

Policies and Programs Affecting Fathers

A State-by-State Report

Jessica Pearson, PhD, Director, Center for Policy Research, Denver, Colorado

Rachel Wildfeuer, PhD Candidate, Research Analyst, Center for Policy Research, Denver, Colorado

Chapter 12: Conclusions

This report presented its rationale^a as well as information on policies and programs that support the engagement of fathers with their children in the 50 states and the District of Columbia in ten areas of public policy: child support,^b child welfare,^c criminal justice,^d early childhood,^e education,^f employment,^g family law,^h food and housing,ⁱ health and mental health,^j and responsible fatherhood.^k Where feasible, we presented data on low-income, nonresident fathers; the challenges they face in engaging with their children; and the policies and programs that states have adopted that have the potential to support parent-child contact.

Looking across the chapters of our report we find the following patterns:

There are few state policies and programs that explicitly target fathers, especially those who are low-income and nonresident. Although low-income, nonresident fathers have the greatest need for support, there are few policies and programs that focus on them. The exceptions are in the areas of child support, family law, and responsible fatherhood. Thus, in the child support realm, states have various policies to adjust their child support guidelines for very low-income obligors, establish interest charges on unpaid child support and thresholds for modifying orders, create jobs programs for unemployed noncustodial parents, pass through child support to families on public assistance, and reduce or eliminate unpayable child support debts. States have family laws and programs that target all fathers, including those who are low-income and nonresident. They consider the status of shared custody following divorce, divorce mediation and parent education requirements, putative father registries, custody presumptions for unmarried parents, the use of state Access and Visitation (AV) grant funds, and the adjustment of child support orders to reflect varying amount of parenting time that noncustodial parents receive. With respect to responsible fatherhood, some states have commissions and non-statutory councils and committees dedicated to improving the

engagement of fathers in the lives of their children as well as annual or biannual summits on fatherhood. States have also been the setting for federal Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) grants which provide programming to low-income fathers designed to improve their economic circumstances, the quality of their parenting behavior, and their coparenting relationships.

There are many state policies and programs that affect fathers. Many policies and programs affect all fathers, including those who are low-income and nonresident. Thus, minimum wage laws in the states are relevant for all low-income populations, including nonresident fathers. Where they exist, state Earned Income Tax Credits (EITCs) provide additional, limited tax benefits for workers without dependent children, which is how nonresident fathers are classified, although only four states have expanded their state EITC for workers without qualifying children and only New York and the District of Columbia provide more generous tax credits to noncustodial parents who pay child support. Male ex-itsers (those who completed, withdrew, or transferred) who had low-income status at program entry from Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs offering individualized and/or training services include an unknown proportion of nonresident fathers, although the small number of individuals served in this program limits its impact for any subgroup. While only two criminal justice policies explicitly deal with the relationship between incarcerated fathers and their children (e.g., taking family relationships into account during sentencing and providing parenting programming in correctional facilities), many other programs and policies affect incarcerated fathers and their children. These include policies dealing with diversion, pardons, revision of criminal records, reducing rates of parole and probation revocations, and improving the employment application process and occupational licensing for ex-offenders. In a similar vein, low-income, nonresident fathers may benefit from state programs to improve the chances of educational success for disadvantaged students. This includes the use of mentoring, academic achievement programs, charter schools and academies that create more responsive environments within larger schools, credit recovery initiatives that permit students who fail classes to make them up through online formats, alternative graduation options, and postsecondary programs at community colleges to reach and engage disadvantaged students and parents.

