

Act Number: 09-175

Bill Number: 6486

Senate Pages: 5692-5693, 5701-5703 **5**

House Pages: 8726-8734 **9**

Committee: Children: 504-518, 533-534, 536-537, 540-546, **75**
559-562, 564-569, 617-628, 647-649, 707-708,
712-717, 720-735

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SENATE**

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from Senate Agenda Number 1, Substitute House Bill 6649, AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION.

Mr. President, would like to mark that item go, for purposes then or placing it on the Consent Calendar. Ask for suspension to mark it go.

THE CHAIR:

There's a motion on the floor for suspension of the rules on Substitute House Bill 6649. Without objection, so ordered, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Yes; thank you, Mr. President. Now would move to place House Bill 6649 on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

There's a motion to place House Bill 6649 on the Consent Calendar. Seeing no objection, so ordered, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Yes; thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, also on Senate Agenda Number 1, previously marked go was substitute for House Bill 6486, AN ACT CONCERNING RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD AND STRONG FAMILIES, would now move, Mr. President, to place that item on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

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There's a motion to place House Bill Number 6486, off the Senate Agenda Number 1, on the Consent Calendar. Without objection, so ordered, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Yes; thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, also for a marking, on Senate Agenda Number 3, would ask for a suspension to mark an item on Senate Agenda Number 3. House Bill 6394, AN ACT CONCERNING THE MILITARY FAMILY RELIEF FUND, would move for suspension to mark that item go.

THE CHAIR:

There's a motion on the floor to suspend rules to mark House Bill Number 6394 as a go, off of Senate Agenda Number 3. Seeing no objection, so ordered, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Yes; thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, now I would move to place House Bill 6394 on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

There's a motion on the floor to place House Bill Number 6394, off of Senate Agenda Number 3, on the Consent Calendar. Without objection, so ordered.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President.

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Mr. Clerk, please call Consent Calendar.

THE CLERK:

Immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate on the Consent Calendar. Will all Senators please return to the chamber. Immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate on the Consent Calendar. Will all Senators please return to the chamber.

Mr. President, those items placed on the Second Consent Calendar --

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk, please hold for a second.

I'm trying to hear the Clerk call the Consent Calendar and I'm sure you don't want to miss that vote either, so if I could have your attention and quiet, please.

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

The items placed on the Second Consent Calendar begin on Senate Agenda 1, substitute for House Bill 6486, substitute for House Bill 6649. Senate Agenda Number 3, House Bill 6394. Today's Calendar, Calendar Page 3, Calendar 317, Senate Bill 586; Calendar Page 4, Calendar 455, House Bill 5018; Calendar Page 7, Calendar Number 593, Substitute House Bill 5286; Calendar Page 8, Calendar 606, substitute

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for House Bill 5883; Calendar Page 9, Calendar 619,
House Bill 6343; Calendar 626, House Bill 6476;
Calendar 629, substitute for House Bill 6232; Calendar
Page 10, Calendar 634, House Bill 6544; Calendar 636,
substitute for House Bill 6483; Calendar Page 11,
Calendar 649, substitute for House Bill 6466; Calendar
Page 13, Calendar 663, substitute for House Bill 5254;
Calendar Page 15, Calendar 680, substitute for House
Bill 5821; Calendar Page 16, Calendar 684, House
Bill 6231; Calendar Page 17, Calendar 689, substitute
for House Bill 5421; Calendar Page 18, Calendar 695,
substitute for House Bill 6419; Calendar Page 19,
Calendar 699, substitute for House Bill 6284; Calendar
Page 21, Calendar 711, House Bill 5099; Calendar 712,
substitute for House Bill 6025; Calendar Page 22,
Calendar 718, substitute for House Bill 5861; Calendar
Page 23, Calendar 720, substitute for House Bill 5108;
Calendar Page 32, Calendar 450, House Bill 6233;
Calendar 467, substitute for Senate Bill 1031; and,
Calendar Page 35, Calendar 205, substitute for Senate
Bill 948. Mr. President, that completes the items
placed on the Second Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Will you please call the Consent Calendar? The
machine will be open.

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THE CLERK:

The Senate is now voting by roll call on the Consent Calendar. Will all Senators please return to the chamber. The Senate is now voting by roll call on the Consent Calendar. Will all Senators please return to the chamber.

THE CHAIR:

Have all Senators voted? If all Senators have voted, please check your vote. The machine will be closed. The Clerk will call the tally.

THE CLERK:

Motion is on adoption of Consent Calendar
Number 2:

Total Number Voting	36
Those voting Yea	36
Those voting Nay	0
Those absent and not voting	0

THE CHAIR:

Consent Calendar Number 2 passes.

Senator Looney.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, would move for immediate transmittal to the House of Representatives of any items voted on, on Consent Calendar Number 2, requiring additional action by the

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Necessary for Passage	72
Those voting Yea	123
Those voting Nay	20
Those absent and not voting	8

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Bill as amended is passed in concurrence.

Mr. Clerk, would you kindly call Calendar 302.

THE CLERK:

On Page 37, Calendar 302, substitute for House
Bill Number 6486, AN ACT CONCERNING RESPONSIBLE

FATHERHOOD AND STRONG FAMILIES, favorable report of
the Committee on Appropriations.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

The gentleman from Norwalk, Representative
Morris.

REP. MORRIS (140th):

Mr. Speaker, I move for acceptance of the joint
committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

The question is on acceptance passage. Will you
explain the bill please, sir.

REP. MORRIS (140th):

Mr. Speaker, the Clerk has an amendment, LCO
8599. I would ask the Clerk to please call the

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amendment and that I be granted leave of the chamber to summarize.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

The Clerk is in the possession of LCO Number 8599, which will be designated House Amendment Schedule A. Will the Clerk kindly call.

THE CLERK:

LCO Number 8599, House A, offered by
Representative Morris et al.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

The gentleman has asked leave of the chamber to summarize. Is there objection? Hearing none, please proceed, Representative Morris.

REP. MORRIS (140th):

Mr. Speaker, this amendment does several things. It's primarily technical changes dealing with reporting that specifies that there will be within available resources. Secondly, it includes language that for grant purposes that DSS is enabled to and encouraged to go after. It allows -- it specifies that experts in domestic violence shall also be considered and depended upon. And lastly, Mr. Speaker, we have language that deals with new practices and promise of practices for problem solving

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courts. I move adoption.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ALTOBELLO:

The question is on adoption. Representative Morris, would you remark any further? Remark further on House Amendment Schedule A? Representative Hovey.

REP. HOVEY (112th):

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this amendment improves the legislation and puts more teeth behind the recommendations of the court and will help to promote fatherhood across the state and encourage individuals to get the kinds of skills that they need to be interactive and proactive parents. Thank you, sir.

REP. GODFREY (110th):

Thank you, madam. Will you remark farther on House Amendment Schedule A? If not, let me try your minds. All those in favor, signify by saying, aye.

REPRESENTATIVES:

Aye.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Opposed, nay.

The ayes have it. The amendment is adopted.

Will you remark further on the bill as amended?

Representative Morris.

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REP. MORRIS (140th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this bill as amended deals on the work of the fatherhood task force, which was commissioned last year under, Speaker Aman, and continued this year and the next two years under, Speaker Donovan and President Pro Tem Donald Williams.

This bill that is before you today has been encouraged by Bill Cosby. He was a member of the -- who came to our task force and spoke about.

Mr. Speaker, furthermore the chairs of each of the committees that this amendment -- that this bill went through, the Children's Committee, the Human Services Committee, the Judiciary and the Appropriations Committee, we're proud to say today that each of the chairs and ranking members of those committees have been included in the bill and have supported it.

I'm glad to say that this is bipartisan support across the board in the spirit of the tenth anniversary of John S. Martinez Fatherhood Initiative. This is one of the best initiatives that was ever given within the country. It is a model for all other states. And hear, within the ten years, we're now going to do something very important. One of the

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first parts of this bill, Mr. Speaker, is that we now have language in here that allows us to be able to take some RBA measures to improve the effectiveness of the programs and initiatives, the objectives that we are already in with the John S. Martinez bill.

Secondarily, Mr. Speaker, this bill now allows us to be able to go after DSS to go after some monies that are expecting to come down regarding fatherhood initiatives. We will now be positioned to do that so we can further the causes of promoting responsible fatherhood.

And lastly, Mr. Speaker, this bill again seeks to apply national and best practices and problem solving courts to the docket. Certainly want to give thanks, Mr. Speaker, in addition to all of the committee chairs that this has gone through and the persons we've aforementioned. I want to give thanks to Judge Monroe, who has certainly been involved in a lot of the language that was given in terms of the provisions for providing the ability for dads to now get educated.

Rather than us incarcerating them, Mr. Speaker, we're providing education, we're providing tools. Whereby, dads will now be able to fulfill their

financial requirements under the children.

I want to thank Elaine Zimmerman and the Commission on Children who have been essential in making certain that members of the National Conference of State Legislatures were also involved in the preparation of this initiative in all that all of our efforts. People from Missouri, and Georgia came and they gave us best practices. This bill, in some way, follows the model where the state of Missouri, in its first year saved \$7 million.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill and I think each of them have already sponsored it. In the spirit of John S. Martinez, I would also encourage my colleagues that will to cosponsor this bill and help us any additional efforts are that we look forward to doing in this regard. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Thank you, sir. Gentlewoman from Monroe, Representative Hovey.

REP. HOVEY (112th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I encourage everyone to support this legislation. We know that children, who have older parents involved in their lives grow up

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stronger, better able to function in the world at large. We also know that children who have extended families grow up healthier, and wealthier, and happier. We know that we need to keep all parents engaged and that this is truly a step in an effort to help that disenfranchise one parent over another, but to keep them working together as units, working together for once in the best interests of their children.. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Thank you, madam. The gentleman from Westport, Representative Mioli.

REP. MIOLI (136th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of this bill. This -- which more than two years ago, and the -- our late colleague, Fred McMahon was one of the principle people to push for this bill. I'd like to call it the Fred McMahon Bill and I urge all my colleagues to support it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Thank you, sir. The gentleman from Griswold, representative Mikutel.

REP. MIKUTEL (45th):

Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support

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this bill. I think every child deserves a good father and this, the intent of this bill is to empower fathers to become better fathers, so I certainly support this bill.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Are you ready for the question? If so, staff and guests please come to the well of the House. Members take your seat. The machine will be open.

THE CLERK:

The House of Representatives is voting by roll call. Members to the chamber. The House is voting by roll call. Members to the chamber.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Have all the members voted? How the members voted? If all the members have voted, the machine will be locked. Clerk will take a tally, and the Clerk will announce the tally.

THE CLERK:

House Bill 6486, as amended by House A.

Total Number Voting 142

Necessary for Passage 72

Those voting Yea 142

Those voting Nay 0

Those absent and not voting 9

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DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

The bill as amended is passed.

Deputy Speaker Altobello in the Chair.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ALTOBELLO:

Are there any introductions or points of personal privilege? Representative Cook of the 65th District, you have the floor, madam.

REP. COOK (65th):

Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I rise for a point of personal privilege and introduction.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ALTOBELLO:

Please proceed, madam.

