provisions (i.e., H.R. 240/S. 105, and S. 6).

On January 4, 2005, a TANF reauthorization bill (H.R. 240) was introduced in the 109th Congress. It includes provisions that authorize the HHS Secretary to make competitive grants totaling \$20 million for each of the fiscal years 2006 through 2010 to public and nonprofit community organizations, including religious organizations, and Indian tribes and tribal organizations for responsible fatherhood demonstration programs. The purposes of the fatherhood programs would be to (1) promote responsible, caring and effective parenting and encouraging positive father involvement, including the positive involvement of nonresident fathers; (2) enhance the abilities and commitment of unemployed or low-income fathers to provide support for their families and to avoid or leave welfare; (3) improve fathers' ability to effectively manage family business affairs; and (4) encourage and support healthy marriages and married fatherhood. Not more than 15% of the annual appropriation would be available for the costs of two multicity, multistate demonstration projects, projects of national significance that support expansion of state and local responsible fatherhood efforts, and an evaluation of the programs. The fatherhood provisions in H.R. 240 are identical to those that were included in H.R. 4 as passed by the House on February 13, 2003 (108th Congress). S. 105, which is identical to H.R. 240, was introduced in the Senate on January 24, 2005.

On January 24, 2005, another TANF reauthorization bill (S. 6) was introduced in the 109th Congress. It would establish a \$75 million responsible fatherhood program comprised of four components for each of the fiscal years 2006-2010: (1) a \$20 million grant program for up to 10 eligible states to conduct demonstration programs; (2) a \$30 million grant for eligible entities to conduct demonstration programs; (3) \$5 million for a nationally recognized nonprofit fatherhood promotion organization to develop and promote a responsible fatherhood media campaign; and (4) a \$20 million block grant for states to conduct responsible fatherhood media campaigns. The purposes of the demonstration grants are to promote responsible fatherhood through (1) marriage promotion (through counseling, mentoring, disseminating information about the advantages of marriage and two-parent involvement for children, etc.), (2) parenting activities (through counseling, mentoring, mediation, disseminating information about good parenting practices,

etc.), and (3) fostering economic stability of fathers (through work first services, job search, job training, subsidized employment, education, etc.). The fatherhood provisions in S. 6 are identical to those that were included in H.R. 4 as passed by the Senate Finance Committee on October 3, 2003 (H. Rept. 108-162, 108th Congress).