Many states have not enacted supportive father policies. In addition to being rare, many of the father policies that exist fail to help low-income, nonresident fathers support their families and engage with their children. For example, in the child support area, 22 states have adopted adjustments in their child support guidelines for low-income parents that fall below the federal poverty guideline for one person in 2021 (\$1,073 per month). Similarly, 24 states retain child support that is collected from fathers whose children are receiving public assistance and use the money to reimburse the state for welfare rather than passing it along to families. In the child welfare area, father engagement in foster care cases in virtually all states falls far below mother engagement. And while 20 states report that they train workers on father engagement, only four states have dedicated father engagement staff or contractors who attempt to locate and engage fathers at the outset of a child welfare case. In the criminal justice area, only 14 states offer broader felony and misdemeanor relief and only 12 do automatic record clearing and expungement of some convictions. With respect to facilitating post-incarceration employment, 18 states and the District of Columbia limit the ability of employers to ask about criminal history at application for public and private jobs, but 14 states do not in either public or private sectors. With respect to parent-child relationships during incarceration, only seven states have enacted legislation to consider preserving parental relationships during sentencing and facility selection, and 20 states and the District of Columbia offer parenting classes for fathers in every Department of Corrections facility.



In every state, prenatal, postpartum, and early childhood interventions tend to focus exclusively on mothers and babies. The exceptions are breastfeeding initiatives for fathers in 22 states, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) fatherhood initiatives in 10 states, and Healthy Start programs which recently required that every project in the 34 states and the District of Columbia in which they operate serve no less than 100 fathers/male partners per calendar year to qualify for funding.

Many policy metrics for low-income fathers reflect long-standing regional patterns that track with state wealth, their political classification, the overall generosity of their safety net programs, and outcomes for women and children.

States that fail to support fathers, especially those who are low-income and nonresident, tend to be those that fare the worst in the nation in their treatment of women and children, too. For example, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Kids Count Data Book identifies distinct regional variations in child well-being. Five of the top 10 states in terms of overall child well-being are in the Northeast (Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Maine, and New Jersey), while, with the exception of Alaska, the 17 lowest ranked states are in Appalachia as well as the Southeast and Southwest (New Mexico, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, Alabama, Texas, Arizona, Arkansas, West Virginia, Alaska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Florida, and North Carolina). Most states that fall short have done so for many years, with all but three of the states ranked at the bottom 20 in the 2021 Kids Count Data Book in that same category a decade ago.¹ In a similar vein, the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center identifies seven states that have not fully implemented any of the five effective policies they identify as fostering the nurturing environments infants and toddlers need (Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Wyoming). At the opposite end of the spectrum, they identify four jurisdictions that have fully implemented all five (California, District of Columbia, Massachusetts, and New Jersey) and eight states that have implemented four out of five (Connecticut, Maine, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington).² Finally, a 2018 study of shared custody patterns in the 50 states and the District of Columbia found that parenting time presumptions varied by the political classification of the states. Shared custody was the norm in 59% of purple states (those that have both liberals and conservatives), with fathers getting an average of 3,500 hours of parenting time per year. It was less common in blue states (those that have more liberals), where fathers got an average of 3,200 hours, and far less common in red states (those that have more conservatives), where fathers got an average of only 2,800 hours.³

The following are examples of regional differences in policies for fathers in this study, as well as some patterns that defy tidy classifications:

- Twelve mostly southern and western states have harsh policies on at least five of the six child support indicators featured in the Child Support chapter of this report (Arizona, Arkansas, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Tennessee). To contrast, 12 jurisdictions on the two coasts and in the West had positive policies on at least five of the six child support policy indicators (California, Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Virginia, and Washington).

1 Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2021). *KIDS COUNT data book: State trends in child well-being*. Retrieved from <https://www.aecf.org/resources/2021-kids-count-data-book>.

2 Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center. (2021). *2021 Prenatal-to-3 state policy roadmap*. Child and Family Research Partnership, LBJ School of Public Affairs, The University of Texas at Austin. Retrieved from <https://pn3policy.org/pn-3-state-policy-roadmap-2021/>.

3 CustodyXChange. (2018). *How much custody time does dad get in your state?* Retrieved from <https://www.custodyxchange.com/topics/research/dads-custody-time-2018.php>.