REP. COOK (65th):

Mr. Speaker, on the floor today, I have my son, who recently graduated from Roger Williams with a degree in criminal justice and psychology, graduated magna cum. I would like us to give him our warmest welcome.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ALTOBELLO:

Thank you, Representative Cook. And for the purposes of an introduction, did you give his name?

REP. COOK (65th):

**JOINT
STANDING
COMMITTEE
HEARINGS**

**SELECT
COMMITTEE
ON CHILDREN
PART 3
495 – 736**

2009

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jr SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN February 26, 2009 11:00 A.M.

CHAIRMEN: Senator Musto
Representative Urban

VICE CHAIRMEN: Senator Meyer
Representative Jarmoc

MEMBERS PRESENT:
SENATORS: Boucher

REPRESENTATIVES: Hovey, Mioli, Mushinsky,
Thompson

REP. URBAN: Welcome to the Select Committee on Children. We have a lot of people testifying this morning, so we're going to try to keep the testimony when we get to the public section to three minutes so that there will be ample time for members of the committee to ask questions.

You also might see members of the committee going in and out. That's because there are a lot of meetings going on today in the capital, so don't think that they're not paying attention. We have your written testimony, so when there are legislators that are not in the room, they have the written testimony.

The first hour of the public hearing is devoted to public officials. Once we get through the first hour, if we have not completed all the public officials, we will go to the public and go back and forth between the public and public officials.

So the first one on our list this morning is Representative Bruce Morris.

REP. MORRIS: Good morning, Senator Musto, Representative Urban and distinguished members of the Select Committee on Children.

HB6486

I am the co-chair of the Fatherhood Task Force along with Senator Gary LeBeau, and I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on Raised Bill 6486, an Act Concerning Responsible Fatherhood and Strong Families.

This bill represents a small portion of the hard work of the Fatherhood Task Force. I would like to thank the staff of the Select Committee on Children for all the hard work over the past few months. This bill builds on the work of the late Representative John Martinez and more recently the late Representative Faith McMahon, who was the co-care of the Select Committee on Children and a member of the Fatherhood Task Force. The bill established in 1999 is nationally recognized. Connecticut was the first to establish a fatherhood council.

Last session, Speaker Amann convened the Fatherhood Task Force. And over the past few months, the task force has gathered input from the public and key experts, including nationally-recognized child psychologist Dr. Kyle Pruett and fatherhood activist Dr. Bill Cosby.

The bill before you is an initiative that has come out of the work from the Fatherhood Task Force. It seeks to implement nationally-recognized best practices in the country to promote positive fatherhood involvement and address barriers to noncompliance with child support by low income parents.

This bill seeks to establish problem-solving courts to alleviate the problems that impede the ability for parents to engage in their children's lives, such as employment and poverty.

Research has shown that children with absent fathers are more likely to drop out of school, become teenage parents, develop drug or alcohol problems, or become involved in violent criminal behavior.

This bill complements ongoing work done by the judicial branch. This proposal is a work in progress, and we expect that there will be a large body of work that will come out in the future. I am on the Human Services Committee, and this bill will have opportunity to be further vetted in that committee.

Judge Munro, the Chief Administrative Judge for Family Matters, is very supportive of this initiative.

This bill will also require the Department of Social Services to report on the work that is being conducted throughout the Fatherhood Advisory Council. An earlier bill that was established through Representative John Martinez's leadership, we found that there were no reporting requirements for the progress that had taken place.

In this day and age of results-based accountability, we need data to support our findings. This bill will require this type of accountability to ensure the outcomes we are seeking for families and children.

This bill also positions us, a very phenomenal thing, positions us to access new federal funds through the Obama administration for fatherhood purposes. I look forward to working with this committee and respectfully request that you vote this bill out of committee.

REP. URBAN: Thank you so much, Representative, and certainly we are so pleased to be moving this forward with the legacy of Representative Martinez and Representative McMahon.

And I would be remiss if I didn't thank you for your extraordinary efforts along these lines, and also to thank you for taking this from the perspective of results-based accountability. I don't have any questions. I think that you're doing a tremendous job.

So I would just turn this over to the senator to see if he has any questions.

REP. MORRIS: Thank you, Representative Urban.

SENATOR MUSTO: Real quick question. Most of this I don't really have any question about or certainly any objection to.

There's one provision in here where the child support arrears in excess of \$500 shall not accrue when the noncustodial parent's income is at or below federal poverty level.

Can you sort of -- well, let me back up. Child support is for the support of the child. It's not punitive for a parent. And the concern I have is that -- is that the children will suffer if the money's not paid.

I understand the goal -- I think I understand the goal, that we want to make family reunification and get everybody together, and this might impede if there's this huge bill outstanding. People won't want to show up. Would you have any objection or has there been any thought given to making it discretionary with the judicial branch, a judge can waive back payments or anything like that?

Can you just address that for me real quick?

REP. MORRIS: As I said, I said this is a work in progress, and that's one of the pieces that is certainly still -- we're having dialogue going through.

However, the State of New York has already implemented such a program, and we're just trying to make certain through the judiciary that they have all the details. My understanding of it, Elaine Zimmerman, the executive director of the Commission on Children will be testifying afterwards, and she can certainly give you a lot more information. I may end up calling her if we need more help here. But they're doing this successfully.

We actually have Robert Johnson from the State of Georgia who came and did excellent -- gave us excellent information specifically on this issue, the child arrearage, because they were providing incentives and there was actually arrearages that were being waived.

And actually initially the argument would be how could you do that? The state is losing money. He actually came and presented data to us to show that the state -- they actually end up making more money. And (inaudible) because they were putting people to work.

In fact, that's what got me involved in this initiative. When Representative McMahon came to me and said, you know, we're spending X amount of dollars to place men in jail because they're failing to pay. Now, certainly we're not -- we're not disallowing the fact that they have the responsibility to pay; however, we were finding most of them were either undereducated, unemployable, so that the

models that are working throughout the state are saying let's address those needs.

In the court, the magistrates are recognizing we need to address those needs, place these men in a position where they can do that, because what we're finding is that they're going underground.

And by going underground we're not getting the payment. They're not being involved in the children's lives. So there's a double -- so the kids are being affected in the long run. We as the state, we have the extra burden on our human services infrastructure as a result of that nonpayment and noninvolvement in the children's lives.

SENATOR MUSTO: Thank you very much.
Questions? Yes, Representative Hovey.

REP. HOVEY: Good morning, Representative. Thank you for your testimony.

REP. MORRIS: Good morning.

REP. HOVEY: So the hypotheses of the fatherhood -- I forget what your -- your initiative is, but the hypotheses is that if there is not an overwhelming fiscal burden, that fathers will make a different choice than they are presently?

REP. MORRIS: Yes, that is a good way of saying it. They are. They're hiding. They're not showing up in court.

REP. HOVEY: Okay.

REP. MORRIS: Failure to appear, criminal charges get larger, it ruins their record, even presents them such that they become even less

employable.

And the magistrates, the courts recognize this as well. So the thinking is, let the magistrates -- give them another -- something else in their toolbox that they can use. Similar to what we do through other diversionary programs, well, this is a diversion for dads where now through the courts they can connect them with the community services.

If I can -- if I can cite something to you from the NCSL, it's something that -- NCSL says policymakers should know concerning dads and the social problem that they're dealing with that makes this a little bit more complex for them, and I'm going to read a few of the bullets in this.

They state that there is no social network where low-income fathers can go for help. And we find that to be true, through the John Martinez effort that we did do, we are federally funded -- it's either five or six programs throughout the state, and that funding is about to run out. And these programs are doing phenomenal work with dads. All right. The need is there.

In fact, within communities there are other smaller groups that have come up without that type of funding. The certain -- the dads that are showing up saying we have this need, we need a support network, there isn't a single entry access point for dads that have needs similar to -- unlike welfare services for women, we didn't do that for dads, and the need is there.

Most fatherhood programs exist at the local level through community organizations, and few

have formal relationships with state institutions. So the demonstration project that we're looking at would not have that formal relationship. And certainly through the family courts, that is an access point where we can reach dads.

Just want to -- most low-income fathers are in committed relationships with the mother of their children at the time the child is born. Most low-income fathers care about their children -- we certainly found this out -- and want to be involved, and many women want the fathers to be involved.

We're finding out that there's -- there's actually state statutes and things that we have in place that are creating barriers, and this is just one of them. That's why we began by saying this is a small part of the work -- of the work that we have ahead of us.

REP. HOVEY: So would it be safe to say that the fatherhood initiative is also looking at the disparity between custodial and noncustodial parental rights? Are you also looking at those components outside of just the fiscal aspects?

REP. MORRIS: Oh, yes, yes. There's actually about five different aspects. This is only one portion of it. The more we get into the bill -- and actually the John Martinez bill encompassed -- is like five different groups of dads when you put them together. You've got the divorced dads, you've got the custodial issues, you've got the dads that have gone underground, you've got the teenage dads.

It's a very complex issue that we need to get our hands around. The task force has a draft

report that we're trying to put together. It will be an interim report that we will be providing to the Legislature on some of the findings we've had thus far.

Senator LeBeau and I have agreed that we're initially intending to try to get the work done by December 31, just went by. We realize this is an ongoing work that we're going to need to do for at least another year just on certain components. So the custodial piece is there.

We are working with Judge Munro. It is interesting to know that the courts are also -- they have an ongoing work -- they actually have a problem-solving committee that -- just in talking to Judge Munro last week, she's invited me to be a part of that committee so the Legislature -- we can work hand in hand, and we're trying to build those alliances across the board.

REP. HOVEY: Thank you very much.

REP. MORRIS: Thank you.

SENATOR MUSTO: Representative Mioli.

REP. MIOLI: Thank you, Chairman. I have a question for Representative Morris. For the benefit of the committee, mostly new members, Representative Morris has been working tirelessly for the past two years on this problem. It used to be our cabinet recognizable keeping families together, keeping fathers around is the best (inaudible).

Again, like you say, most of the people are undereducated, underemployed, and putting a father who is behind on his payment in jail

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does not -- it's going to cost us money, so -- but Representative Morris has been very, very astounding in his job, you know, and I've been serving under him and actually was responsible for bringing in Dr. Bill Cosby to help at one of our meetings. Actually, he took over the meeting, you know?

Anyway, I just want to give Representative Morris compliments for what he's doing, very, very -- it's under the radar, but it's very, very, very important, and I believe we can change the system, the way we do business with children and families in this state. Thank you. And thank you, Representative Morris.

REP. MORRIS: Thank you, Representative Mioli, for those comments. And again, Madam Chair, Chairman Musto, again, this is really about better outcomes for children, better outcomes for families, and certainly reduced costs to the State of Connecticut.

We have one of the best policies. Our law that's on the books is excellent, but as many of our other laws, we find we need to make certain that they're being properly implemented. And the piece in here about the reporting, that's about getting on the beginning of doing that.

SENATOR MUSTO: Are there any other questions from the committee? Thank you very much, Representative.

REP. MORRIS: Thank you very much.

SENATOR MUSTO: Elaine Zimmerman. Good morning, Ms. Zimmerman.

ELAINE ZIMMERMAN: Senator Musto, Representative Urban, members of the committee, my name is

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HB 5144

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SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN 11:00 A.M.

Elaine Zimmerman, and I'm the director of the Commission on Children. An honor to follow Representative Bruce Morris.

