

How father- and family-friendly is Connecticut?

Prepared for the National Practitioner's Network for Fathers and Families

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Introduction

Preface

In the fall of 2002, the National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families contracted Lee Mizell Consulting to review the “father- and family-friendliness” of various public policies in the state of Connecticut. This report summarizes those findings. It is divided into four parts. Part One focuses on child support policies – a key interface between the state, families, and fathers. While child support is not the only service area that address issues related specifically to fathers and families, many of the “hot button” issues that nonresident parents are concerned about center on child support. Other areas for future research include child care, foster care, healthcare, and means-tested assistance programs.

At the request of the state, Part Two describes some of the initiatives other states have taken to be more “father- and family-friendly.” These summaries are drawn from a number of sources, and incorporate both social service and child support policies. The reform efforts of 1996 decentralized welfare policy in a manner that continues to make states key actors in child and family policy. For this reason, Part Three summarizes key national policy issues with ramifications for fathers and families that Connecticut should monitor.

Finally, Part Four contains a review of documentation provided by the Connecticut Office of Child Support Enforcement (CSE). These documents, which are regularly used by CSE personnel, were reviewed by a nonresident father with an eye to their accessibility and father-friendliness.

Summary of Findings

Overall, Connecticut is a father- and family-friendly state. It is clear that the state has made efforts to formulate policy in a manner that maximizes both family participation and family welfare. A review of existing literature, meeting notes and reports available online, and state publications demonstrates ongoing efforts to identify and implement innovative and family-friendly policies. With this in mind, a handful of changes that Connecticut could undertake to enhance family- and father-friendliness are presented for consideration.

Part I: A Look at Connecticut Policy

Order Establishment

In most cases, establishment of a child support order is the first contact that the custodial and noncustodial parent have with the child support enforcement system. Court-based procedures for establishing an order can be off-putting to many parents who find the court system adversarial. If they can be used, administrative procedures – especially those that minimize the need to appear in court at all – are family-friendly.

In some cases low-income noncustodial parents do not receive notification of the need to appear in court regarding paternity establishment or child support because their housing situation is unstable or due to a misunderstanding. Consequently many of these parents receive child support orders by default that may not reflect their true income situation. In addition to having inappropriate orders, they may be unaware of the order and begin to accumulate arrears. Policies that increase the likelihood of timely notification of appearance requirements and order levels are most family-friendly.

What is the policy in Connecticut?

(CGS § 17b-179, 17b-745, 46b-172, 46b-215, and 46b-231)

Connecticut uses both an administrative and a judicial process to establish child support orders. The administrative process is used only when the noncustodial parent agrees to the amount of support indicated by the child support guidelines. The judicial process is used when the noncustodial parent does not agree to the guideline's amount.

With respect to attendance at court proceedings, indicating "you must appear" on the initial notice has increased the appearance rate to 90 percent in Connecticut.

Community based organizations in Connecticut may attend any state child support training

event. This facilitates the flow of information about child support into local communities.

What can Connecticut do to be more father/family-friendly?

A summons in a paternity and/or child support cases should require confirmation that the parent has received notification. The most appropriate form of service in these contexts is personal service. If this is not possible, mail delivery that requires a signature for confirmation of delivery would be useful. The state could also augment VOICES, the automated phone system, to would allow both parents to check the court date and time, indicate any materials they need to bring with them, and review the basics of order establishment.

Connecticut also could ensure that information on child support establishment and obligations is available at the time of paternity establishment in hospitals, at community health clinics, and at other family service agencies, such as Head Start, IV-A and IV-E programs.

Imputed Income

Many low-income noncustodial parents have sporadic and part-time employment and thus an uneven income. Often these parents' child support orders are established by imputing income when the parent's income is unknown. Income is imputed using various criteria that may reflect the parent's earning capacity, but not necessarily their actual earnings. In the case of low-income parents who have very low and sporadic earnings, these imputed orders may far exceed their ability to pay. Since these parents do not actually earn this assumed income, they quickly accumulate arrears on their orders.

What is the policy in Connecticut?

Imputed income is only used to calculate deductions from gross income for the purpose of establishing a child support order, or to calculate arrearage owed in the absence of a current support order.

Child support orders in Connecticut are determined on the basis of net income. The noncustodial parent may deduct the amount of child support paid to children other than the one for whom the order is being established. If the amount of the other order(s) is unknown, it may be imputed. Only current child support obligations may be deducted, not arrearage.

The imputed amount may also be used to defend against proposed changes to an existing order – but not if the obligator seeks to modify an order.

Imputation is also used to establish the payment against arrearages in the absence of a current order. Generally, payment equals 20% of the imputed amount for an unemancipated minor and 55% for an emancipated child.

Child support orders are not imputed if the obligator fails to appear in court to establish the initial order. Rather, Connecticut imposes a default amount. This may or may not reflect the obligator's ability to pay. The default record is kept open for 4 months, during which timeframe the noncustodial can appear and provide updated income information. An order based on new evidence replaces the initial order.

What can Connecticut do to be more father/family-friendly?

When computing imputed child support orders, the state should use historical income and tax data whenever available.

With respect to default orders, the state could keep the record open for one year (as Massachusetts does), and allow for retroactive amendment. This would minimize arrearage accumulation and the resulting problems to the noncustodial parent, child, and family. In addition, the default order could incorporate information about the obligator's ability to pay using custodial parent testimony and tax

documentation. If no such information is available, the obligator could be assumed to earn full-time minimum wage.

Retroactive Support

Upon establishing paternity, noncustodial fathers who were previously unaware of the birth of their child might find themselves obligated for retroactive payments that date back to the birth of their child. The vast majority of states order noncustodial parents to pay retroactive support in public assistance cases, and a few order noncustodial parents to reimburse Medicaid birthing costs. Depending on the age of the child and the services a child and/or a child's custodial parent have received, this can lead noncustodial parents to face a large debt as soon as an order to pay support is established. This debt often serves as a deterrent to paying any support at all. The U.S. Inspector General found that once a child support order was established, noncustodial parents who were charged for more than one year of retroactive support were 250% more likely to make no support payments than those who were not charged retroactive support (Entmacher, 2001).

What is the policy in Connecticut?

The state does establish child support orders retroactive to the birth of the child, date of parental separation, or three years prior to filing in paternity cases, whichever is applicable. Information taken into account when establishing orders for prior periods includes the parent's past ability to pay or if this is unknown the parent's current ability to pay is used. If neither of these can be established then information about past assistance provided to the child is used. If the prior period amount is based on an existing court order, then an arrearage affidavit of the obligated parent is used.

What can Connecticut do to be more father/family-friendly?