- In the criminal justice area, eight states in the Northeast and the South received an "A" regarding their use of pardoning and/or the use of judicial expungement or sealing for pardoning (Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina).
- The 14 states with broader felony and misdemeanor relief laws are geographically heterogeneous (Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, and Washington).
- The 19 states that make deferred adjudication broadly available are also geographically diverse (Alabama, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia).
- On the other hand, the seven jurisdictions with robust (California, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Minnesota, New York, and Wisconsin) and the 11 states with minimal (Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington) regulation of both public and private employment to reduce discrimination based on criminal record are decidedly blue or purple.
- Additionally, the few states that have passed legislation taking family relationships into account during sentencing are almost exclusively blue (California, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Oregon, Tennessee, and Washington).

Many supportive policies and programs do not exist at scale. Research shows that child support debt is particularly toxic for children and that robust jobs and debt compromise programs can boost the payment of current support and reduce debt.⁴ Nevertheless, only 13 states have jobs programs for noncustodial parents that are statewide in scope, and only 10 states and the District of Columbia have robust programs to reduce or eliminate unpayable child support debt. Huge declines in appropriations for the WIOA Adult Program between 2009 and 2017 mean that even though the U.S. Department of Labor began to require that American Job Center staff prioritize low-income populations for individualized and/or training services, few are able to participate. Thus, in FY 2019, the number of male exiters from the WIOA Adult Program nationally who had low-income status at program entry and received individualized or training services was only 30,268 and 25,277, respectively. Although CenteringPregnancy, a group prenatal care program that is built on the inclusion of both the birthing person and a support person (typically a father), is offered at 540 sites in 47 states and the District of Columbia, the percentage of pregnant people that use CenteringPregnancy ranges from 0.4% in Tennessee to 9.6% and 9.0% in Maine and Vermont, respectively, with the District of Columbia registering the highest proportion at 14.2% in 2019. In a similar vein, although 89% of high schools in the United States offer credit recovery programs that allow students who have failed a high school class to earn credit by successfully redoing the coursework or retaking the class online, nine states had participation rates of 3% or less and only four states and the District of Columbia had high participation rates of 10% or more. And although researchers find strong returns for low-income youths or adults who complete at least a year of community college or a certificate program in a high-demand occupation or sector, the availability of programs to support low-income students at community colleges remains extremely limited. Only 13 states provide coordinated single stop services to low-income individuals and families, primarily on community college campuses. And while 41 states and the District of Columbia had at least one institution of higher education that received a federal Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) grant to assist parent students with childcare, the total amount distributed through the CCAMPIS program in FY 2020 was only \$45,648,300.

4 Nepomnyaschy, L., Emory, A. D., Eickmeyer, K. J., Waller, M. R., & Miller, D. P. (2021). Parental debt and child well-being: What type of debt matters for child outcomes? *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 7(3), 122–151.

Other supportive programs have only been conducted on a pilot basis as part of federal demonstration projects with limited geographical and numerical reach. For example, a recently concluded federal demonstration project to strengthen the engagement of fathers and paternal relatives with children involved in the child welfare system conducted culture change efforts with only 57 child welfare staff members across four states. While Healthy Start programs require that each program serve at least 100 fathers/male partners per calendar year, there are only 101 Healthy Start programs located in 34 states and the District of Columbia. While 42 states receive basic Tier I funds for apprenticeship programs from the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, they top out at \$450,000, with only 11 states receiving Tier II funding ranging from \$3 to \$9 million. In the family law area, parent education and mediation programs for divorcing couples with minor-aged children are discretionary in many states, unavailable in many jurisdictions, and inaccessible to nonmarital parents who obtain child support orders with ease but typically must file a petition in a separate court to obtain a parenting time order. State AV grant awards to improve safe contact between noncustodial parents and their children are frozen at their 1997 levels and translate into only pennies per child support case. Although domestic violence is a serious barrier to the exercise of safe parenting time, the Supervised Visitation Network, a national membership association for providers, reports only 590 members with 24 states reporting 10 or fewer members and only three states reporting 50 or more.