I'm here this morning in support of 6486 and 5144. I'm going to speak to 6486. Several years ago we heard a presentation on the radio, it was on public radio, that Georgia had looked at the fathers who were absent from home and had determined that the dads were actually young and in poverty and had created and designing a comprehensive system to help those dads come back to their children.

And what Georgia did was they said you've gone underground because you owe child support. We can see that you're poverty-stricken. What we want to do is have you come back. You come back, begin paying child support today. Get education, get job training. We'll help you.

They created an entire system linked to the community college. Systemwide, statewide. Thousands of men came back who had gone underground strictly because they could not provide the child support payment, but who in many cases were seriously depressed, wanted to be back with their children and wanted help getting jobs.

So what Georgia did was they turned the whole thing around. They provided support, but they also made it very clear, if you don't begin paying child support now with these changes, you will be in trouble. You will go to jail. But we're going to forgive your past if you begin today connecting to your child, working with us on job training, on literacy and making due so you can reconnect to your child.

The Georgia model has saved its state millions of dollars. Thousands of fathers returned to

their children, and John Martinez in our state took the Georgia model and strove to have us replicate it. We began -- we wrote a yeoman fatherhood initiative that is placed in the Department of Social Services, and then John Martinez died.

The leadership was missing. There was some effort, but as is typical when you don't have a leader, this simply became a line item in a state budget with some program, and we stopped working systematically to bring dads back to their children.

We are so lucky that Bruce Morris has picked up the legacy of John Martinez and moved this forward. And we now have other states that have taken this on, in particular, New York state has, Missouri has. We've brought all the States that were working on this issue together to try to find out what their learnings are now so that we could apply them.

What mistakes did they make? What did they learn? What's working? And how, Representative Hovey, do we make sure not to get into a gender feud about this but have the only goal be to get the dad back to those children? Because all the literature tells us that children do better, their outcomes are much better when they have both parents. Whether they live together or not, they need both parents.

So this isn't about forcing marriage. It isn't about any of that, but it is about figuring out how you get the dad back.

What we learned is that there is beginning to be a momentum around the country for courts that are fanatic, that are based on an issue. And fatherhood courts are working, where the

judge takes it case by case but has the authority to waive the child support arrearage, to place the gentleman in a community college program, et cetera.

So this bill takes the core learning, directs the chief court administrator to establish the a problem-solving court that authorizes the court to incorporate into court proceedings the ability to work with noncustodial parents, be that the mother or the father. And we've got some mothers who are the noncustodial parents, too. It no longer breaks out as one might think.

This model was developed by the National Center for Court Innovation, and it's working wherever it is taking place. We also learned that in our state that we did come up with a model in the original legislation to create an arrearage management program, and DSS was charged with promulgating regulations for that. Fewer than ten residents have qualified. Fewer than ten dads in our state have qualified.

So we are unintentionally creating hurdles, and what we want to do is to make things a little simpler to get dads back. The very good news, which Representative Martinez referenced -- is that President Obama is very concerned about this very issue. It's very clear there is going to be money for this, and we want to be ready to receive it.

What we learned was that in order to be ready for this, you had to have a system. You needed a systemic response. It could not be one simple little program but a systemic response. We are delighted that the judicial branch is interested in coming together to come up with agreed-upon ways to do this that

satisfy everyone.

What we know is that there's a group of low-income dads whose partners are making the transition off of welfare or could be at risk of going on welfare. The dads share many of the same characteristics as their female counterparts, low levels of literacy, unemployment, poor work history or low-wage employment, but they don't get any help. And so this is an effort to get them the help in a systemic way so we can bring dads back and also so that we can be ready for the dollars from the federal government.

Thank you. Also, we really stand strongly in support of the Nurturing Families Expansion. This is a prevention model that helps vulnerable families parent in the early years. It's been a profoundly successful model in our state, and there is no question that the stimulus package has dollars in it for this. Thank you.

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REP. URBAN: Thank you, Elaine. And I couldn't agree with you more. We're looking across the board here. We're looking at results. We're looking at accountability and we're also looking at maximizing federal dollars, and we all know in this atmosphere that's important.

So are there any questions from the committee? Representative Hovey?

REP. HOVEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning, Elaine.

ELAINE ZIMMERMAN: Good morning.

REP. HOVEY: I just wanted you to reiterate this point, that a common thread in all of these individuals' lives is a lack of literacy. And

so when we're looking at accountability and we're looking at improving children's lives across the state, be it fatherhood or motherhood, the core component of that would be to assure literacy; am I correct?

ELAINE ZIMMERMAN: You are so correct. I mean, when you look at the problem here, are you expecting someone to pay back \$16,000 and they have a fourth grade reading level? They have no choice but to disappear, because they know mathematically they can't get to that money unless they do something illegal. Then they could probably get that money. But we don't want that.

And so what was so impressive about the Georgia model was rather than having simply a casework paradigm, they partnered with the community college system statewide so that the gentleman or the mom who is needing the support could get the literacy help and the job training help they need. So absolutely. This is committed to the literacy, the health, whatever psychological needs, and essentially employability.

We also know that these candidates are candidates for our FSET dollars, so that there's the potential to create a plan that would provide us 50 cents to a dollar on whatever we do, and that FSET money pays for literacy. Thank you.

REP. URBAN: Are there any other questions from the committee? Thank you for your testimony, Elaine.

ELAINE ZIMMERMAN: Thank you.

REP. URBAN: Next on the list is Senator LeBeau, but I don't see him in the room. so we will go

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think you've got a pretty good -- pretty good chance of having your --

KAREN FOLEY-SCHAIN: Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR MUSTO: Any other questions?

REP. URBAN: I'd just like to thank you also for your taking the results-based accountability to heart and your performance measures here and your indications as to how you're going to turn the curve are much appreciated and help us know that what you are doing is actually making people in the State of Connecticut better off, so thank you.

KAREN FOLEY-SCHAIN: Thank you. And we're glad to have that process to help us make those points, too. It's helpful to us. Thank you.

SENATOR MUSTO: Any other questions from the committee? Thank you very much.

KAREN FOLEY-SCHAIN: Thank you.

SENATOR MUSTO: Senator LeBeau, is he in the room? Carolyn Signorelli. No?

Oh, she's right there. Okay. Good morning.

CAROLYN SIGNORELLI: Good morning. I didn't realize I was up next. Good morning, Senator Musto, Representative Urban and distinguished committee members.

For the record, I am Carolyn Signorelli, Chief Child Protection Attorney for the State of Connecticut with the Commission on Child Protection, and Acting Chair of the Children's Trust Fund Council.

I thank you for this opportunity to provide

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testimony House Bill 5144 and House Bill 6486, and I would also like to express some concerns regarding Senate Bill 870.

I am in favor of House Bill 5144, because it is critical that a significant transition of state funds to primary prevention, designed to voluntarily engage families in meeting the challenges of parenthood, creating their own solutions and support network, and avoiding involvement in the child protection system be made now.

Our state, our families, another generation of children cannot wait while leaders in whom they have put their trust expend energy explaining why we can't act to do what is right, to figure out what to do to do what makes sense, and why we're constrained to continue our pattern of reacting to crisis and failing to rescue too many children from a cycle of poverty, abuse, neglect and lose the opportunity to achieve their highest potential.

This bill, by daring to appropriate funds for the nurturing family network during this economically challenging time, is an important first step towards true leadership on behalf of struggling parents and the futures of innocent children.

NFN has a proven track record of successful engagement with families who exhibit signature indicators for child abuse and neglect. The voluntarily nature of the program fosters a parent's sense of initiative, responsibility for the child's well-being and future success, problem-solving capacity, and sense of security in their community.

NFN effectively addresses the risk factors in

I'm also in favor of House Bill 6486, a pilot to work towards engaging fathers in responsible involvement in their children's lives as a parent, and consider what's described in the pilot as a positive means to increasing their engagement.

As the agency that currently provides legal representation to indigent parents who owe child support and who are facing possible incarceration due to contempt, I believe that the current system of threatening or placing parents who have been found indigent in jail until they, or perhaps a family member, can come up with the money to pay a purge of the contempt is logically flawed and ineffectual in the long term.

Ordering individuals who have no education, possibly a criminal record and a history of irresponsible behavior to do job searches to stay out of jail also does not appear to be a long-term solution, especially in this economy.

I think the pilot is appropriate to determine if it can have positive results with fathers already in arrears in their child support.

I think this concept of engagement and support goes hand in hand with the expansion of NFN, as the Children's Trust Fund has also implemented a program to involve fathers early on in the life of their newborn. And myself, on behalf of the Children's Trust Fund, and in my capacity as providing legal representation, have been having ongoing discussions with Judge Munro about how to improve results out of the magistrate support court system for these fathers and their families.

I know that the Children's Trust Fund would also be anticipate to collaborate in this

effort.

I do have one concern over the reference to the provision of legal counsel in this pilot, as my office currently provides legal counsel for parents facing contempt and possible incarceration when they are in arrears on their support. It seems to me that a program such as this should be seeking to reduce the need for legal counsel and providing an alternative track from contempt and incarceration for dealing with indigent parents.

Legal counsel should not be necessary at this point in the process. And if it were to be provided, it would increase the costs to the state of providing legal representation in child support cases.

House Bill 870, An Act Concerning the Court-appointed Special Advocate Program, I am opposed to this bill as written, because it appears in Section 2(4) to give my agency responsibility for practice, caseload and training standards for all GALs appointed by the Superior Court.

I have since writing this testimony last night had an opportunity to speak with both Judge Munro and Christina Ghio from the Office of Child Advocates, and I think that going forward we can work to clarify the language in that and where the proponents of this bill envision that the responsibility for oversight of guardian ad lites in family matters should lie.

Currently, my office is only responsible to pay for those guardian ad litem in family court whose -- who are appointed for children whose parents cannot afford to pay for the --

going to be in charge of the training.

Is that a misreading on my part?

CAROLYN SIGNORELLI: Well, and that's a discussion that I just had with Christina Ghio, that the notion would be -- my office has already set some standards for GALs, primarily towards those in the juvenile court. But those could be set for family matters, GALs as well.

I think there would have to be some changes to them, and it would be in consultation with folks that practice in family matters, because the cases are somewhat -- you know, they're different than a child protection case.

And so that we would be setting the standards, and the understanding would be that judicial branch and whatever agency is carrying out the contract for this program -- well, in this case, the judicial branch would be responsible to make sure the attorneys comply with the standards on the -- you know, when they're practicing the cases.

SENATOR MUSTO: And lastly, regarding 6486, fatherhood issue, is there anything in the law -- we keep talking about putting people in jail for arrearages.

Is there any reason why a judge if they so choose could not put someone in jail for, say, a \$400 arrearage? We're limiting it to \$500, and my question sort of went to the judicial discretion of amount, but I guess I should have expanded it to judicial -- obviously there is some judicial discretion as to whether you're going to incarcerate someone on a competent charge.

But is there anything in the law, maybe not in

this law but in any law, that would prevent a court from saying, okay, you owe \$499, you're going to jail?

CAROLYN SIGNORELLI: I think it's completely discretionary whether or not somebody's incarcerated for their arrearage, whatever the level might be, if I'm understanding your question.