In cases where it is clear that a noncustodial parent was unaware of the child's birth, or a

father attempted to establish paternity but was obstructed from doing so by the mother:

- Child support owed should be calculated from the time paternity is established rather than the time of the child's birth;
- The father should not be required to reimburse the state or federal government for federal or state assistance provided to their child or their child's custodial parent prior to the establishment of paternity;
- Paternity should not be determined by default in the absence of a genetic test; and
- Retroactive arrears could be capped at \$500 if the father can establish an income below the poverty level at the time of and 6 months prior to paternity establishment.

The recommendations made regarding imputed income also apply here.

Arrears

Arrears can become obstacles in the efforts to achieve financial stability and meet their current child support obligations. Arrears often become both significant emotional and financial barriers to payment of current support. Moreover, unpaid child support debt accrues interest at a rate determined by state law, courts can no longer retroactively reduce accumulated arrears (since enactment of the Bradley Amendment in 1986), and a child support debt above a certain amount can lead to a felony conviction in some states.

What is the policy in Connecticut?

(CGS Section 46b-215b)

Connecticut does not charge interest on missed payments, retroactive child support, or on adjudicated arrears. In addition to current support payments, an obligator is expected to make payments toward arrears. Arrearage payments are generally equal to 20% of the current support order. If there is no current support order, one will be imputed (see previous).

The state makes special provisions for low-income obligators. In these cases, s/he must

pay 10% of the current order or \$1.00, whichever is greater.

What can Connecticut do to be more father/family-friendly?

Connecticut's policy, especially with respect to low-income fathers, is father- and family-friendly. The state could go further by working with noncustodial parents to prevent arrears from accumulating by 1) understanding the conditions that encourage the accumulations of arrears given state policies, 2) working to mitigate those conditions, and 3) educating both the custodial and noncustodial parent about arrears and their implications when the child support order is established. The state also could implement an automated phone system and/or interactive website that allows the obligator to check the amount of current support due and the amount of arrearage due.

Support Order Modification

It is often difficult, time-consuming, and costly for noncustodial parents to modify a child support order if their financial circumstances change. Fathers report that they are often not informed of the possibility of getting a downward modification, despite the fact that federal law requires states to notify both custodial and noncustodial parents of their right to request a review of their order every three years. However, a 1999 review by the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services found that 18 states did not notify parents of this right and nine had no plans to do so (Entmacher, 2001).

The modification process also takes many months. If a modification is granted it is often effective to the date of the hearing or decision, and not to the date of the request (when their circumstance changed). Under federal law, a child support obligation becomes a final judgment when it comes due and cannot be retroactively modified. (42 U.S.C. § 666(a)(9)) However the individual or entity to whom the child support judgment is owed may agree to a compromise. Thus, a state may negotiate reduced arrearages assigned to the state that resulted from the delay in modification after a

change in financial circumstance (Entmacher, 2001).

What is the policy in Connecticut?

(CGS Section 46b-86)

In Connecticut, either parent may request that the state review the support order if any of the following situations occur:

- The financial situation of one or both parents changes
- The support order is no longer adequate to meet the needs of the child
- The support order did not include medical insurance
- The circumstances of either parent or the child have changed substantially

In the event of a modification, the state presents the request in court. The state has 180 days from a request to complete the review of an order and present the modification request to the court. For TANF cases, the state automatically reviews the support order every three years. For the state to modify the request, there must be a substantial change in the circumstances of either parent or substantial deviation of an existing support order from the established child support guidelines of at least 15 percent.

A substantial change in circumstances can be established as:

- The earnings of the obligor have substantially increased or decreased;
- The earnings of the obligee have substantially increased or decreased;
- The needs of a party or the child(ren) have substantially increased or decreased;
- The child(ren) have extraordinary medical expenses not covered by insurance; and/or
- Custody and payee changes.

What are not taken into account are 1) changes in the cost-of-living as measured by the Federal Bureau of Vital Statistics and 2) changes in child care expenses. The latter is not taken into account because child care is ordered

reimbursed as a percentage of whatever expenses are incurred and paid.

While the Connecticut General Statutes state that a child support order cannot be modified retroactively, the statutes do permit changes with respect to the period in which a motion for modification is pending – beginning from the date that the notice of the motion was given to the opposing party.

Finally, state case law discourages downward modifications when a noncustodial parent is incarcerated.

What can Connecticut do to be more father/family-friendly?

Connecticut could undertake a handful of changes to be more father/family-friendly. First, noncustodial parents could be informed in writing of the possibility of seeking a modification and of the process entailed in doing so when the initial order is set. Second, processing of modification requests could occur within 60 days rather than 180 days, thereby minimizing the generation of arrears due to a change in the father's financial situation. Finally, modifications could revert back to the time of the request rather than to the date of the court hearing.

The state could enact legislation such that incarceration automatically triggers a review of an obligator's child support order(s). The review could result in a suspension of the order, a downward modification if assets exist to make payments, or a one-time payment using existing assets prior to a suspension.

License Suspension and Revocation

In 1996 federal child support reforms required that all states grant agencies or courts authority to withhold, suspend or restrict driver's, professional, occupational and recreational licenses of individuals who owe overdue child support or who fail, after receiving notice, to comply with subpoenas or warrants in such cases. By the end of 1998, 49 states and the District of Columbia restricted driver's and occupational licenses, 50 states and the District

of Columbia restricted professional licenses, and 48 states and the District of Columbia restricted recreational and sporting licenses. A 1996 cost-benefit study conducted in North Dakota showed a seven percent increase in collections due to the license restriction law (Myers, 1999).

While a useful tool to force unwilling noncustodial parents to pay their child support orders, it has also had the effect of forcing people out of their jobs (e.g., because their professional license is suspended and cannot be reinstated), limiting employment opportunities (e.g., because a driver's license has been suspended), and increasing expenses over the long term (e.g., for auto insurance, because the cause for a license suspension remains unspecified).

What is the policy in Connecticut?

(CGS Sections 46b-220 to 46b-223, inclusive)

Connecticut has a combined judicial and administrative process for suspending licenses in the case of delinquent child support obligations. Specifically, the state Superior Court and any family support magistrate may suspend the professional/occupational licenses, motor vehicle licenses, and/or recreational licenses and permits of a delinquent child support obligor who (A) owes overdue support in an amount which exceeds ninety days of periodic payments on a current support or arrearage payment order; (B) has failed to make court ordered medical or dental insurance coverage available within ninety days of the issuance of a court order or who fails to maintain such coverage pursuant to court order for a period of ninety days; or (C) has failed, after receiving appropriate notice, to comply with subpoenas or warrants relating to paternity or child support proceedings.

What can Connecticut do to be more father/family-friendly?