Many needed policies require changes at the federal level, although some states manage to pursue more inclusive policies despite federal limitations, while others resist federal opportunities. Federal limitations can have a chilling effect on state policies. By the same token, states can ignore federal opportunities. Here are some examples:

- In child support, the federal government normally reimburses each state for 66% of all allowable expenditures on child support activities, but employment services, debt compromise programs, and parenting time interventions are currently not allowable activities. As a result, only a few states use Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds, child support incentive funds, and state appropriations for "unallowable" activities that benefit low-income fathers and their families.
- Another federal policy that discourages state child support agencies from passing through collected child support to families previously on public assistance is the federal retention of a portion of retained collections. Only five states pay money to families who no longer receive public assistance that would normally be used to pay off state-owed child support arrears, and only one state passes through all child support to families currently receiving public assistance (26 states and the District of Columbia pass through \$50-\$200/month).
- Since most of the 30 states and the District of Columbia that have a state EITC calculate it as a percentage of the federal EITC, expanding the maximum federal EITC for childless workers (which was done for Tax Year 2021 under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)) and broadening the eligibility requirement are keys to expanding the benefit for nonresident fathers who are treated as childless workers. Only four states and the District of Columbia have expanded their state EITC for workers without qualifying children, and only New York and the District of Columbia have an EITC for noncustodial parents who pay child support.
- The federal government excludes individuals from public housing for certain types of drug and sexual offenses, but local Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) have discretion to craft eligibility criteria for prospective tenants. Despite urgings by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and advocates to be more lenient, PHAs have typically extended the denial to prospective tenants with criminal records (regardless of conviction) and utilized extended "look back periods." States also have the flexibility to lift

or modify the lifetime ban on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) receipt that the federal government imposes on individuals with previous drug felony convictions. To date, 28 states and the District of Columbia have lifted the ban entirely; one state has retained the full drug felony ban; and 21 states have modified it by limiting the drug felonies subject to the restriction, using temporary bans rather than a permanent one, and/or requiring enrollment in a drug education or treatment program

- Although states can improve the health status of low-income men, including fathers, by adopting the Medicaid expansion that extends Medicaid coverage for low-income adults to 138% of the federal poverty level, 12 states have declined to implement the expansion. The average rate of health insurance coverage for males in the 39 jurisdictions that have expanded coverage is 13.6%, as compared with 7.6% in the 12 states that have not.

Performance measures and targets on father engagement are needed with appropriate incentives and sanctions.

Measurement of father engagement is a needed first step to improving father inclusion, but reliable metrics are rarely available in most areas of family life including child welfare, early childhood, education, employment, food and housing, and health and mental health. In the domains that have metrics that explicitly pertain to nonresident parents, who are typically fathers (child support, family law, and responsible fatherhood), states are not incentivized to adopt policies that support father engagement. Thus, while child support agency performance in the states is assessed and rewarded according to five congressionally mandated performance measures (paternity establishment, order establishment, collections on current support, collections on arrears, and cost effectiveness), none pertain explicitly to the non-financial involvement of fathers and/or the policies that might enhance child support payment performance by low-income, nonresident fathers. States might be legitimately incentivized to adopt policies and programs that remove barriers to father payment and involvement by creating a new performance measure for this purpose.

In addition to being unavailable, there is resistance to including new metrics on father involvement in some policy areas. One is in the area of home visiting. Thus, although the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Health Resource and Services Administration (HRSA) proposed to include a new performance item on father engagement in home visits for the Material, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program in 2022, it was dropped when the reporting requirements were finalized. As a result, there continues to be no federal requirement to include fathers and/or to measure their participation in federally funded home visiting programs that served over 140,000 parents and children and provided more than 925,000 home visits in all 50 states and the District of Columbia in 2020.