The magistrates do not have to incarcerate parents who are in arrears and are in contempt of a court order to pay those arrears. It's a tool that they have at their disposal if they feel it's appropriate in the case and if they feel that that's what's going to obtain payment, but it's my understanding that it's completely discretionary on the magistrate or judge whether to utilize that tool or utilize that sanction.

And I would just -- you know, one point in that regard, you know, the courts -- I think that portion of the statute that talks about arrearages no longer accruing if a particular parent goes below the poverty line -- and I can appreciate the -- some concern about that, because it's the child that's entitled to those funds. The parent is responsible one way or the other whether they need some extra help to get to the point to meet that responsibility. I don't know that that's a solution.

From my perspective, if somebody is found below the poverty line and found to be indigent to the point where they would qualify for state-paid counsel, it doesn't really seem logical that they should be found in contempt and incarcerated as a result of their inability to pay a support order.

So perhaps something could just be put in that if a parent is found indigent or below the poverty level, that they can't be incarcerated for failing to pay their support.

And I understand -- and I just learned a lot about this program listening today. I didn't know that much about it before reading the bill. I understand part of this program is to be a diversionary track, but if the parent were not to comply with all the efforts to help them to be able to pay support, then perhaps in the future they could be facing incarceration.

But right in the very beginning when you're finding them indigent, it doesn't necessarily make sense to, one, pay for an attorney for them to help keep them out of jail to pay something that they can't afford to pay.

SENATOR MUSTO: Thank you. And that's, you know -- and I'm not sure the bill goes as far as you would like. Maybe, again, if you have some language that you might want to try to help us with on that, just to say what you just said.

CAROLYN SIGNORELLI: Right, yes. The language deals with arrears, and I'm thinking that instead of --

SENATOR MUSTO: The concern just seems to me that we're making people do what they can't do, and that's keeping families apart. And I don't think there's any real argument about that.

The concern is the language is so -- well, there's not much there, frankly, so if you do have any particular language that might help -- and of course the other issue as well regarding your role. And I'd certainly appreciate that.

CAROLYN SIGNORELLI: Thank you.

SENATOR MUSTO: Co-chair, any questions? Vice Chair, yes, Representative Jarmoc.

REP. JARMOC: Thank you, Carolyn. Language would be helpful if we could have -- specifically have that. We are screening later this afternoon after this meeting.

But additionally, Representative Morris and I talked this morning, and he's fully aware this bill is still a work in progress. It's still being vetted out, so to speak, and obviously it would go on to the Human Services Committee where I sit and where he sits, and it would be worked on in that committee as well.

So I don't know if that helps, Senator Musto, with questions, but that's where the advocates of the bill are coming from at this time.

CAROLYN SIGNORELLI: Sure. And it would be -- you know, it would be helpful for me if it's envisioned that my office be in any way responsible for legal counsel in relation to the pilot that, you know, I'd be happy to participate in any discussions regarding --

REP. JARMOC: So, I guess, could I put through the onus on you to speak with Representative Morris at some point today to try to understand that so that possibly this afternoon we can know that information?

CAROLYN SIGNORELLI: Absolutely.

REP. JARMOC: That would be great. Thank you. Senator Boucher.

SENATOR BOUCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and

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thank you for your testimony.

Having been early in my legislative career involved in the original fatherhood initiative on human services, I am gratified that it has reignited interest and that people are pursuing this, and there's no question that we want to encourage in every way possible the connection of the family, particularly the father, early in a child's life. And I do believe that the Nurturing Families Network that is ongoing now that is doing such good work is a good place to start.

But one of the conundrums of this particular issue is, you know, what's incentive to do the right thing, how do you motivate people, how do you keep them engaged, and then at what point do you finally say that they're not making a good-faith effort and that some sort of harder retribution has to be in place to create that incentive?

I see here that you noted that ordering individuals with little education or possibly a criminal record or history of irresponsible behavior to do job searches to stay out of jail does not appear to be along-term solution, in particular in this economy. And I -- you know, that gives me pause, because for me, it seems to be exactly the right thing to do, not only just for the financial responsibility, because we need an emotional connection, but we also need to make the point that there is also some amount of financial responsibility with bringing a child into the world that you just don't leave all together, both mentally and financially in some way.

It should be reasonable, however, given the situation, and that's really the concern, and the job search in itself or even at a job

level that can be very low level does teach certain skills and certain areas of responsibility that have to be attached.

So this is our dilemma, is how far do you go? Do you make it such that if you change it, and hopefully a pilot will show that if you change the parameters and make it incentivizing to -- to not work -- because if you're under a certain income level, then you're relieved of that financial responsibility, that could produce a negative behavior that you don't want. You want a positive. You want to reward good behavior.

If anything, it's possible that if making the good-faith effort, you may be relieved of certain financial constraints further down the road. But I think that's an area that really has to be very carefully thought out in pursuing change to that whole financial connection and the job search connection as well.

CAROLYN SIGNORELLI: And I would agree with you completely in everything you said. And I guess to clarify my point, it's not that requiring somebody to do job searches is not appropriate, but, you know, it's not enough.

And I think that this pilot is designed to address the fact that a person that you -- in this situation that you've just ordered to do job search just needs a little more help than just going knocking on doors and saying please hire me.

And that was really my point, not that they shouldn't be held accountable and be responsible to gain employment, but just that we may need to provide them with a little -- with some more assistance that I think this

pilot is designed to do.

And so that's really why I'm in support of what's being proposed here.

And the other point that I would make regarding what you said earlier on about the engagement and the responsibility, what I think we found through the NFN programs with the early engagement when the newborn is either on its way or just arriving, that if the father is sort of brought into the fold and made to feel like an important part of the family and made to understand their responsibility and have an opportunity to interact with that child, that that sense of responsibility sort of comes naturally, and you don't necessarily need, hopefully, the other incentives on the back end in the future as far as threatening them with incarceration.

SENATOR BOUCHER: Very well put. Thank you.

SENATOR MUSTO: Any questions from other members of the committee? Thank you very much.

CAROLYN SIGNORELLI: Thank you.

SENATOR MUSTO: We're going to move into the public comments section of the hearing, and the first person -- I'm going to exercise some discretion here as the Chair and ask that Donna Colavito, I believe, step forward.

And for the public hearing section, I would ask -- as you can see, we have a large amount of people here today. In the past when we had a small amount of people, we let people be a little bit -- we were a little bit more liberal with the time constraints.

There is a three-minute time limit. It is a

My name is Gabriel Fonseca --

SENATOR MUSTO: Excuse me, sir, did you submit written testimony?

GABE FONSECA: Yes, sir.

SENATOR MUSTO: Thank you.

GABE FONSECA: Thank you for this opportunity. My name is Gabriel Fonseca, program manager of the Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Program and three Children's Trust Fund programs at the Madonna Place in Norwich. I'm here to support Bill 5144, and Bill No. 6486.

I support Committee Bill 5144 because the Children's Trust Fund has proven to be an asset to our state. The Children's Trust Fund has been a major supporter of our work at the Madonna Place for over ten years. We've benefited from their leadership and guidance.

The Children's Trust Fund uses research findings to guide program development. I respectfully ask this committee to consider the return on investment that is possible from expanding the work of the Children's Trust Fund.

This entity should be seen as an asset to our community that's worth the investment. Regarding Bill 6486, I respectfully ask you to consider constructing this Problem-Solving Court Demonstration pilot program. I'm confident that it will bring -- that it will bring benefit to the state by collecting money owed to us.

In the last two years, our fatherhood staff worked with over 250 dads. Of those, 67 of

those fathers asked us to guide them as they attempt to handle their child support issues. The results are we helped 87 percent of those men handle their child support obligations.

We did that through comprehensive service delivery. We helped these fathers maintain a socially productive lifestyle, and we helped the state by empowering these men to make regular payments.

But furthermore, we helped many of those men get more involved with their children. We helped them by establishing visitation orders and coparenting plans, which, in turn, gave these men what they're looking for, meaning in their role of being a dad.

In closing, I'd like to ask you to consider Norwich and the Madonna Place as a possible pilot site location. From my perspective, implementing this form of service would pose little to no barriers.

The major thing that I need to consider is fiscal limitations. Given the current economic status that we face, I may be able to use existing funds received from DFS in promoting Responsible Fatherhood dollars. That's our federal grant.

To do that, I must get permission from my -- from DSS. I've already had the conversation, and I see little barriers to implementing such services.

Furthermore, if our program is one that is selected, we would bring a great deal of expertise. I understand that the budgetary issues we face as a state are serious. I'm not asking for additional dollars today. I'm simply asking you to consider the Madonna

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Place and the fatherhood initiative as a site to pilot the Problem-Solving Court.

I thank you for your time.

SENATOR MUSTO: Thank you very much. You guys are doing great.

Are there any questions? Yes, Representative Hovey.

REP. HOVEY: Good afternoon.

I just had one quick question. On the Problem-Solving Court, it just seems to me that the idea of court itself has some negative emotion that comes with that; and coming from the mediation side of things, I wonder if instead of a Problem-Solving Court, we might actually impose a mediation component.

GABE FONSECA: I agree, Representative Hovey. I think mediation is essential in this. And if I could highlight to you, when a dad comes to us, typically he's asking for help navigating the court system. That's not our priority. We're not asking dad to go through court. Our first attempt is to see if there's a coparenting opportunity.

Our staff does have limited training in mediation, but we also have a working relationship with Family Relations. Family Relations respects our work because what we do is we prepare the family before they get into the overburdened place, which is Family Relations office.

So mediation is an essential piece to this intervention. And I think if you look at the six certified sites that perform the work of

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The fatherhood initiative, we all have the same assets and skills.

I think either of the six sites can be identified as a possible pilot opportunity, so I do agree with you, Representative. Thank you again.

SENATOR MUSTO: Other questions from members of the committee?

GABE FONSECA: Thank you very much.

SENATOR MUSTO: Flo Woodiel. Good afternoon.

FLO WOODIEL: It is afternoon, isn't it?

SENATOR MUSTO: It is.

FLO WOODIEL: I have written down "morning."

I'm pleased to be here today to talk a bit about one of my favorite subjects, the Nurturing Family Network. Thank you for allowing me to testify on its behalf.

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I was appointed to the trust fund council ten years ago serving at the time that Governor John Rowland designated the Children's Trust Fund an independent agency to look at the prevention of child abuse and neglect. I served those ten years first as a member of the council and then as its chair for the last five.

I only just "retired" last year, but the work of the trust fund continues to occupy my thoughts and gladden my heart.

The Children's Trust Fund is a small agency, as agencies go. I believe the Children's Trust Fund's success is largely due to its

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Thank you very much.

FLO WOODIEL: Thank you, Senator Representative Thompson. Coming from you, that certainly is a compliment. Thank you.

SENATOR MUSTO: Thank you very much. Senator LeBeau. Afternoon, Senator.

SENATOR LeBEAU: Good afternoon. I'm sorry I'm late. I wasn't able to be in here earlier.

I wanted to say that normally I don't read testimony, but I'm going to read this letter, because I wrote it last night, and it's what I wanted to say, so I'm not going to summarize it. I'm just going to read it.

Senator Musto, Representative Urban and members of the Select Committee on Children, good morning to the distinguished chairs of the Children's Committee. I'd like to thank you for your leadership in raising HB 6486 this session. If she were still with us, I am sure that Representative Faith McMahon would also be pleased.