If professional licenses are suspended because of nonpayment of child support, all public records should indicate the reason for the suspension, so individuals do not appear to have lost their license due to professional misconduct. Moreover, exceptions should be made to the suspension that permit driving

under certain circumstances (e.g., to and from work, at work, to and from child care, etc.).

Access, Visitation, and Parenting

Many noncustodial parents complain that child support payment is pursued too aggressively, and that their access to and visitation with their children is not pursued aggressively enough. Their resentment often acts as a barrier to participation in the child support system. The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) authorized the Administration of Children and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to fund state programs that "support and facilitate non-custodial parents access to and visitation [with] their children by means of activities including mediation (both voluntary and mandatory), counseling, education, development of parenting plans, visitation enforcement (including monitoring, supervision and neutral drop-off and pick-up), and development of guidelines for visitation and alternative custody arrangements."

What is the policy in Connecticut?

(CGS Sections 46b-69b, CGS – Public Act 97-2, Jobs First Welfare Reform Act.)

Connecticut requires parenting education programs for separated and divorced parents to raise awareness concerning the impact of divorce and restructuring of families on children. The program includes discussion of child development stages, adjustment of children after parental separation, conflict management, visitation guidelines, stress reduction for children and cooperative parenting. Connecticut also requires parents under eighteen years of age to live with a parent or legal guardian while raising their child(ren).

What can Connecticut do to be more father/family-friendly?

It is important that both custodial and noncustodial parents be given adequate information about how to address access and visitation issues at the time of paternity

establishment or the setting of a child support order, or any time thereafter when it is requested.

Connecticut could follow the lead of Tennessee which recently replaced the legal terms “custody” and “visitation” with “shared parenting” and “parental responsibilities” to demonstrate the courts’ commitment to joint parenting. The state also enacted a law in which blocking court-ordered parenting time may result in the loss of recreational and/or professional licenses. The state also made it possible for the noncustodial parent to have access to the medical records of their child(ren), unless forbidden by the courts. Three new rights were added to the Tennessee Parents’ Bill of Rights: 48 hour notification of any events to which parents are normally invited to participate, non-custodial parental involvement in all school activities, and contact information when either parent leaves the state for two or more nights with a minor child.

If the state does not possess them, it could consider developing visitation and exchange centers that allow parents to transfer children from one parent to the other for formal visitation. These centers help ensure that children can see both parents in a safe, secure atmosphere.

Finally, Connecticut could follow the lead of Minnesota where the court orders compensatory visitation time to the noncustodial parent if it is found that s/he has been deprived of court-ordered parenting time. This additional parenting time must be at least of the same type and duration as the deprived parenting time or, at the discretion of the court, it may be in excess of or of a different type than the deprived parenting time. It must be taken within one year after the deprived parenting time and at a time acceptable to the person deprived of parenting time.

Child Support Collection

In order to ensure that noncustodial parents make their child support payments, states generally pursue multiple means of securing payment. In some cases, child support payments are debited directly from the noncustodial parent’s paycheck. This approach brings a noncustodial parent’s employer into the payment situation. In some cases, states do not send monthly notices or receipts to parents’

required to pay child support if the amount is being debited from their paycheck. As a result, the parent may be unaware if a problem occurs with the employer’s processing of their payments. Alternatively, if an employer fails to pay the parent on time, he or she may fall behind in their child support payments. In these cases, parents’ may find themselves:

- In contempt of court and subject to incarceration
- Reported to a credit bureau for failure to pay, and subsequently unable to borrow money in the future
- Subject to a lien on their assets

What is the policy in Connecticut?

(CGS Sec. 46b-231; CGS Secs. 53-304 to 53-308, inclusive; CGS Sec. 52-362d(b))

Connecticut can debit child support payments directly from paychecks, unemployment and workers’ compensation, retirement checks, and lottery winnings as well as apply income tax refunds to child support owed. Under state law, withholding is generally established when orders are set. Eighty-five percent of the first \$145 of disposable income per week is exempt from withholding. If a parent’s payment are not being withheld, the state can begin withholding if their payments fall 30 days behind, as the parent is notified and offered a court hearing. When payments are withheld from income, payment for current obligations takes priority over payment for arrears.

If a parent is 30 days late in support payments, he or she may be found in contempt of court if they are determined to have purposefully avoided compliance. In order to be cited with contempt, the parent must receive the court papers in person. A magistrate may order the arrest of a parent who personally receives notice of a court hearing and does not attend. Ultimately, citation for contempt may result in incarceration. If a parent owes at least \$500 in back child support, Connecticut can place a lien on real or personal property. Before a lien is placed, the parent is notified and has the chance for a hearing to protest the action. If a parent falls behind in support payments by at least \$1,000, the state can report him or her and the debt to consumer reporting agencies. Before a

parent's name is sent to a credit bureau, the parent is notified and given 60 days to ask for a hearing or to pay the overdue support.

Connecticut has a computer system that tracks payments and amounts owed, links government agencies and speeds up the process. The system automatically sends notices to parents and flags problem cases for child support workers. However, monthly statements are not mailed to parents whose employers deduct payments from their checks.

What can Connecticut do to be more father/family-friendly?

Monthly statements could be mailed to obligators, whether or not their payments are deducted from wages. This would help the parent stay abreast of current and past support obligations. The statement could include 1) amount due, 2) payments for the year-to-date, 3) sources of and amounts of any withholdings, and 4) a phone number to contact for information.

Child Support Pass-Through

For low-income nonresident fathers, establishment of a child support order often means turning the payment over to the state to offset the cost of the mother's participation in Transitional Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). This policy is father- and family-unfriendly, as it provides a disincentive for both nonresident fathers and custodial mothers to participate in the child support system and welfare system.

Since 1996, states have been able to retain or pass-through up to 100% of the child support order to the custodial parent. They have also been able to disregard the child support payment when computing TANF eligibility and benefit levels.

As of April 2002, 26 states refused to pass-through or disregard any child support income. Another ten states pass through \$50, but do not incorporate child support payments for the purposes of eligibility and benefits. Under a waiver from the federal government, Wisconsin allowed 100% of the child support payment to be

passed to the TANF recipient and disregard 100% of child support payments when determining cash assistance. Evaluation of this program reveals that that this policy increases fathers' child support payments.

What is the policy in Connecticut?

Connecticut is one of the few states to pass through the entire current child support payment to the custodial parent. At present, Connecticut disregards only the first \$100 of the child support payment for the determination of eligibility and benefits.

What can Connecticut do to be more father/family-friendly?

In order to be more father/family-friendly, the state could disregard the full amount or a larger amount of the child support payment.