In contrast, Head Start and Early Head Start programs (which may also include home visits but are more often based in centers) have an established framework and series of metrics designed to enhance the engagement of fathers. While programs are not required to use the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework, it provides an organizational guide for collaboration among families, programs, and community service providers that includes strategies to engage fathers. More to the point, the Office of Head Start's Program Information Report provides national- and state-level information on the number of fathers/father figures engaged in various Head Start program activities.

Making father inclusion a funding requirement is another way to achieve father engagement. As previously noted, Healthy Start programs currently require that every Healthy Start project serve no less than 100 fathers/male partners as a condition of funding and that they report annually on their progress toward



meeting the goal of father/male partner involvement during pregnancy and following birth. And a HUD grant released in 2016 that required applicants to demonstrate compliance with its nondiscrimination policy led the Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services to require family emergency shelters in the city to admit fathers as residents, which most shelters promptly did.

There are new opportunities for states to help low-income fathers and their families. Although many needed investments require the passage of broader legislation, there are current, unprecedented opportunities for states to support the well-being of children and their families, including low-income, nonresident fathers. They lie in growing state tax revenues and budget surpluses that nearly every state is experiencing, as well as the influx of federal recovery dollars through the ARPA, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022. These budgetary surpluses and federal funding opportunities provide state and local leaders the chance to make historic investments in low-income families, including fathers. All states, including poorer states and those that have consistently fallen short on various rankings of state policies that affect children and their families, will have an opportunity to put some of their federal pandemic aid toward low-income housing and job training for underserved populations, use its infrastructure funding for projects in historically disadvantaged communities, and pursue Environmental and Climate Justice Block Grants within the Inflation Reduction Act to invest in workforce development in communities with low-income and/or minority populations. According to a recent report on ARPA spending and U.S. Commerce Department grants, this may have begun to happen with total planned workforce spending by states and local governments totaling \$1.1 billion.⁵

Limitations of this Study and Next Steps

Missing Information on Many Important Areas

Many important measures of father engagement and impact are not tracked by federal and state agencies. For example, in the child support area, there is no national information on the use of income imputation and default orders when a noncustodial parent fails to appear at an order-establishing proceeding and/or when reliable information on earnings and income is not available. We also lack information on the extent to which impactful enforcement actions are taken automatically without any review by a worker. Thus, in many states, child support agencies suspend driver's licenses, revoke passports, and attach bank accounts when certain debt thresholds are reached and the proscribed warning letters have been sent to delinquent obligors. It is not known whether these written notifications reach the targeted noncustodial parent, his reasons for nonpayment, and/or whether services such as employment programs have been offered. In the child welfare area, we do not know how many fathers with children in the child welfare system have been located and contacted. Nor do we know whether child welfare workers have used effective location resources to find fathers and paternal relatives, including those maintained by the child support agency to which they may access. As previously noted, home visiting programs do not track the participation of fathers and father engagement is not a required metric by HRSA which funds the MIECHV Program. Since Head Start researchers credit the presence of male staff to successful father engagement, it would also be important for child and family programs to track the number of males and fathers hired as staff. Father metrics are totally missing in the education area. We do not know about male participation in alternative high school graduation options, initiatives to improve high school graduation rates, postsecondary education programs for low-

5 Farmer, L. (2022). *The billion dollar jobs push using ARPA funds*. Route Fifty. Retrieved from <https://www.route-fifty.com/finance/2022/08/billion-dollar-arpa-jobs-push/375910/>.

income students, and career and technical education (CTE) programs. Future data gathering efforts should address this omission and generate and report breakdowns on participation and outcome by sex and race.