This bill represents the beginning of the harvest of some of the tangible fruit of the labor that Representative McMahon worked so hard to achieve and so fervently wished for.

It was principally through Representative McMahon's advocacy working with Senator Meyer that the Fatherhood Task Force was established and initiated. It was and is my honor to work on such a crucial issue at this important time in our history.

The bill embodies some of the actions supported by testimony in front of our task force -- which has, incidentally, been meeting

since last August, but we're taking a little break right now given the crush of the legislative session -- that the state could begin to help turn around some of the negative and potentially disastrous trends that we see in society.

Moreover, the bill generally takes these actions by using existing resources. This is important because it pulls together a variety of state functions or, as the cliché goes, "breaks down the silos" between the courts, the community technical colleges, and a variety of service providers to strengthen the role of fathers in the lives of their children.

The bill also takes a practical and important new approach to child support arrears payments. The data shows that the vast majority of those noncustodial parents who are in arrears are poor, poorly educated, and have little hope of making a substantial income.

It is ridiculous to drive these men away from their children by forcing them to jump over a hurdle which grows gross larger by the week for defaulting on payments.

These payments can reach tens of thousands of dollars, making it impossible for most people to ever pay their debts. So the question arises, is it better for children to have two parents, even if one of them cannot meet their financial responsibilities to their child? Or is it better to have one parent and have the second parent essentially banished from the child's life because of their inability to meet their financial responsibility?

I come down on the side of two parents for every child.

Finally, the bill opens up the opportunity for possible future funding from federal sources. This bill is an important second step, building upon the initiative of two great representatives who are no longer with us, Representatives John Martinez and Faith McMahan. We should pass this bill in their memory to advance their work. Mostly we should pass this bill because it may help our children and our future.

SENATOR MUSTO: Thank you very much. Thank you, Senator LeBeau.

A couple of the things we were talking about on this bill that had come up were there is a \$500 cap on arrearages, and some of the testimony from other officials and people was that we don't want to be putting people in jail. We don't want to keep them away from their children if we can somehow get them back.

And something I had asked a couple of questions on, I was wondering if you could address this, was providing some sort of judicial discretion, because it seems like if you owe \$499, you can still be put in jail under the bill if you're found in contempt. And 500 may or may not be the right number. Maybe 250, maybe 750. We're just not sure.

But obviously if there's a judge sort of on the ground looking at the family, looking at the people, he may be able to make sort of a more informed decision. And in light of what we've been doing with our judges for the past couple of weeks, it seems like we're giving them a lot of discretion and certainly thinking about whether they deserve it when we vote for them and vote for them when we think

they do.

So I was wondering if you had any comments on that.

SENATOR LeBEAU: I think your comments are right on the mark. You know, you know how we do legislation. We write it and then we improve it. And I think that this is -- that that's a very positive suggestion for this section of the bill.

SENATOR MUSTO: Well, we'll try to improve it. Yes, okay. Thank you, yes, Representative -- Senator Meyer.

SENATOR MEYER: Gary, you brought this along so well, and I well remember about two and a half years ago walking into the office and saying -- talking about this and motivating some of us...

The only question I have with this bill is whether or not it legally captures in full context what we have been doing and the issues we've been looking at.

What this bill basically does is it focuses primarily on the question of child support, and it does not deal with some of the other issues that our task force has been very involved with, which include, of course, early parental training, father-child communication and contact, a bunch of things that --

Very provocative hearings we had and meetings we had of the task force, we saw that we could promote father-child -- good father-child relationships by something more than child support, child support issues that are raised here.

We identified some of the father problems as coming from incarceration, but this bill does not address the very significant issue of father-child visits, prison visits, which I've been part of a program that has done that with great dividends, great benefits.

And I wondered if as you look at the full scope of your vision, you had a very big vision here, if you think this bill should be modified or amended to expand its -- its purport, its vision, to encompass the many factors that we looked at in our meetings and hearings.

SENATOR LeBEAU: I very much appreciate your comments, Senator Meyer. And it's a tough question, because the vision is large, but I do not think that we are ready to do that at this time.

I expect that the speaker of the house and the senate president will be in a sense reauthorizing our task force very shortly to continue with our meetings, continue with our investigations, continue with our background work.

I think this is -- I think you hit the nail on the head. This is a small piece of what is a much larger problem, and I totally agree with you on the issue of incarcerated parents, that that's a crucial piece. But I think this bill is pretty good. Very limited, pretty good.

And I want to make sure that we move ahead and try to put our arms around some of the larger pieces, that we do it right, that we do it thoroughly and that we do it effectively.

Also, as you know, there may be costs involved. This is something we look at and

said we can probably do some of these things with very little cost this year, and I think that's a fiscal constraint that we're also looking at.

So the answer is you're right. This does not encompass our vision. This does not encompass the problem. It takes a piece of it, may help, and it will help, I think, but it -- there's a much larger problem, and I think the task force -- continuing to work on the task force and going forward, we'll be in front of you again next year, hopefully, with a little bit more of an expanded vision.

SENATOR MUSTO: Thank you. Are there any other questions from members of the --

REP. URBAN: Senator LeBeau, I would just like to thank you for your work on this. And all journeys start with one small step, so I think we're on our way, and I appreciate everything you've done.

SENATOR LeBEAU: And again, I didn't take it, the first step. Representative Martinez did some ten years ago, and he deserves -- in his memory, he deserves a lot of credit.

REP. URBAN: Absolutely. And Representative McMahon also. It's always -- and in the Legislature, as always, it's a team effort. So thank you again.

SENATOR LeBEAU: Thank you. Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR MUSTO: Thank you, Senator.

Next up we have Jackey it looks like Dieli. Jackey Dieli? She's not here? Ardith Crampton.

you just joining?

TAMIKA BRADHAM: Joining.

SENATOR MUSTO: Okay. All right. Thank you very much. Please go ahead.

BLANNIE BOSTIC: Thank you, sir.

First of all, good afternoon, Senator Musto -- and I see Representative Urban left, but -- and members of the select committee, my name is Blannie Bostic, and I'm the project -- manager -- how are you doing, Senator Boucher? I remember you from being with us.

HB6486

I'm the project manager of the Male Involvement Network in New Haven, Connecticut. And I have -- also with me I had Mr. Terrance McIntosh, the director of marketing and communication with the Community Action Agency, Dr. Augustino Okeke, who had -- they both had to leave.

Dr. Okeke had to pick up his daughter from school, which we promote, responsible fatherhood -- that's the reason I'm here -- and Mr. McIntosh had an appointment.

But my other two colleagues here representing the Male Involvement Network are Mr. Rick Jennings, director of Student Parenting and Family Services Father Care Program at Wilbur Cross High School, and Tamika Bradham, research associate with the Consultation Center at Yale University, which is representative of our collaborative.

The New Haven Family Alliance is the lead organization of the Male Involvement Network and has provided social services in New Haven for more than 17 years working with New

Haven's most vulnerable and fragile families.

The Male Involvement Network is a collaboration of fatherhood stakeholders operating in New Haven for over ten years. We worked closely with the late representative John Martinez in his foundational work on fatherhood in Connecticut, and we helped shape the 1999 fatherhood legislation in our state.

We are here in support of House Bill Number 6486, An Act Concerning Responsible Fatherhood and Strong Families.

We support the House Bill Number 6486 at this time because it helps to reestablish as a public policy priority in Connecticut fathers' role in the lives of children, and in particular poor children in our urban environments.

Connecticut was one of the first states to implement fatherhood legislation and to convene a fatherhood council. However, our efforts to address the issues of fatherhood, father absence and father involvement in the lives of children have fallen short and have not been a public policy priority in our state for quite some time.

We have fallen behind in this arena, even in light of the bodies of relevant data that demonstrate conclusively that the problems associated with father absence are monumental and that fathers are important to children economically, socially, scholastically, morally and spiritually.

We know that the absence of fathers in families that are poor create substantial negative consequences that need to be addressed in order to engender a healthy,

productive society.

We in the Male Involvement Network know that supporting the healthy involvement of fathers in children's lives requires more than programmatic responses. Meaningful and effective fatherhood efforts require a collaborative working partnership of local social services, interested community members, fathers, local funding sources, state entities and academic partners aligned to address the unique needs of low-income, noncustodial fathers.

This is a description of the Male Involvement Network, established in 1999 to build on the assets and services existing in our local service delivery systems.

The Male Involvement Network is a model that builds the capacity of a locale by creating a systemic approach to fatherhood development. Through this integrated approach, partner agencies (Male Involvement Network members) -- and I'm going to skip over that. You guys can read that -- partner agencies collaboratively serve men using strategies consistent with their stated mission.

The Male Involvement Network systemic approach reduces interagency competition, because each agency engages in practices consistent with their stated goals that also expands their clientele and requires them to examine how they uniquely serve this population of men.

The Male Involvement Network has worked in partnership with local magistrate and child support court since 2004 -- prior to that, we were getting thrown out of court every time we went down there -- enrolling fathers with child support arrearages on site at the

courthouse using a state-of-the-art database developed in partnership with the New Haven Healthy Start, our federally funded child-infant mortality and morbidity prevention initiative.

SENATOR MUSTO: Thank you, sir.

Can I ask you, it sounds like you're in favor of the bill?

BLANNIE BOSTIC: I'm sorry?

SENATOR MUSTO: It sounds like you're in favor of this --

BLANNIE BOSTIC: Absolutely.

SENATOR MUSTO: Okay.

Is there anything specifically in the bill you can point to that would help your organization or what you do or are you just generally in favor of the idea of the bill?

BLANNIE BOSTIC: Well, putting the cap on the arrearages so they don't expand -- because most of our fathers are low-income, you know, working, making money at the poverty level.

So that would, you know -- we just had a class in this morning -- this afternoon at 12:30 while we were here sitting here listening to -- sitting here talking to you guys today, and I'm going to be able to bring them back some hope on Tuesday when our next class starts, so --

SENATOR MUSTO: Let me just -- specifically, is there any part of the bill -- maybe I just missed it in your answer, I'm not sure.

But is there any part of the bill that specifically would help your organization -- I mean, I understand it would help some of your members.

But is there any part of the bill that would help your organization do what you do or is it just that you're here to advocate on behalf of your members or some the people you assist, I should say?

BLANNIE BOSTIC: No. Helping us do what we do by bringing the -- defining the fact that they can --

If you're below the poverty level, the bill talks about there's a cap of \$500 that would not exceed that. That's going to -- that makes a -- that will make a big difference to a lot of fathers who generally would not go to court because they owe so much money, they know it's going to get worse, and they really can't meet the present child support order.

That's going to make a big difference. That's going to encourage a lot more men to go to court, which we have a lot of -- a relationship with the magistrate, with support enforcement and the Department of Social Services which encourages men to actually not see these agencies as adversarial because of our relationship with them.

SENATOR MUSTO: Thank you.
And I did find your written testimony.

Ma'am, did you --

TAMIKA BRADHAM: No, I did not.

SENATOR MUSTO: And, sir, did you submit any written --

MR. JENNINGS: No, I did not.

SENATOR MUSTO: Okay. I just wanted to make sure I wasn't missing anything.