Noncompliance w/PRWORA

The requirements of Title IV-A of the Social Security Act, as amended by PRWORA, establish the provisions regarding penalties for non-compliance with child support and work requirements. For failure to cooperate in establishing paternity or obtaining child support without good cause, the penalty is at least 25% of the assistance payment otherwise provided to the family. The state has the option to deny full benefits to the family. For refusal to engage in work without good cause, the penalty is at least a pro rata reduction of the amount otherwise payable to the family during the period of refusal. The state has the option to have a greater reduction or to terminate assistance.

What is the policy in Connecticut?

In Connecticut, penalties for failure to comply with child support and work requirements, including voluntarily quitting a job, are the same. They are:

- a reduction of 25 percent for three months for the first offense;

- a reduction of 35 percent for six months for the second offense;
- discontinuance of the family's assistance for three months for the third and any subsequent offenses.

Individuals who fail to comply with a requirement by the end of a given penalty period will automatically progress to the penalty associated with the next higher offense. If while in penalty status, an individual fails to comply with another program requirement, the penalty associated with the next higher offense will begin as of the first possible date following expiration of the required notices of adverse action.

What can Connecticut do to be more father/family-friendly?

One way for the state to be more "family friendly" without undermining the intent of the penalties would be to impose graduated penalty amounts for each "step." For example, rather than impose a flat reduction in the award of 25% for three months for the first offense, the state could impose a penalty of 10% in the first month, 20% in the second month, and 30% in the third month for the first offense. A similar methodology could be applied for the second offense.

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Part II: A Review Of Other States' Initiatives

This section of the document presents father- and family-friendly initiatives undertaken by different states. The summaries are *excerpted* from various documents. They do not describe all state programs, but rather a handful of those found to be particularly interesting. Resources for locating additional descriptions of state initiatives are provided at the end of the section.

Florida

The Florida Commission on Responsible Fatherhood (FCORF) was established as a response to help curb child abuse, promote awareness about the importance of responsible fathering, and identify barriers to father involvement. The Governor, Senate President, and Speaker of the House appointed the FCORF Advisory Board from among Florida's business, civic, and faith leaders. The Commission sponsors an annual summit, hosts a father of the year program, provides community grants to develop local programs serving fathers, and conducts a media campaign. The Commission collaborates with state agencies, educates new legislators, promotes "Take Your Dad to School Day," and finds common ground between FCORF and the state's anti-drug initiative. FCORF maintains a relationship with the legislature by offering policy recommendations on an annual basis.

Georgia

In 1997, the Department of Technical and Adult Education Special Workforce Services began the Fatherhood Initiative as a pilot program at seven technical institutions. Its goal was to educate non-custodial fathers who were not paying child support. Specifically, it targeted low-income, non-custodial parents, those who lacked a high school diploma or GED, and those who had children receiving TANF benefits. It now functions successfully in 33 technical colleges and 3 colleges with technical divisions.

Now called the Georgia Fatherhood Program, it provides education, training, and job placement

for non-custodial parents with court-ordered child support. It does so through the technical colleges and colleges throughout Georgia. Transitional employment is sought for the participant while he takes part in life management and survival skills workshops. Job readiness and workforce preparation also are taught to promote success once the participant has completed the program.

Illinois

Statewide, ten male-focused programs address themes such as staying in school, decision-making, self-esteem, health, risk-taking behavior, and healthy sexuality through case management, counseling and tutoring services, and mentoring opportunities. Program expansion areas include offering men instruction in anger management, resume development, and reproductive health, as well as social support. Young fathers, and teenage boys in general, benefit from the 26 school-based health centers where students receive STD testing, physicals, counseling, and medical referrals when necessary. In addition, a paternity establishment program in Illinois prisons has a success rate of 86 percent. Finally, the state has instituted an effort to inform WIC staff about the child support enforcement process.

Indiana

Major components of Indiana's efforts to promote responsible fatherhood include:

- Restoring Fatherhood supports responsible fatherhood and healthy life choices for young fathers and males that are not fathers through grants to programs.
- Reducing Early Sex and Pregnancy by Educating Children and Teens (RESPECT) encourages pregnancy prevention through both a statewide media campaign and grants to 60 programs that focus on abstinence education.

- □□Using Access and Visitation funds from the federal government, Indiana funds local agencies to offer mediation and other services to divorcing or non-married couples, ensuring fair access and visitation agreements.

A statewide working group of professionals and agency representatives now forms the Indiana Fathers & Families Coalition which serves to promote and champion the responsible involvement of fathers in the lives of their children and families. The Coalition shares resources and information striving to increase father's involvement with their children, increase paternity establishment and child support, improve fathers' parenting skills, improve co-parenting relationships, increase education and employability and decrease out-of-wedlock pregnancies.

Louisiana

The Young Fathers Project provides fathers with counseling services, adult basic education/GED preparation, job placement assistance, help with the child support system, and parenting classes. The project also involves fathers in peer support groups, leadership opportunities, and recreational activities with their children. Young Fathers utilizes a curriculum developed by the Partners for Fragile Families and the National Center for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership.

The Family Road of Greater Baton Rouge houses numerous community-based agencies into accessible one-stop shopping networks that are designed to build stronger, more independent families.

The Hunts Correctional Facility represents the Louisiana model for outreach to incarcerated fathers. Through the Shock Incarceration Program, men participate in classes and community meetings that address topics such as job search skills, substance abuse, and child support and visitation.

The Department of Social Services has produced videos discussing access, visitation, and child support, as well as public service announcements that feature members of the New Orleans Saints.

Maryland

The Maryland Child Support Enforcement Administration launched a debt leveraging program that targets noncustodial parents who owe large amounts in arrears. The new approach is intended to emphasize parents' emotional and psychological contributions to child development, particularly when financial difficulties become barriers to parental involvement.

The state has drafted and is seeking a sponsor for legislation that would temporarily reduce an obligor's child support obligation to \$25 per month, for as long as the obligor is incarcerated and for a 60-day period following the obligor's release. Application is limited to periods of incarceration that exceed one year, and the law does not apply if the obligor was jailed due to failure to pay support, for domestic violence or a crime against a child. The modification occurs only at the obligor's request, and only after the obligor is released, and all assets available to the obligor during the incarceration must be considered during the modification process.

Massachusetts

In 1999, the Massachusetts Department of Revenue's Division of Child Support Enforcement hired a workforce development coordinator to assist partner agencies and organizations in identifying strategies to help fathers secure gainful employment. One of the Department's first efforts was to conduct a series of job fairs in three county houses of corrections. Similarly, Massachusetts Job Training, Inc. assists individuals seeking employment. The organization partners with the judicial system to assess referred individuals' abilities and needs.