Lack of Data and Analysis on Racial and Ethnic Disparities

Throughout the nation, people of color are more likely to experience institutional barriers that prevent the economic and social well-being of themselves and their families. People of color are also disproportionately likely to navigate the civil court system without legal representation and consequently experience a civil justice gap.⁶ Thus, because they face difficulty finding and maintaining jobs that would allow them to reliably pay child support, many fathers of color incur significant child support arrears and face harsh enforcement methods that include drivers' and occupational license suspensions and civil contempt actions that sometimes result in incarceration. Qualitative research on 69 child support enforcement hearings in a large urban, suburban, and smaller urban court found that although court actors cited a "colorblind" approach to child support enforcement, fathers repeatedly raised questions of race and racial equality during their court hearings dealing with nonpayment of support. Researchers conclude that the colorblind approach adopted by courts and child support agencies fails to consider the race-based injustice that men of color experience in the labor market. The net result is further discrimination and increasing racial bias, translating to unrealistically high orders that go unpaid, burdensome child support debt, and harsh enforcement remedies including incarceration.⁷

Future policy analyses need to examine the extent of racial and ethnic disparities in the states and innovative policy responses to address these disparities. One challenge is the lack of accurate information on the racial and ethnic characteristics of clients in various public programs and agencies. Typically, racial and ethnic data is treated as an optional field in data collection systems maintained by child support agencies, courts, and other human services programs. This makes it impossible to assess the racial and ethnic profile of individuals subject to various policies and procedures. Even when this information is tracked, as in the WIOA programs, it is impossible to simultaneously analyze participation patterns by sex and race while controlling for low-income status. To enhance our understanding of the race dynamics that shape policies and proceedings, programs and agencies must begin to collect racial and ethnic information on clients and program participants on a routine basis. In the interim, researchers should explore the use of proxy measures for the racial and ethnic characteristics of agency and program participants including those generated from census tract information if address information is provided.

Limited Research on the Impact of State Policies on Father Engagement with Children

Although researchers have been interested in the role of fathers in their children's development for many years⁸ and a recent meta-analysis found that positive father involvement is associated with improved child well-being even among unmarried, nonresident fathers,⁹ research on the effects of state-level policies on father opportunities and behaviors remains in its infancy. Simply put, few studies examine behavioral outcomes associated with varying policies in different state settings. One exception is the analysis of state laws regarding the information employers can legally consider and the availability of official criminal record

6 Sandefur, R. L. (2008). Access to civil justice and race, class, and gender inequality. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34, 339–358.

7 Brito, T. L., Pate, D. J., & W, J-H. S. (2020). Negotiating race and racial inequality in family court. *IRP Focus*, 36(4), 3–11.

8 Cabrera N., Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., Bradley, R. H., Hofferth, S., & Lamb, M. E. (2000). Fatherhood in the twenty-first century. *Child Development*, 71(1), 127–136.

9 Adamsons, K., & Johnson, S. K. (2013). An updated and expanded meta-analysis of nonresident fathering and child well-being. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 27(4), 589–599.

information on the employment of fathers with criminal records.¹⁰ This research combines original policy data across the United States linked with nine years of longitudinal survey data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS), a population-based study of 5,000 children born in large U.S. cities between 1998 and 2000. Among other things, FFCWS includes data on 3,120 fathers interviewed up to six times over a 15-year period and takes advantage of variation over time to explore how these policies are related to employment outcomes among fathers with and without a criminal record,¹¹ as well as their formal child support payments, accrual of arrears, and contributions of in-kind or informal cash support to their children.¹² In another analysis by these same authors using the FFCWS, associations between parental debt and socio-emotional outcomes among nine- and fifteen-year-old children who have a nonresident father are explored. The authors conclude that child support arrears, but not other types of parental household debt, are associated with worse outcomes and that these associations become stronger as children age.¹³ And in a third analysis using FFCWS, these authors examine the impact of different state EITCs on nonresident fathers' material contributions to his child including formal child support, informal cash support, and in-kind support. Although they find no association between EITC and material contributions which they attribute to the low level of childless EITC benefits, they do find an increase in informal cash support among nonresident fathers who have a new resident child.¹⁴ Finally, an examination of a 2014 Wisconsin pilot project that reduced the amount of interest due on child support arrears from 1% per month to 0.5% found that the reduction led to significant reductions in total arrears growth as well as intended increases in payments towards interest and arrears.¹⁵ More of this type of research is needed to make the connections between state policy, father behavior, and child outcomes.