Are there -- let's focus on this gentleman for a moment. Are there any questions for this gentleman before us from the members of the committee?

In that case, ma'am, perhaps you'd like to --

TAMIKA BRADHAM: I just wanted to add -- good afternoon, everyone on the committee. I just wanted to add and build upon Senator Meyer's comments earlier about the bill focuses on child support. And we hope to build or -- build upon the current bill to encompass the litany of issues regarding responsible -- the responsible fatherhood initiative.

SENATOR MUSTO: My question exactly. Can you give us a couple?

TAMIKA BRADHAM: (Inaudible.)

SENATOR MUSTO: You said the litany of issues regarding responsible fatherhood.

Can you give us maybe three?

TAMIKA BRADHAM: Health information, education achievement, employment. Those are the substantive issues that I know that our program -- that we evaluate (inaudible).

SENATOR MUSTO: And are those -- looking at the language of the bill, are those the kind of things in Section B here, the new language about reducing teen pregnancy, you know, especially we're talking about teen fathers in

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this case, rights of noncustodial parents,
that sort of thing.

TAMIKA BRADHAM: Yes, that's (inaudible).

SENATOR MUSTO: Thank you. Are there any questions
for this lady from the committee?

Senator Boucher.

SENATOR BOUCHER: Thank you. And I would actually
like to pose that to all three, if I could, in
that it seems like the issue of the child
support seems to dominate the entire bill and
several bills.

Can you explain how this is -- I mean, also,
it would be interesting to note if this should
be in place if it, in fact, did make a
difference.

And if you could, you know, be able to have
data that showed the numbers before or after
to see if, in fact, it made that huge
difference.

But explain to me why the focus is so strongly
on that particular issue for you.

BLANNIE BOSTIC: That's one of the -- if I may.

SENATOR MUSTO: Mr. Bostic.

BLANNIE BOSTIC: That's one of the biggest
barriers, Senator. Child support is one of
the biggest barriers that we see -- hear from
the men engaging in -- just engaging their
children in general.

They say the mothers won't allow them to see
the children because they don't pay child
support, which I'm sure this committee is well
aware of.

And we -- we get them to understand that establishing a visitation order has nothing to do with child support. Spending time with your children has nothing to do with child support. At the same time, they need support around understanding what (inaudible) values are, how the child support system works. And that if you don't have all of it, pay some of it.

But more importantly, you're more important to your kids socially, emotionally. Educational-wise, go to their schools, be involved in the activities of these children, be involved in their lives. Learn to -- I mean, one of my colleagues mentioned -- talked about mediation (inaudible). Learn to have a cordial and respectful relationship with the mother of the child.

Just February 10th, we had 20 men come to our orientation for the new session that began that day. They represented 60 children and 20 mothers. And what we're -- and the biggest part -- and most of those men were not engaged with their -- with their children. Just this past weekend, ten of those men took their children to the Children's Museum.

Their fathers -- and most of them don't have a relationship with their fathers. So they don't even -- a lot of them don't understand what it's like to even be a responsible father.

So we're helping them understand that it's not -- don't get caught up in the money if you don't have it, if that answers the question.

SENATOR BOUCHER: No, I think that that answered it extremely well. And you also touched on

something very, very important, and it is not said often enough. Love that you mentioned it, because I was told, you know, a long time ago when first having children that the most important thing that parents could actually do for their kids is having a loving relationship with each other.

It's something that they can see and that they can copy or emulate when they get older. So thank you for stating that, too.

SENATOR MUSTO: Ma'am, did you want to answer Senator Boucher's question?

TAMIKA BRADHAM: Just to expound on Blannie's point, the focus of the program or the programs that we're involved in or that we evaluate is to provide fathers with the resources so that they're able to build stable family relationships, not only with their children but their partner.

And that will encompass child support, again, all the issues that we talked about.

SENATOR MUSTO: And, sir, if you could give us your name, please?

RICK JENNINGS: Yes. Rick Jennings.

SENATOR MUSTO: And I know you probably have something to say, but Senator Boucher had a question. I was wondering if you wanted to address that first.

JOAN JENKINS: I'm sorry, sure.

SENATOR BOUCHER: Is your focus also predominantly on child support as being like the -- one of the main barriers to the whole issue of the fatherhood -- the bill that we are addressing?

JOAN JENKINS: Yes. With my group, I pick up the young men at an earlier time period. My client base is young fathers between the age of 14 and 21.

At that age, they're not required to pay child support, even though in court, when they go to court, something has been put in place. So by the time the young man of 14 becomes 18, he's automatically called to court. And for some reason or another, he has been assessed a child -- not a child but assessed a bill for child support.

Now, he really doesn't understand it, because at 14 he lives with his parents. Of course you know if you're -- if your son or daughter is an adolescent, you take the responsibility for them and maybe never even knew that the court had assessed him for 200, 300 or \$500 for child support until they turn 18.

But a lot of times that accumulates. And so for the first time going into court, a child -- a young man finds out he owes \$1,500. Now, that automatically causes a problem with the mother of the child, the child's family.

My job then becomes a little aggravated, because now I have to be a mediator between the young father and the young mother and their parents and the courts, at which time I come to Mr. Blannie [sic] and say, What can I do, Blannie? What can I do?

And this begins a process.

SENATOR BOUCHER: That's very well and clearly stated. Do you know if the assessment starts accumulating at the age of 16 or 18?

In other words, an age of employment? Do --

JOAN JENKINS: From what I understand, if the young lady goes -- from the time the infant is important, the court can assess a charge.

SENATOR BOUCHER: It's voluntary, it's not -- you know, it depends, then, on the particular judge, should they decide they wanted to do it or not, so it's not prescribed at a certain time?

JOAN JENKINS: That's what I was under the impression. However, I had a situation, a young mother did not want child support. Two years later they go to court. The young man owes more than the \$500. They said it was in the best interest of the court to assess an amount whether the young lady wanted it or not in the child's behalf.

My organization represents infants and toddlers, and those are our consumers. The parents, the mother and the father are the ones that we service to get that child those that child those efforts (inaudible) better life.

SENATOR MUSTO: Any other questions from members of the committee? Thank you very much.

BLANNIE BOSTIC: Thank you.

TAMIKA BRADHAM: Thank you.

SENATOR MUSTO: Jason Gibson? Is Jason Gibson here? He's gone. Was Mary Wilson and Paul -- they're all gone?

Okay. Thank you. Linda Sprouse.

Thank you for waiting, and thank you all who

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are here for waiting. I know it's been a long day, and there's been a lot of people before you. But we -- it does really help us when we get your testimony, because, you know, we're not always -- we're never really in your shoes, so it does help us to understand what we're acting on and how it will affect people on the ground.

Please continue.

LINDA SPROUSE: Good afternoon. My name is Linda Sprouse, and I'm here today to speak to you about the injustice I've been facing.

HB 6486

My ex was court-ordered to pay a loan, which he never refinanced. The credit union took his overdue payments from my savings, and when my sons' CD matured, it rolled in my savings and they took that, too.

Once the credit union started taking from us, he never made another payment. He owes close to 15,000 on that. My debt to income looks overextended because my name is still on his loan, making it difficult to refinance my house.

The only way to prosecute him is if I go to Florida and go through the courts there. I need to stay in Connecticut to take care of my children and work to support them. The divorce took place in this state; so should the contempt charges.

He has not made child support payments since he moved in with his mother and sister -- mother and sisters. So far he owes me over \$5,000.

In September 2008, my child services rep, Joe Bellavance, sent the paperwork to Florida. He

Good afternoon, Mr. DiBiase.

JOHN DiBIASE: Good afternoon.

SENATOR MUSTO: Do you have any written testimony for us, Mr. DiBiase?

JOHN DiBIASE: Yes, I do.

SENATOR MUSTO: Thank you.

JOHN DiBIASE: I'm not going to read it, but I'm going to refer to some things that are in there.

Thank you, Committee on Select Committee on Children Chairs and members for giving me the opportunity to speak regarding Bill 64 -- 6486 and 5144. I would like you to support both of those bills. I have some concerns with Bill 6486. I'm going to speak to that in a few minutes.

My name is John DiBiase,. I'm here speaking for the thousands of noncustodial fathers who have been systematically discriminated against by our state's family court judicial branch.

I just got a call yesterday from a father in Fairfield who had some concerns that he would not be treated fairly by the courts in his upcoming divorce. He had responded to my website.

There's no confidence in the fathers of this state that they will or have been treated fairly by the family court system. One father complained to a judge in Danbury Superior Court that he was being treated unfairly at the end of his hearing, and the judge's response was the courts are treating you

fairly. And he laughed and walked out of the courthouse.

This same judge denied my motion to prevent my ex-wife from taking our son out of the country and gave her permission to take him -- her out -- him out of the country on my motion. She didn't even have to file a motion, which isn't -- I don't think was appropriate.

I would like to speak to the child support issue. The section there -- Section 2 of Section 46b-21 (inaudible) D of the general statutes to be appealed says for child support arrears in excess of \$500, shall not accrue from a child -- when a noncustodial parent's income is at or below the poverty level.

I'd like to have it included or amended that child support arrears shall not accrue when a parent is incarcerated. It's almost impossible for those parents to pay that back.

There's two bills that are affecting the child -- this child support arrearage issue. The Bradley (inaudible) and the (inaudible) Act of 1867 which was established to end debtors (inaudible) prison. And the Bradley amendment was established to -- or saying that child support arrears cannot be forgiven.

SENATOR MUSTO: Thank you, sir.

I want to see if there are any questions from members of the committee for this witness.
None?

JOHN DiBIASE: This bill also does not --

SENATOR MUSTO: Sir, excuse me. Like I said before, we're trying to give people -- trying to give everyone a chance to speak, so we

really do need to limit your three minutes
this time.

Thank you for coming in and testifying.

Caroline Mavridis?

CAROLINE MAVRIDIS: Mavridis.

SENATOR MUSTO: Mavridis.

CAROLINE MAVRIDIS: Yes.

Chairs and members of the committee, I'd like to first thank you for giving us this forum to speak with you. My name is Caroline Mavridis, and I'm a postdoctoral research fellow at UConn in Storrs, and I've had the privilege of being involved now with some ongoing research related to Nurturing Families Networks through the training that they provide to clinical supervisors and to the family home visitors.

And so my insight is coming from that and from having gotten to know the great folks who work at the Children's Trust. And, of course, I am here to support Bill Number 5144 to expand NFN to all single parents with income below poverty line.

As they currently stand, the NFN services are well-received, accepted by most of the families to whom they are explained and offered. And the programs not only address immediate survival needs, but they also teach families about child development, parenting, help them set their own goals and identify the resources they need to achieve those goals.

In addition to further decreasing abuse and neglect before they do their damage, an expansion of NFN programs to all needy Connecticut families is also strategic

Testimony of Gabriel Fonseca, Program Manager
Madonna Place
240 Main Street
Norwich, CT 06360

Prepared for the Select Committee on Children
Public Hearing – Thursday, February 26, 2009
Committee Bill No. 5144 and Raised Bill No. 6486

My name is Gabriel Fonseca, Program Manager of the **Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Program** and three **Children's Trust Fund** programs at Madonna Place, a non-profit family support agency in Norwich. I am here today in support of Committee Bill No. 5144 An Act Concerning an Appropriation to Expand the Nurturing Families Network and Raised Bill No. 6486 An Act Concerning Responsible Fatherhood and Strong Families.