The Massachusetts Children's Trust Fund (CTF) leads statewide efforts to support parents and strengthen families, thereby preventing child abuse. CTF is a catalyst for statewide efforts to strengthen families, funding, promoting, and evaluating the most promising programs to support parents.

Over 100 parenting education and support programs are funded by CTF, including the Healthy Families Massachusetts Newborn Home

Visiting Program. This statewide initiative is funded in partnership with the Department of Public Health and offers information and support for all first-time parents age 20 and under. CTF also provides community leaders with training and resources, educates public policy makers, and brings public and private organizations together to work on behalf of children. The Father and Family Network, sponsored by the Massachusetts Children’s Trust Fund, hosts monthly luncheons for practitioners working with fathers to share best practices and provide peer support.

Minnesota

Minnesota has completed a Child Support Delivery Study that establishes a Client Analytic System. The System design segregates noncustodial parents into five major categories (based on readiness, willingness and ability to comply with child support obligations). Corresponding IV-D strategies/enforcement actions were crafted to meet the needs/situations of each NCP group – with the overriding goal to maximize the payment compliance rate in each category. Special outreach brochures aimed at each NCP category were recently distributed. In general, the NCP categories and corresponding strategies are:

Category of NCP	Strategy
Complying	Reinforce and reward
Misinformed/uninformed	Inform
Unable to pay	Enable and connect
Reluctant	Motivate and prod
Evading	Compel

Mississippi

The Mississippi Responsible Fatherhood Initiative addresses poverty, illiteracy, juvenile delinquency, child abuse and neglect, and teenage parenthood. Its mission is to train, educate, encourage, and assist fathers in becoming responsible fathers and in assuming responsibility for the growth and development of their children. Specifically, the Initiative works to assist fathers in sharing the legal, financial, and emotional responsibilities of parenthood with the

mother(s) of their children and to improve the self-image of fathers and their families.

The state coordinates services for fathers between the Department of Corrections; Department of Human Services, Child Support Enforcement and Division of Community Services; Department of Education; Mississippi Food Network; and faith-based organizations.

Missouri

Highlights of existing services to fathers and families include:

- □□Through Mediation Achieving Results for Children (M.A.R.C.H), parents receive up to four hours of free mediation. Program goals are to encourage father involvement in their children’s lives, address parents’ needs regarding access issues, reduce unnecessary litigation in courts, and reduce conflict between parents. MARCH staff screen for domestic violence and help the parents establish an enforceable order once an agreement is made.
- □□Through FUTURES, Missouri families receiving temporary assistance also receive job training, education services, child care, transportation, Medicaid, and case management services.
- □□Through Proud Parents, fathers participate in a one-time parenting workshop discussing fathers’ rights and responsibilities, bonding and attachment, cooperative parenting, and community resources. Workshop participants, if eligible, receive referrals to MARCH and Parents’ Fair Share.
- □□In order to enhance parents’ understanding of and access to the child support system, the Department of Child Support Enforcement and Head Start, along with local child care centers and primary health care facilities, created Parent Corners. Services and information offered at Parent Corners involve paternity establishment, health care, child development, and child care.

New Hampshire

The Department of Corrections has instituted the Family Connections Project. The program seeks to reduce delinquent behavior, such as drug use, among children with incarcerated parents by serving incarcerated parents, their spouses/partners, and their children. The majority of male inmates are fathers. Program components include training for correctional officers to conduct parenting education classes and support group activities for inmates, monitored parent-child visits in an area designed to provide healthy family interaction, a library of children's books and parenting resources, and outreach to spouses/partners.

New Jersey

The state's Department of Human Services provide a range of services to fathers, including group counseling, peer counseling, and mentoring:

- Operation Fatherhood provides job training, job support, and job placement services meant to enhance noncustodial fathers' wage earnings and child support compliance.
- Parents Anonymous of New Jersey coordinates support groups for young minority fathers. The groups, titled Parenting Our Successors in Society Effectively (POSSE), seek to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect among young minority fathers. They provide participants with affirming experiences that support the development of leadership skills.

New York

The state has a "minimum order" program designed to encourage low-income noncustodial parents to participate in the order establishment process, thereby avoiding default situations, potentially higher current support amounts, and potential future arrearages. If the low-income noncustodial parent appears, the program provides that the current child support amount, whenever appropriate, is set at \$25 per month, and that arrears are capped at \$500.

Puerto Rico

The Commonwealth conducts outreach to employees expected to experience layoffs or similar workforce reductions. The outreach is initiated based upon information provided by the Department of Labor (notice of plant closings, etc.), and takes place at the actual site of employment. The outreach visit is conducted by a task force representing all the government agencies, including IV-D. At times, requests for modifications can be completed on-site.

Rhode Island

The Male Responsibility Project (MRP) was developed and is administered by the Adolescent Self-Sufficiency Collaborative (ASSC) of the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS). ASSC serves pregnant and custodial teen parents to ensure the long-term economic independence of adolescent parents and their children. As part of MRP, male counselors from community-based organizations already under contract with DHS work to prevent too-early fatherhood. MRP serves ten cities and towns, including the five cities with the highest rates of teen pregnancy in Rhode Island.

The Young Father Program offers fathers between the ages of 13 and 19 weekly counseling on issues related to responsible fatherhood. Some of the young men are currently incarcerated at the Rhode Island Training Institute; they will be provided with a contact in the community for follow-up upon release.

The Rapid Job Entry Program, offered by the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training (RIDLT), receives referrals from Family Court when a father is unable to support his children due to unemployment or skills deficiencies. RIDLT performs an assessment and either assists the father in securing a job or, if appropriate, refers the noncustodial father to education, skills training, or other activities resulting in employment.

The Department of Health provides a free vasectomy to volunteers as another option to prevent unwanted fatherhood.

Virginia

The state has initiated a pilot “Barriers Project” that provides the Family Court with an alternative to jailing child support obligators whose payments are irregular and who have substantial arrears. Instead, eligible obligators are sentenced to the Barriers Project, a case management process that relies on a network of community agencies that can identify and address barriers to payment, such as transportation, drug/alcohol addiction, irregular work patterns, conflicts with custodial parent or children, etc.

Wisconsin

The Wisconsin Fatherhood Initiative (WFI) was launched in 1998. Once WFI was established, one of its first directives was to determine the degree to which state sanctioned programs and policies promoted or discouraged father involvement. Through WFI, Wisconsin policymakers also made community grants available to develop local fatherhood programs and conducted an extensive public awareness campaign promoting responsible fatherhood, including print materials, an 800 number, collaborations with the Milwaukee Brewers, a summit, and a website.