Need to Update this Compilation on a Regular Basis

Policy change occurs regularly. A year after the release of the first Prenatal-to-3 State Policy Roadmap, the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center reported that five states had fully implemented at least one of the five roadmap policies that the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center had identified as effective in fostering nurturing environments that infants and toddlers need, and many more states were considering legislation to adopt at least one. In addition, many states were investing in evidence-based strategies through legislative or administrative action.¹⁶ Like the Prenatal-to-3 State Policy Roadmap, this state-by-state examination of father-inclusive policy needs to be regularly updated. The update would inform states on how they are doing and the progress that they are making. This report has been researched and written with the internal support of the Center for Policy Research, a small independent nonprofit organization, without federal or foundation assistance. Hopefully, future updates and analysis activities will attract external support so that state efforts and accomplishments in these areas can be monitored and highlighted.

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- 10 Emory, A. D., Haralampoudis, A., & Nepomnyaschy, L. (2019). State policies and employment outcomes among fathers with criminal records. *Fatherhood Research & Practice Network*. Retrieved from <https://www.frpn.org/asset/state-policies-and-employment-outcomes-among-fathers-criminal-records>.
- 11 Emory, A. D. (2019). *Unintended consequences: Protective state policies and the employment of fathers with criminal records* (WP19-04-FF). Princeton University. Retrieved from <https://fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/sites/g/files/toruqf2001/files/wp19-04-ff.pdf>.
- 12 Emory, A. D., Nepomnyaschy, L., Waller, M. R., Miller, D. P., & Haralampoudis, A. (2020). Providing after prison: Nonresident fathers' formal and informal contribution to children. *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 6(1), 84–112.
- 13 Nepomnyaschy, L., Emory, A. D., Eickmeyer, K. J., Waller, M. R., & Miller, D. P. (2021). Parental debt and child well-being: What type of debt matters for child outcomes? *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 7(3), 122–151.
- 14 Haralampoudis, A., Nepomnyaschy, L., Miller, D., & Waller, M. (2021, March). *States' earned income tax credits and nonresident fathers' material contributions to their children* [Paper presentation]. Annual Meetings of the Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management, Hybrid.
- 15 Mayer, D. R., & Riser, Q. (2021, March). *Slowing the "vicious cycle": The effects of reducing the interest rate on child support arrears* [Paper presentation]. Annual Meetings of the Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management, Hybrid.
- 16 Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center. (2021). *2021 Prenatal-to-3 state policy roadmap*. Child and Family Research Partnership, LBJ School of Public Affairs, The University of Texas at Austin. Retrieved from <https://pn3policy.org/pn-3-state-policy-roadmap-2021/>.