I support Committee Bill 5144 because the Children's Trust Fund (CTF) has proven to help our state cope with a costly social phenomenon, child abuse and neglect. The Children's Trust Fund has been a major supporter of our work with Norwich families for over 10 years. We have benefited from their leadership and guidance. I am currently managing a Nurturing Families Network program, a Family Empowerment Program working with fathers and families, and a Family School Connection program. All of these help parents and children with a focus on improving the chances that children will have a promising future. The Children's Trust fund uses research findings to guide program development. I respectfully ask this committee to consider the return on invest that is possible from expanding the work of the Children's Trust Fund. This entity has proven to be effective and should be considered an asset to the state that is worth the investment.

Regarding Raised Bill 6486, I respectfully ask you to support the concept of constructing a Problem-Solving Court Demonstration pilot program. If this program is implemented correctly, I am confident that it will help CT collect more from parents with child support arrears owed to the state. We are at a critical point in Connecticut and these times call upon us to use alternative responses.

I am sure you are aware of the large number of parents who owe child support to the state. Most of those parents are non custodial, low-income fathers who lack the skills needed to earn a living wage, lack confidence, or have criminal records that may be barriers to earning taxable wages. As a fatherhood practitioner, I have seen a number of dads come to the Madonna Place for support as they face their obligations. From my experience, the majority of those men were willing to handle their responsibilities yet many of them needed formal guidance to deal with the underlying problems that brought them to court. In the last two years, our fatherhood staff worked with over 250 dads. Of those, 67 asked us to support and guide them as they attempted to improve and maintain compliance with Child Support Enforcement. We helped 87% (58 fathers) of them comply with their child

support obligations. Through comprehensive service delivery we helped fathers maintain a socially productive lifestyle and we helped the state by empowering these men to make regular payments. Furthermore, we helped many dads get more involved with their children by helping them establish visitation orders or co-parenting plans which in turn gives them meaning to their role of 'DAD'. We approach this work in the best interest of children. The children of our state ought to have two parents financially and emotionally supporting them.

My staff members work with men and families in a strength based manner. We understand the systemic issues they face and we use a tactical approach. Our agency is a respected community based entity located in down town Norwich no more than two blocks away from the Family Court. We have a good working relationship with the court staff and we receive many referrals from them. Recently, I spoke with David Gage, Norwich Court Clerk, about the concept of Problem-Solving Court. He was excited to hear of the concept and stated to me, "I think it would be great to have another option for these men".

Our program holds the John Martinez Award for Program Excellence since the certification process was implemented. Currently we are one of six DSS certified fatherhood programs in our state. I am certain that any of these programs can play an effective role in a Problem-Solving Court Demonstration pilot program. It would be in the best interest of the state to utilize existing programs that have expertise and a proven track record.

In closing, I ask you consider Norwich and Madonna Place as a possible pilot site location. From my perspective implementing this form of service would pose little to no barriers. The major thing I need to consider is fiscal limitations. Given the current economic problems we all face, I may need to enact this program with no additional financial support. If that is the case, I may be able to use existing funds received from DSS for the purpose of demonstration. To do that, I must get permission, which should not be an issue. We are willing to change the direction of services to work more with parents with child support arrears issues, if there may be a possibility to expand our program in the future. Our Agency Director, Mrs. Nancy Gentes and I have been working on this concept and have patiently waited for legislators to gain interest in it. We would like to have a service delivery role and hopefully demonstrate that this type of program has positive implications for our state. Furthermore, if our program is one of the designated pilot sites we would bring a great deal of expertise. We understand that the budgetary issues we face as a state are serious. I am not asking for additional dollars. I am simply asking you to consider us as site to pilot a Problem-Solving Court Demonstration pilot program. Thank you for your commitment to children of our state and for your time.

Gabriel Fonseca- Program Manager, Madonna Place, Norwich, CT

NHFA New Haven Family Alliance

Partnership for Family Empowerment
370 James Street, 2nd Floor • New Haven, CT 06513-3090

Barbara Tinney
Executive Director

Tel: (203) 786 5970
Fax: (203) 777-5839

TESTIMONY PROVIDED TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN

February 26, 2009

Mr. Blannie Bostic, Project Manager
New Haven Family Alliance/Male Involvement Network
370 James Street
New Haven, CT 06513

SUPPORT FOR H.B. No. 6486 (Raised) AN ACT CONCERNING RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD AND STRONG FAMILIES

Good Afternoon Senator Musto, Representative Urban and members of the Select Committee on Children. My name is Blannie Bostic and I am the Project Manager for New Haven Family Alliance/Male Involvement Network. Also with me are Mr. Terrance McIntosh, Director of Marketing and Communication with the Community Action Agency of New Haven, Dr. Augustine Okeke, Program Coordinator, Project Brotherhood at the Hospital of St. Raphael and Mr. Rick Jennings, Director of Student Parenting and Family Services Father Care Program at Wilbur Cross High School and Tamika Bradham, Research Associate with The Consultation Center at Yale University.

The New Haven Family Alliance is the lead organization for the Male Involvement Network and has provided social services in New Haven for more than seventeen years working with New Haven's most vulnerable and fragile families. The Male Involvement Network is a collaboration of fatherhood stakeholders operating in New Haven for over ten years. We worked closely with the late Representative John Martinez in his foundational work on fatherhood in Connecticut and we helped shape the 1999 Fatherhood legislation in our state. We are here in support of House Bill No. 6486 An Act Concerning Responsible Fatherhood and Strong Families.

We support House Bill No. 6486 at this time because it helps to re-establish, as a public policy priority in Connecticut, father's role in the lives of children, and in particular poor children in our urban environments.

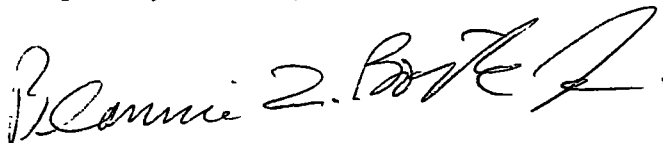
Connecticut was one of the first States to implement fatherhood legislation and to convene a Fatherhood Council. However, our efforts to address the issues of fatherhood, father absence and father involvement in the lives of children have fallen short and have not been a public policy priority in our State for quite some time. We have fallen behind in this arena even in light of the bodies of relevant data that demonstrate conclusively that the problems associated with father absence are monumental and that fathers are important to children: economically, socially, scholastically, morally, and spiritually. We know that the absence of fathers in families that are poor create substantial negative consequences that need to be addressed in order to engender a healthy productive society.

We in the Male Involvement Network know that supporting the healthy involvement of fathers in children's lives requires more than programmatic responses. Meaningful and effective fatherhood efforts require a collaborative working partnership of local social service agencies, interested community members, fathers, local funding sources, state entities, and academic partners aligned to address the unique needs of low-income, non-custodial fathers. This is a description of the Male Involvement Network (MIN), established in 1999 to build on the assets and services existing in our local service delivery systems. The MIN is a model that builds the capacity of a locale by creating a systematic approach to fatherhood development. Through this integrated approach, partner agencies (male involvement network members; local social service agencies, interested community members, fathers, local community foundations, state entities, and academic partners) collaboratively serve men using strategies consistent with their stated mission. The MIN systematic approach reduces interagency competition because each agency engages in practices consistent with their stated goals that also expands their clientele and requires them to examine how they uniquely serve this population of men.

The Male Involvement Network has worked in partnership with our local Magistrate and child support court since 2004 enrolling fathers with child support arrearages on-site at the court house using a state of the art database developed in partnership with New Haven Healthy Start our federally funded child infant mortality and morbidity prevention initiative. We are able to provide fathers with the range of services cited in House Bill No. 6488 that support their ability to meet the court's orders and to nurture and parent their children.

We believe that if Connecticut is to sustain our work in the area of fatherhood and regain our national leadership position in this area then the highly replicable model of the MIN can create the infrastructures needed to assist low-income, non-custodial, minority fathers.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Blannie Bostic".

Blannie Bostic, Project Manager
Male Involvement Network



Commission On Child Protection
State of Connecticut

Office of the Chief Child Protection Attorney

330 MAIN STREET, 2ND FLOOR
 HARTFORD, CT 06106
 Tel 860-566-1341 Fax 860-566-1349
 E-Mail: CCPA@jud.ct.gov

CAROLYN SIGNORELLI
 CHIEF CHILD PROTECTION ATTORNEY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN
Public Hearing February 26, 2009

Written Testimony of Carolyn Signorelli
Chief Child Protection Attorney & Acting Chair, CTF

Good Morning Senator Musto, Representative Urban and distinguished Committee Members. For the record I am Carolyn Signorelli, Chief Child Protection Attorney with the Commission on Child Protection and Acting Chair of the Children's Trust Fund Council. I thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in favor of H.B. 5144 and H.B. 6486 and to express concerns regarding S.B. 870.

I am in favor of H.B. 5144 because it is critical that a significant transition of state funds to primary prevention, designed to voluntarily engage families in meeting the challenges of parenthood, creating their own solutions and support network, and avoiding involvement in the child protection system be made now. Our state, our families, another generation of children cannot wait while the leaders in whom they have put their trust expend energy explaining why we can't act to do what is right, to figure out a way to do what makes sense and why we're constrained to continue our pattern of reacting to crisis and failing to rescue too many children from a cycle of poverty, abuse, neglect and lost opportunity to achieve their highest potential.

This bill, by daring to appropriate funds for NFN during this economically challenging time, is an important first step towards true leadership on behalf of struggling parents and the futures of innocent children. NFN has a proven track record

of successful engagement with families who exhibit significant indicators for child abuse and neglect. The voluntary nature of the program fosters a parent's sense of initiative, responsibility for their child's well-being and future success, problem-solving capacity, and sense of security in their community. NFN effectively addresses the risk factors in partnership with the families thereby preventing their situation from deteriorating and avoiding a future investigation by DCF for abuse or neglect.

"Prevention" efforts are the most responsible and cost-effective methods to reduce child neglect and abuse and all its attendant short and long-term costs to our children, families, communities and state. It is responsible because the state is proactive in helping parents be better parents and children avoid the pain of abuse and neglect; cost-effective because of the exponential expense of childhood abuse and neglect in our society.

The Children's Trust Fund is the state agency who researched, designed, evaluated and continues to improve and expand NFN. The Children's Trust Fund from very early on embraced results based accountability to ensure that its programs worked and that state dollars are spent on evidence based practices. As a result, the Nurturing Family Network and the Children's Trust Fund are trusted resources in our communities. Appropriating the funds to CTF will ensure that all the time and effort the agency has taken to earn that trust has not been a wasted undertaking and investment over the course of the last 10 years.

I enthusiastically support this bill and see it as an important step to implementing the critical goals of C.G.S. §§ 4-67t through x. I would therefore respectfully request that this bill be approved.

H.B. 6486 AN ACT CONCERNING RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD AND STRONG FAMILIES.

I am also in support of HB 6486, a pilot to work towards engaging fathers in responsible involvement in their children's lives as a parent, and consider what's described in the pilot as a positive means to increasing their engagement.