Features of the Wisconsin Fatherhood Initiative include the following:

- □The Children’s Trust Fund supports Family Resource Centers and community-based child abuse prevention programs that offer programs targeted specifically for fathers.
- Wisconsin Works offers employment preparation activities— such as job search assistance, job skills training, basic education, and/or work experience opportunities—to unemployed or underemployed noncustodial parents who meet eligibility criteria and/or to the second parent in a two-parent family. Services are available for low-income families who are not eligible for the full range of employment services. They include job creation, wage subsidies, on-the-job training, job readiness, job placement and post-employment services, community service work or work experience; and job retention and supportive

services such as transportation and child care.

- □Children First provides unemployed or underemployed noncustodial parents who face incarceration because of unpaid child support the opportunity to participate in work experience and training as well as fathering activities instead of going to jail. The Department of Workforce Development is helping the State Department of Corrections develop and fund employment-focused models of offender supervision. The intent is to promote stable employment as the noncustodial parent provides support to his family and to decrease the likelihood of re-offending. Also, maximum, medium, and minimum male offender facilities and centers in Wisconsin offer fathering/parenting programs.
- The Non-Custodial Parents Project provides training activities that help newly released offenders balance work responsibilities with the responsibilities of daily living, including parenting skills that promote responsible fathering and consistent child support payments.
- The Veterans Assistance Program offers counseling and assistance to noncustodial parent veterans and helps homeless veterans and those at risk of becoming homeless receive job training, education, counseling, and rehabilitative services.

Sources/Additional Resources

Summaries presented here were excerpted from the following sources. They contain additional material not presented here regarding best practices and innovative programs at the state level:

Best Practices and Good Ideas in Child Support Enforcement 2002. Office of Child Support Enforcement, September 2002
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pubs/2002/best/

The Massachusetts Children’s Trust Fund. Volunteer Information Center http://www.volunteersolutions.org/mit/volunteer/agency/one_10329.html

Managing Child Support Arrears, A Discussion Framework. Office of Child Support Enforcement, 2002

[www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pubs/2002/reports/arr
ears/](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pubs/2002/reports/arr
ears/)

*State Policy Series on Family Support and Father
Involvement.* National Center on Fathers and
Families.

www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu/statepol/statepol.htm

The Georgia Fatherhood Program,
www.state.ga.us/GAFatherhood/

Part III: National Policies Affecting Fathers and Families

The 1996 welfare reform legislation transformed social service delivery in the United States, giving states more flexibility to customize programs. The current Administration seeks to broaden state flexibility in other areas that affect child and family welfare. Keeping abreast of these national policy initiatives is critical to maintaining father- and family-friendly policies at the state level.

Reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

The landmark 1996 welfare reform law which created Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) must be reauthorized this year. As of the writing of this document, the Administration submitted its proposals to Congress, a bill passed the House in February (H.R. 4), and efforts are focused in the Senate. Major provisions of H.R. 4 include:

1. Increases the TANF work/activity requirement from 30 hours to 40 hours. Recipients must engage in one of a limited number of "direct work" activities for at least 24 hours a week. States would have broad discretion to define what counts toward the remaining 16 hours, subject to federal regulations.
2. Raises the percent of recipients required to participate in work or job preparation activities from 50 percent to 70 percent by 2008.
3. Decreases the ability to count vocational education as a primary activity from one year to three months in a two-year period.
4. Includes \$1.2 billion in federal TANF funds for marriage promotion activities; up to \$600 million in TANF funds could also be used as state match.
 - Includes \$20 million in competitive grants for fatherhood and marriage

promotion programs, along with specified projects, media campaigns, and evaluation.

5. Increases mandatory child care funding by \$1 billion over five years.¹
6. Creates state "superwaivers," permitting the Executive Branch to waive nearly all federal laws and rules associated with a number of low-income programs, including the Food Stamp Program, Child Care and Development Block Grant, most Workforce Investment Act programs, and TANF.
7. Maintains current restrictions on access to benefits and services for legal immigrants.
8. Adds "responsible fatherhood" to the fourth goal of TANF which promotes the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

On the Senate side, Senator Jim Talent (R-MO) has introduced a bill (S. 5) that is similar to the House-passed bill. The Senate Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over TANF reauthorization, is expected to begin hearings in the Spring.

For a side-by-side comparison of recent legislative proposals for reauthorization, visit: http://www.clasp.org/Pubs/DMS/Documents/1048782368.95/CW_SBS_032703.pdf

Reauthorization of the Head Start

Head Start and Early Head Start are comprehensive child development programs that serve children from birth to age 5, pregnant women, and their families. They aim to increase the school readiness of young children in low-income families. The program presents an

¹ States receive three types of child care funding from the federal government: 1) "matching" funds, 2) "mandatory" funds which is level funding that does not require a match, and 3) "discretionary" funds which Congress votes on each year and do not require a match.

opportunity to further integrate the issue of fathers as competent parenting partners. The Head Start Act was amended on October 27, 1998 and must be reauthorized beginning in FY 2004.

As part of reauthorization, the Administration proposes to offer states the opportunity to coordinate preschool programs with Head Start. States wishing to do so must submit a state plan to the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Secretary of Education that addresses:

- Preschool Goals and Activities
- Accountability Program
- Coverage and Maintenance of Effort
- Professional Development
- Preschool Program Coordination

Under current law, the Department of Health and Human Services spends about \$165 million per year to provide technical assistance to improve Head Start programs. The administration intends to make a significant portion of this money available to states to meet their needs in designing and implementing state plans.

Reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA)

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which was enacted in 1998, is due to be reauthorized in 2003. The Administration's view on reauthorization can be found in the Department of Labor's "white paper" outlining general proposals for restructuring the Workforce Investment Act, which they released in March.² Both the House and Senate are in the process of drafting their own WIA proposals. Rep. McKeon (R-CA), introduced H.R. 1261, which adopts much but not all of the Administration's framework. In the Senate, the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee will develop its own proposals for reauthorization.

As part of reauthorization, the Administration is proposing to restructure federal job training programs. This includes merging the WIA adult program, the dislocated worker program, and Employment Service state grants into one grant

² www.doleta.gov/whatsnew/WIA_Factsheet_Final_v3.cfm.

to states totaling \$3.1 billion. At the same time, the President proposes to consolidate youth programs and target funding on out-of-school youth, while eliminating the Youth Opportunity Grants.

More detail on the Administration's proposal can be found from the Workforce Alliance at: http://www.workforcealliance.org/policy/wia_proposals.shtml/USDOL_WIA_Plan.pdf

Community and faith-based initiatives

The Bush Administration has focused on faith- and community-based organizations to deliver social services at the community level.