- ^a **Chapter 1: Introduction** described the scope of the report and its rationale. While there are several excellent reports that assess the state of America's families and children for the 50 states and the District of Columbia, with the exception of state minimum wage laws and family leave policies, they generally lack indicators that pertain to fathers. In cataloguing what states are doing with respect to low-income, nonresident fathers, this report establishes a baseline of supportive father policies against which future change might be assessed and highlights examples of supportive policy and programs that interested states might adopt.
- ^b **Chapter 2: Child Support** examined how states and the District of Columbia handle six child support issues that affect low-income fathers. This included whether and how states adjust child support orders so that they can support themselves and also pay support, limit the growth of arrears through the interest they charge on past due child support, invite the modification of child support orders by using low minimum change requirements, help unemployed and underemployed fathers in the child support program find jobs through dedicated programs, distribute collected child support to families receiving cash benefits rather than sending it to the state for welfare cost recovery, and reduce unpayable child support debt through the compromise of state-owed arrears.
- ^c **Chapter 3: Child Welfare** examined the status of father engagement in child welfare cases in the fifty states and the District of Columbia. Drawing from Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSRs), Child and Family Services Plans (CFSPs), federal research and demonstration projects, Children's Trust Programs, and recent legislative trends, this compilation shows that all states need to take more concerted and focused steps to identify, locate, and engage fathers, including collaborating with child support agencies for location resources and coordinating with fatherhood organizations to strengthen outreach. While some child welfare agencies conduct training programs on father engagement, only four states have added staff or contractors with explicit father engagement responsibilities.
- ^d **Chapter 4: Criminal Justice** examined state-level policies that may help to avoid incarceration, lessen the duration of incarceration, facilitate reintegration, and foster parent-child connections during incarceration. The chapter discussed initiatives dealing with diversion, deferred adjudications, pardons, revision of juvenile and adult criminal records, limitations on the information that employers have about an applicant's criminal record during the application and occupational licensing processes, reforming parole and probation to increase rates of success, taking family relationships into account during sentencing, and providing parenting programming in correctional facilities.
- ^e **Chapter 5: Early Childhood** examined a variety of prenatal, postpartum, and early childhood interventions, nearly all of which focus almost exclusively on mothers and children. The exceptions to this are Healthy Start programs and Head Start and Early Head Start programs, which have performance standards that involve father engagement and provide programs with specific inclusion strategies. Some states make specific efforts to include fathers in breastfeeding initiatives and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) programs.
- ^f **Chapter 6: Education** highlighted some of the ways states can reduce educational disparities and improve educational achievement for low-income men and fathers. We reviewed access to services to boost high school graduation rates and achieve alternative certification; programs to make postsecondary education more accessible and affordable to vulnerable low-income populations; and career and technical education (CTE) programs for secondary, postsecondary, and adult populations, including parents.
- ^g **Chapter 7: Employment** discussed a variety of state-level initiatives that have the potential to improve employment and earnings among less-educated and minority men, many of whom are fathers. This includes minimum wage laws, state Earned Income Tax Credits (EITCs), and prioritizing the enrollment of disadvantaged individuals in core workforce programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).
- ^h **Chapter 8: Family Law** addressed state policies on court-ordered custody arrangements and court-authorized services to help divorcing parents generate agreements about how the child will spend time with each of them and maintain contact when there are concerns about safety. With respect to nonmarital families, we presented information on policies concerning paternity establishment and information on the development of parenting time plans. Additionally, and relevant for all populations, we considered adjustments to child support order levels for parenting time in state child support guidelines, as well as the problem of domestic violence and promising practices to prevent and address it.
- ⁱ **Chapter 9: Food and Housing** explored how state policies affect the incidence and mitigation of food insecurity and housing instability among low-income, nonresident fathers. This includes state agency disqualifications for participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and local housing authority rules regarding access to public housing due to criminal behavior. State child support policy also can affect eligibility for housing assistance, rental rates, and the size of the units that low-income, nonresident parents can obtain.
- ^j **Chapter 10: Health and Mental Health** looked at policies states can adopt to improve the health picture for low-income, nonresident fathers. This includes adopting the Medicaid expansion, which is associated with higher rates of male health insurance coverage; developing two-generation (2Gen) health programs for nonresident fathers and their children; and incorporating fatherhood with substance abuse treatment and other human service programs to improve father engagement, motivation, and outcomes.
- ^k **Chapter 11: Responsible Fatherhood** presented state-by-state information on programs to prevent adolescent pregnancy and encourage responsible parenting; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) expenditures on fatherhood; grants for fatherhood programs by the federal government through the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) grant program; multi-agency commissions, councils, and committees to promote father inclusion; and other 2Gen and/or anti-poverty approaches at the state level that either address fathers or might be expanded to include fathers as part of their scope.



Fatherhood Research & Practice Network

About the FRPN

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To the best of our knowledge, the information we provide is current as of report publication and/or the date indicated in the report and table sources. Nevertheless, since state policies and programs continually evolve, there are inevitable changes and developments that we have not captured. The views expressed in the report are those of the authors.

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