
DIGEST

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HB No. 572

Abstract: Establishes the Fatherhood First Initiative.

Present law establishes a program to be known as the "Fatherhood Initiative" to promote the positive involvement and interaction of fathers with their children with an emphasis on children eligible or formerly eligible for services funded by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant.

Proposed law retains present law but renames the program to the "Fatherhood First Initiative".

Present law requires the program to identify those services that effectively encourage and enhance responsible and skillful parenting and those services that increase the ability of fathers to meet the financial and medical needs of their children through employment services and child support enforcement measures. The objectives of the program shall be to:

- (1) Promote public education concerning the financial and emotional responsibilities of fatherhood.
- (2) Assist men in preparation for the legal, financial, and emotional responsibilities of fatherhood.
- (3) Promote the establishment of paternity at childbirth.
- (4) Encourage fathers, regardless of marital status, to foster their emotional connections to and financial support of their children.
- (5) Establish support mechanisms for fathers in their relationships with their children, regardless of their marital and financial status.
- (6) Integrate state and local services available for families.

Proposed law retains present law and adds the objective to promote public education concerning and increase public awareness of resources for the following areas:

- (1) Substance abuse and addiction.
- (2) Anger management and conflict resolution.

- (3) Fiscal awareness and financial literacy.
- (4) Parenting skills, child developments, and family studies.

Proposed law requires the secretary of the Dept. of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to convene and chair a Fatherhood First Council no later than Oct. 1, 2013. The secretary shall seek the advice and participation of any person, organization, or state or federal agency deemed necessary to carry out the provisions of proposed law. The secretary may designate a working group from among the members of the council to carry out specific duties required under proposed law.

Proposed law requires the Fatherhood First Council to perform the following functions:

- (1) Develop a comprehensive plan to promote the positive involvement and interaction of fathers with their children.
- (2) Conduct an evaluation of state programs, government policies, and community initiatives relative to fatherhood.
- (3) Advise the secretary of DCFS on the development of a fatherhood research and demonstration program relative to design, implementation, and evaluation pursuant to proposed law.

Proposed law provides that the membership of the council shall be appointed by the secretary and shall include but not be limited to:

- (1) The secretary of DCFS or his designee.
- (2) The secretary of the La. Workforce Commission or his designee.
- (3) The superintendent of the Dept. of Education or his designee.
- (4) The secretary of the Dept. of Public Safety and Corrections or his designee.
- (5) Two representatives of the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board.
- (6) One representative of the La. District Attorneys Association.
- (7) One representative of a regional workforce development board.
- (8) One representative of the clergy.
- (9) One representative of the Fatherhood Institute of Loyola University of New Orleans.
- (10) One member with expertise in male psychology and health.

- (11) One representative of the Second Time Around Grandparents Support Group.
- (12) The member of the La. House of Representatives representing House District No. 99 or his designee.

Proposed law requires the Fatherhood First Council to establish a comprehensive plan for the implementation of the Fatherhood First Initiative and the research and demonstration program. The plan may include but shall not be limited to the following:

- (1) A planning process that gathers input from the public through public hearings or other means.
- (2) The establishment of an inventory and evaluation of state and federal programs, community initiatives, government policies, and any other services identified that encourage and enhance responsible and skillful parenting through positive involvement and interaction with fathers and those services that increase the ability of fathers to meet the financial and medical needs of their children.
- (3) The identification of the services that can be provided to fathers including but not limited to employment services, parenting skills, teen pregnancy prevention services, educational services, child support enforcement services, paternity establishment services, custody and visitation services, conflict management services, family mediation, and any other community-based support programs providing assistance to fathers.
- (4) The identification of the characteristics that will be used to target the population to be served in each demonstration program.
- (5) A system that establishes mechanisms for voluntary and mandatory access to the services provided in the program for those individuals identified for participation including procedures for establishing and assessing the eligibility of an individual for the services provided in the program and procedures for providing guidance to courts ordering a noncustodial parent's participation in the program in addition to a child support or medical support obligation.
- (6) The identification of a case management system for the full range of services offered in the program including mechanisms for referring program participants to community-based support programs.

Present law requires the secretary of DCFS, in consultation with the executive director of the La. Workforce Commission, to establish a research and demonstration program that specifically evaluates the effectiveness and outcomes of services provided to fathers. The research and demonstration sites shall have an ability to:

- (1) Utilize existing local, state, and federal resources.

- (2) Collaborate with broad-based constituencies representing schools, municipal entities, nonprofit organizations, and other neighborhood, religious, health, and community organizations.
- (3) Provide a safe, caring environment for participants. The evaluation shall measure the effectiveness and outcomes of services in the following areas: child support and medical support, job placement and retention, increased earnings, increased visitation, family reunification, paternity establishment or adjudication, the need of a custodial parent for public and medical assistance, teen pregnancy prevention, the effect on fathers under the age of twenty-three years, low-income or unemployed fathers, educational levels, measures of emotional involvement of fathers, and the overall cost effectiveness, including a cost-benefit analysis of the services provided on an aggregate and case-by-case basis.

Proposed law retains present law and adds the following areas: substance abuse and addiction treatment, anger management and conflict resolution skills, fiscal awareness and financial literacy, and parenting skills, child development, and family studies.

Proposed law requires the Fatherhood First Council, no later than March 1, 2014, to submit an interim report relative to the status of the comprehensive plan established under proposed law to the secretary of DCFS. The secretary shall add his assessments thereto, and present the findings to the House and Senate committees on health and welfare, the House Committee on Appropriations, and the Senate Committee on Finance prior to the start of the 2014 R.S.

Proposed law requires the council, no later than March 1, 2015, to submit a final report to the secretary on the comprehensive plan which shall include:

- (1) Recommendations for the continued implementation of the Fatherhood First Initiative.
- (2) Recommendations for the expansion or statewide implementation of fatherhood programs.
- (3) The secretary shall add his assessments thereto, and present the findings to the House and Senate committees on health and welfare, the House Committee on Appropriations, and the Senate Committee on Finance prior to the start of the 2015 R.S.

(Amends R.S. 46:261)

Summary of Amendments Adopted by House

Committee Amendments Proposed by House Committee on Health and Welfare to the original bill.

1. Revised membership of the Fatherhood First Council provided for in proposed law as follows:

- (a) Reduced to one the number of representatives of the clergy.
 - (b) Specified that the member representing a local fatherhood program be a representative of the Fatherhood Institute of Loyola University.
 - (c) Added the member of the state House of Representatives representing District No. 99 or his designee as a member.
2. Deleted language referring to courts ordering participation by a noncustodial parent in the program provided for in proposed law in lieu of a child support or medical support obligation.
 3. Made technical change.