The \$30 million Compassion Capital Fund (CCF) funds "intermediary organizations," to help smaller faith-based and community groups operate and manage their programs effectively, access funding from varied sources, develop and train staff, expand the types and reach of social services programs in their communities, and program replication. The President's budget requests \$100 million for FY 2004. The Administration's budget proposal also includes:

- \$20 million in competitive grants for faith and community-based organizations to help non-custodial fathers be more involved in their children's lives. A similar proposal is in the House welfare reform bill.
- \$50 million in competitive grants to faith and community-based organizations providing mentors for children of incarcerated parents.
- \$10 million to provide community-based coordinated services to young pregnant and parenting women through community-based maternity group homes.

Bush's "faith-based initiative" was weakened when the Senate eliminated language alluding to religion before passed the Charity Aid, Recovery and Empowerment (CARE) Act of 2003 on April 9th. The CARE Act of 2003 is what remains of the legislation that grew out of President Bush's Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, which was presented unsuccessfully in the House of Representatives in 2001 as the Community Solutions Act. The CARE Act has yet to be reviewed by the House.

Medicaid Reform

The Bush Administration has proposed an option plan giving state governments more flexibility to cut Medicaid costs through restructuring of benefits or eligibility. States could also expand coverage areas like long-term care, allowing elderly or disabled patients more flexibility to receive home health services instead of only nursing home care. The plan would also change the way the federal government pays its share of Medicaid costs. States would receive two payments, one directed toward long-term care and the other toward acute care. States would be prohibited from changing benefits or increasing out-of-pocket costs for the neediest of Medicaid beneficiaries. States could use their flexibility only to change benefits for patients they cover on an optional basis.

States that join the optional plan would get a share of \$3.25 billion in increased federal Medicaid payments in 2004 and about \$9.5 billion more through 2010. Federal assistance is then cut for the last three years of the 10-year plan, an incentive for states to improve efficiency and cut costs in the first seven years.

As policymakers address changes to Medicaid, it will be important to address the needs of low-income fathers, many of whom lack access to health care.

Criminal Justice

The Administration's "Going Home Initiative" aims to reduce recidivism of offenders by encouraging government agencies, social service organizations, and community- and faith-based organizations to collaborate on programs to assist reentry of offenders. The funds for this Initiative are committed to various State correctional agencies which must partner with faith-based or community organizations.

The President's budget proposes \$15 million in the Department of Justice for reentry programs but would eliminate funding in the Department of Labor.

Sources for Part III:

Faith and Community-Based Initiatives (1), April 2003. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbci/activities.html>

Faith and Community-Based Initiatives (2), April 2003. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbci/grants-catalog-prisoners.html>

Milbank, Dana. "Bush Legislative Approach Failed in Faith Bill Battle," *Washington Post*, Wednesday, April 23, 2003; Page A01

Policy Agenda, National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families, 2003

"President Bush's Plan To Prepare Children For Kindergarten," News Release, Department of Health and Human Services, Feb. 3, 2003 <http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2003pres/20030203.html>

"Welfare Reauthorization Update," *The CLASP Update*. Vol. 16 No. 3, March 2003 <http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1047055726.73/view.html>

Zwillich, Todd. "Bush Administration unveils Medicaid reform plan," *Reuters Health*. 1/31/02

Part IV: Document Review

Summary

The following pages contain a brief assessment of the “father-friendliness” of documents used by the Connecticut Department of Social Services and furnished by the Connecticut Department of Child Support. This analysis was conducted by a non-custodial parent with an eye to issues which might complicate a father’s involvement with his children, and/or with the state in matters of child support.³

Overall, Connecticut has done a good job at presenting documents that are as friendly to fathers as they are to mothers. On the whole, these documents seem to be written in a way that is very gender-neutral. There are only a few instances where mothers and fathers are referred to directly. The language in these documents is supportive of a parent’s need to understand the process and ample coverage is given to explanations of the rights and responsibilities of both parents. One way in which the state might be more supportive of the noncustodial parent is by providing the names of organizations devoted to assisting fathers – in conjunction with documents that outline their rights and responsibilities.

In-State Documents

Document: Child Support and Arrearage Guidelines

This document is a twenty-five-page booklet containing the Child Support and Arrearage Guidelines regulations adopted by the Commission for Child Support Guidelines. The Schedule of Basic Child Support Obligations and prescribed worksheet are included. The booklet also includes an unofficial explanatory preamble to assist the user.

³ This analysis was written by a 32-year old noncustodial, nonresident father with a high school degree. In order to ensure that it represents his views, the father reviewed and approved minor edits.

This document is used by child support practitioners, judges, family support magistrates and the public, to understand the purposes and principles underlying the guidelines governing the Connecticut Department of Child Support. This document provides for uniformity of interpretation, of child support guidelines and regulations, by the users named above.

This document reads very much like tax return instructions. Someone who has difficulty interpreting instructions and tables might need help understanding this document. The state’s determinations are explained well and imply a great deal of fairness. The language appears gender-neutral, using the terms “obligor”, “custodial parent” and “non-custodial parent”. There is no suggestion that the father is a “bad guy” and no implication that the non-custodial parent need be the father. The document appears impersonal and explanatory.

Due to the impersonal and gender-neutral nature of the document, there is little that might “turn off” the non-custodial parent to paying child support, visiting a child or otherwise participating in the system. It might be good if the state offered assistance in understanding the document to those who admit to having difficulty understanding other similar documents, such as tax return instructions. This document steers clear of poisoning the state’s interaction with a father or mother, as it is nothing more than the publication of the guidelines that all persons must follow pursuant to Child Support and Arrearage.

Document: Child Support- a Guide to Services in Connecticut

This is the long version of the shorter “Brief Guide” described next. It is a 13-page booklet outlining the types of support a single parent is entitled to and under what conditions. There is a section on rights and responsibilities of a custodial parent, and a list of agency telephone numbers and information about separate organizations involved in child support such as “Legal Services” and “Connecticut Women’s

Education & Legal Fund". This booklet is intended for use by a custodial parent as an introduction to services and a reference as needed. Perhaps fathers could be offered similarly devoted resources as a way of enhancing the father friendliness of this document.

This booklet presents no bias regarding the sex of the parent with the exception of referrals to "establishing paternity". There is no implication that the father is a "bad guy". There is nothing here that would discourage involvement in the system; there are illustrations of fathers with children as well as mothers with children. The public policies reflected here are not "father unfriendly".

Document: Publication No. 98-6; "Child Support - A Brief Guide to Services in Connecticut"

This document is a pamphlet designed to introduce services provided by the State of Connecticut to custodial parents pursuing child support collection activities. It briefly lists benefits, responsibilities, and agencies involved in child support services, along with telephone numbers and addresses for the regional offices of the DSS and Support Enforcement Services. Custodial parents seeking benefits from the state use this pamphlet.

This document seems to be written more for a mother than a father. Though it does not imply that the father is a "bad guy," note is made of the need to establish paternity. A section on "finding absent parents" and establishing paternity suggests that fathers are more apt to be absent than mothers. Perhaps "friendlier" language would be "establishing contact with absent parents."

This pamphlet urges the custodial parent to take aggressive action to receive benefits. These actions include providing information about the non-custodial parent, and possibly testifying in court. If a non-custodial father were to read this document, he may find it threatening. It is disturbing to a cooperative father to find he is the subject of a court hearing and court orders, with penalties as enforcement incentives. Many times young people in these situations are little able to support themselves, and a court ordered

payment of any kind could generate fear and resentment. Fear that the payments may not be met, and resentment toward the custodial parent (mother) for not attempting a cooperative arrangement with the non-custodial parent (father). This fear and resentment may result in an attitude of non-involvement. Perhaps this document could be changed for the better by including the suggestion that both parents could work with each other through a mediator, thereby avoiding involvement with the court.

While the state cannot effectively "invite" absent fathers to voluntarily pay child support, writing the document in a way that invites parents to participate in the system would enhance the father-friendliness of this document.

Document: Instructions for Eligibility Determination Document W-1E

This document is an exhaustive questionnaire to determine aid eligibility. It presents no biases or implications toward either male or female parents. However, people who have difficulty understanding written instructions may need assistance understanding and completing this document.

Document: Application for Title IV-D Child Support Enforcement Services F0699N

This document is aimed at describing the non-custodial parent for use in locating them. This includes the usual address/employer info, and also height, weight, eyes and hair color, scars/tattoos and vehicle information. It does not, however imply the sex of the non-custodial parent. It does not appear "unfriendly."

Document: Superior Court- Financial Affidavit JD-FM-6

This document is a general assets/liabilities statement for either a plaintiff or a defendant for use in unspecified court proceedings. Nothing on the document suggests it is "family unfriendly."

Document: Digital Imaging Turnaround Document (TAD) W-685

This document is an internal-use document dealing with ID cards for service recipients. Nothing on the document suggests it is “family unfriendly.”

Document: Exemption Form For Jobs First W-1084

This is a form identifying reasons why an applicant should be exempt from the mandatory employment program and services provided by the state as part of the TANF program. There is nothing “unfriendly” about the document.

Document: Notice Concerning Exemption From Child Support Cooperation W-595

This document is a statement regarding an applicant’s exemption from cooperating with the state in pursuing the matter of child support. This issue is denoted as one primarily of domestic violence concern. This form is bilingual and gender-nonspecific. Nothing on the document suggests it is “family unfriendly.”

Document: Non-custodial Parent Information Sheet W-348A

This document is an internal-use document to be filled out by an interviewing agent of the Connecticut DSS. It contains fields for information, which could be used to track and locate a non-custodial parent. This form is gender nonspecific. Nothing suggests it is “family unfriendly.”

Document: Application Verification List W-1348

This document is given to applicants in order to furnish them with a written list of items which are needed by the state to determine the eligibility either of a household, an individual, or both for assistance. This document seems to serve only as a reminder, and is gender neutral. Nothing suggests it is “family unfriendly.”

Document: Reach for Jobs First, Recipient/Agency Responsibilities Addendum W-1236A

This is a document stating that the responsibilities of the agency and the responsibilities of the recipient have been discussed, understood, and to the present extent carried out. Both the caseworker and the client sign the form. There is also a signature field for an interpreter should one be needed. This document is bilingual and gender non-specific. Nothing on the document suggests it is “family unfriendly.”

Document: Law Enforcement Information Form W-1129

This document is statement regarding the recipient’s standing with the law, notifying that information regarding known felons and law-fleeing individuals who are receiving state assistance, will be given to law enforcement agencies under certain circumstances. This document is bilingual and gender-non-specific. Nothing on the document suggests it is “family unfriendly.”

Document: Recipient/Agency Responsibilities W-1236

This is like the Jobs First addendum listed above. It is an acknowledgement of the discussion and understanding of the terms and conditions for assistance through the state. It is signed by the recipient and the worker, and presents no father-friendliness issues.

Document: Client/Agency Certification W-576

This is a statement of discussion, understanding, and acceptance of the terms and conditions for the Asset Set Aside program which deals with saving for a child’s education. There are no father-friendliness issues presented here.

Document: Diversion Screening W-1239

This is an internal document used by a worker to determine if a client is a potential Diversion program participant. This document seems to have nothing to do with a client's gender.

Document: Instructions for Requesting a Medical Exemption for Yourself + Medical Report for Incapacity + Examination Request for Medical Eligibility Determination + Social Information for Incapacitated Person W-1463, W-1461, W-513, W-998

These are forms related to requests for exemption from work based on medical reasons. There are no fatherhood issues presented here.

OUT-OF-STATE DOCUMENTS**Document: Child Support Enforcement Transmittal – Initial Request UIFSA-1**

This is instructive/informational in nature and contains personal information such as name/address, date of birth, employer information, and dependent relationship information. It appears there is nothing for either parent to fill out on this document. There are no father-friendliness issues presented in the document.

Document: Uniform Support Petition UIFSA-4

This document informs a respondent of a petitioner's action or claims against them and the petitioner's request for a remedy through establishing paternity, child support, spousal support, medical coverage, attorney fees and other costs, or "other remedy" which is left blank.

If these are the father's first contact with the Connecticut DSS, they are intimidating documents. I would like to know if out-of-state fathers receive any friendly colored pamphlets with lists of numbers for assistance, or just these

rather stark and official looking documents. Perhaps this is a good opportunity to enhance the father-friendliness of the system, by issuing helpful and inviting documents to the out-of-state parent. Clearly offering mediation, as an optional remedy to a support claim would go a long way toward improving out-of-state father involvement.

Document: Affidavit in Support of Establishing Paternity UIFSA-6

This is a three-page check-box quadruplicate document used to establish paternity. It is a simple document and presents no father-friendliness issues. By completing this form, a man is given the rights and responsibilities of fatherhood as provided for by law, and is legal recognized as the father of a particular child.

Document: General Testimony UIFSA-5

A ten-page exhaustive statement of all the legal relationships, personal physical, financial, professional, and property information, and "other pertinent information" regarding the parents involved in a case. This document refers to "obligors" and "obligees", is impersonal in tone, and presents no father-friendliness issues. Admittedly, involvement in any kind of legal proceeding is unpleasant, but insofar as it is necessary, this document is friendly enough. These out-of-state documents offer a good opportunity to enhance the father-friendliness of Connecticut's Department of Child Support by providing to the out-of-state parent with literature that is inviting in tone and that offers resources to both mothers and fathers.