As the agency that currently provides legal representation to indigent parents who owe child support and who are facing possible incarceration due to contempt, I believe that the current system of threatening or placing parents who have been found indigent in jail until they (or family members) come up with the money to pay a purge, to be logically flawed and ineffectual long term. Ordering individuals who have no education, possibly a criminal record and a history of irresponsible behavior to do job searches to stay out of jail also does not appear to be a long-term solution, especially in this economy.

I think the pilot is appropriate to determine if it can have positive results with fathers already in arrears in their child support, but it may be quite challenging to achieve the results necessary for each child of a father who has impregnated several women and reneged on his support obligations. I think this concept of engagement and support goes hand in hand with the expansion of NFN, as the Children's Trust Fund has also implemented a program to involve fathers early on in the life of their newborn, encouraging them to view their responsibility in a positive light and to be pro-active in taking the necessary steps to support and nurture their children. If programs like this can be expanded through H.B. 5144 it will help to reduce the docket in support court in the future. I also know that CTF would be happy to collaborate with the effort in support court to ensure that the expertise and programs it has already developed be accessed where appropriate for the fathers in this pilot.

Testimony to the Public Hearing on Raised Bill No. 6486

John DiBiase
17 Newton Street
Meriden, CT. 06450-4414

Thank you Committee on Select Committee on Children Chairs and members for giving me this opportunity to speak regarding Bill 6486. I have mixed feelings about this Bill.

I am here representing the thousands of non custodial fathers who have been systematically discriminated against by our states Family Court Judicial Branch. I just got a call yesterday from a father in Fairfield who had some concerns that he would not be treated fairly by the courts in his upcoming divorce. He had responded to my web site for Divorced men.. www.ctdivorcedmen.com There is no confidence in the fathers of this state that they will or have been treated fairly by the family court system. One father complained to judge Romeo Petroni in Danbury Superior Court that he wasn't being treated fairly by the court. The judges response was the court treats everyone equally. This same judge denied my motion to prevent my ex-wife from taking our son to the Phillipine and in the same hearing gave he permission on my motion to allow her the right to take our son out of our country.

[There are a number of judges who are ill suited to family courts and should be removed because of their twenty century anti-father attitudes. It takes two pay checks and two parents to raise a family in the twenty-first century not one.]

While it is good that it provides for support of fathers to improve their lives, we need to level the playing field between First and Second Families, between married and non married families and between custodial and non custodial parents in the realms of child custody and child support.

Family Courts are holding these classes to different standards. Example: Mothers who are ordered to pay child support do not pay the court ordered child support 80 % of the time. Interference with a non custodial parents visitation orders are rarely sanctioned yet fathers who are delinquent in paying their child support are more often than not incarcerated than given the option of paying an arrearage fee. This is contrary to CSE administrators comment at a fatherhood Task Force meeting saying the courts will not incarcerate a father but order him to pay an arrearage sir charge.

When a custodial parents rights are being interfered with the police readily respond but when a non custodial parent complains about access to their children the police say that visitation interference is a civil matter and you should get an attorney and take the matter to the court. Some police say we can't force you child to visit. There is no consistency between one police department and another in regards to enforcing court ordered visitation.

This Bill No. 6486 is ignoring the "Elephant in the Room" It's name is not "Dumbo" It's name is , Judicial Bias, Judicial Tyranny, Gender Bias, Discrimination against Parents with Disabilities and Discrimination against Fathers.

The amendment to Sec 3 Section 17b-27a of the general statutes ignores the fact that men (fathers) are being systematically segregated from their children and unconstitutionally being made a non custodial parent for the duration of their children's lives without any access to Due Process Law because of the prejudice in Family Courts against fathers. Our no-fault divorce law denies the defendant Due Process because it takes away the ability of the defendant to stop the plaintiff from getting a divorce. Eighty percent of the divorces are filed by women We need to take the monetary and property incentives out of

Thursday, February 26, 2009 AOL: Jdibiasejr

getting a divorce Family court judges give no credit fathers even if they have been the stay at home parent before the action for dissolution and the bonding that has occurred with the minor child prior to the court action.

This Bill No. 6486 is just perpetuating an already unjust, unconstitutional child support, child custody system. The director of CSE, Charisse Hutton said at a recent Task Force on Fatherhood meeting the "fathers are ordered to pay child support more than 90% of the time and women less than 10 % or Mothers get custody more than 90 % of the time and fathers get custody less than 10 % of the time. These stats were confirmed when our Attorney General stated that the number of fathers paying child support was 94%, he said this on a news 30 broadcast on Deadbeat dads about a year ago. debra.bogstie@nbcuni.com

I suggested to the Task Force on Fatherhood to introduce a Bill requiring judges to complete a Child Custody Determination Factor check list showing what factors were the ones that determined which parent would get custody in a contested case. No Bill was produced.

This Bill 6486 discriminates against married persons when it says that this Bill will increase the ability of fathers to meet the medical needs of their children. Parents of non divorced homes are not held to this standard of having medical insurance for their children. Parents living at the poverty level at the time of their separation usually can't afford medical for their family let alone for their children. Also working second spouses of both the first and second families income should be included in any calculations for child support. It is unjust to require all parents to pay for college or medical insurance regardless of their financial or marital status.

Regarding sec. 46b-215d of the general statutes: Why is the cap for hours worked is at 45 hours per week and not 40 hours per week ? It is good that overtime is not to be considered income for purposes of child support guidelines. How many obligors are working over 40 hours a week. They are lucky to even have a job in this competitive job market. Nation wide the statistics for how much non custodial parents earn is about 85 % earning less than \$10,000 per week.

The statement in sec. 3. Section 17b-27a (1) is not gender neutral, it states The objectives of the initiative is not to give father equal rights or equal treatment but to continue the state's policy of discriminating against fathers in family court matters. Both men and women should be assisted in meeting their obligations in the financial and emotional responsibilities. There should be a public education program and policy education the custodial parent to support the involvement of the non custodial parent in the minor child's life.

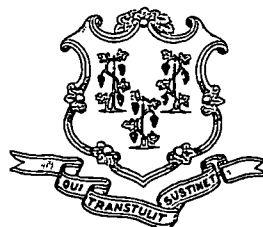
John DiBiase
Child-Father Advocate
Save Our Kids Parental Alienation Foundation
www.fatherwithoutchristmas.com
Divorced Men's Association of Connecticut
www.ctdivorcedmen.com

Thursday, February 26, 2009 AOL: Jdibiasejr

SENATOR GARY D. LEBEAU
Third District

State Capitol, Room 110
 Hartford, Connecticut 06106-1591

Tel. (860) 240-0511
 LeBeau@senatedems.ct.gov
 www.SenatorLeBeau.cga.ct.gov



State of Connecticut

SENATE

DEPUTY PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

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Commerce Committee

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 Legislative Management Committee
 Transportation Committee

February 26, 2009

To: Senator Musto, Representative Urban and members of the Select Committee on Children

Re: **HB 6486 AAC RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD AND STRONG FAMILIES**

Good morning to the distinguished chairs of the Children's Committee. I would like to thank you for your leadership in raising HB 6486 this session. If she were still with us, I am sure that Representative Faith McMahon would also be pleased. The bill represents the beginning of the harvest of some of the tangible fruit of the labor that Representative McMahon worked so hard to achieve and so fervently wished for.

It was principally through representative McMahon's advocacy working with Senator Meyer, that the fatherhood Task Force was established and initiated. It was and is my honor to work on such a crucial issue at this important time in our history.

The Bill embodies some of the actions supported by testimony in front of our task force, that the state could begin to help turn around some of the negative and potentially disastrous trends that we see in society. Moreover, the bill generally takes these actions by using existing resources. This is important because it pulls together a variety of state functions, or as the cliché goes "breaks down the silos" between the courts, the community technical colleges and a variety of service providers to strengthen the role of fathers in the lives of their children.

The bill also takes a practical and important new approach to child support arrears payments. The data shows that the vast majority of those non-custodial parents who are in arrears are poor, poorly educated and have little hope of making a substantial income. It is ridiculous to drive these men away from their children by forcing them to jump over a hurdle which grows larger by the week for defaulting on payments.

These payments can reach tens of thousands of dollars, making it impossible for most people to ever pay their debts. So the question arises; is it better for children to have two parents, even if one of them cannot meet their financial responsibilities to their child? Or is it better to have one parent and have the second parent essentially banished from the child's life because of their inability to meet their financial responsibility? I come down on the side of two parents for every child.

Finally, the bill opens up the opportunity for possible future funding from Federal sources. This bill is an important second step, building upon the initiative of two great representatives that are no longer with us, Representatives John Martinez and Faith McMahon. We should pass this bill in their memory, to advance this work. Mostly we should pass this bill because it may help our children and our future.

Sincerely,

Gary D. Lebeau
State Senator, 3rd District



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



Commission on Children

Testimony of Elaine Zimmerman
Executive Director
Connecticut Commission on Children

Submitted to the Select Committee on Children
Connecticut General Assembly
February 26, 2009

Senator Musto, Representative Urban and Members of the Committee. My name is Elaine Zimmerman and I am the Executive Director for the Commission on Children. I appreciate the opportunity to testify this morning in support of **Raised Bill 6486, An Act Concerning Responsible Fatherhood and Strong Families** and **House Bill 5144, An Act Concerning An Appropriation to Expand the Nurturing Families Network**.

H.B. 6486, An Act Concerning Responsible Fatherhood and Strong Families

The bill before you seeks to address a systemic problem facing society of fatherlessness. "Fatherlessness" is a complex social issue and there is a great deal of debate about the causes and remedies. However, there is no debate that strong families and communities are essential elements for providing a secure future for children. When both mother and father are positively and actively engaged in a child's life by providing financial support, love, guidance, and discipline, every child has a better chance of success. Within that context, the science of brain development and overall social, emotional and physical health of children depends on the interaction of caring, competent parents and caregivers. Research points to the fact that children with absent fathers are more likely to drop out of school, become teenage parents, develop drug or alcohol problems, or become involved in violent criminal behavior.

The Commission commends the leadership of Representative Morris and Senator LeBeau for convening the Fatherhood Task Force. It has been ten years since Representative John Martinez embraced fatherhood policy for the state and established the Fatherhood Council to bring all three branches of government together to commit to promoting positive fatherhood and better child outcomes. Since then progress has been made in investment in fatherhood programs that provide support, education, job training and parenting classes to dads throughout Connecticut.

The Task Force provides an opportunity to reinvigorate efforts on behalf of families and children. The Task Force heard from parents, child development experts, Judicial Branch leaders, and national experts who provided testimony on the important role of fatherhood. Fatherhood activist and actor icon Bill Cosby provided riveting testimony on the impact of fatherlessness on the minority community. He called for a major culture change to embrace responsible parenting. Too many of our children go to bed without the hug of a father.

The bill before seeks to establish public policies that will promote positive father involvement and address some of the system barriers to achieving this goal.

Section 1: Directs the Chief Court Administrator to establish a Problem Solving Court. This approach authorizes the court to incorporate into court proceedings the ability to work with non-custodial parents, both mothers and fathers, to address the root causes for non-compliance with child support orders. This model, developed by the National Center for Court Innovation, successfully helps parents to address issues such as lack of education, increase parenting skills, work on legal issues, help with co-parenting and overall case management to do what it takes to end the cycle of court involvement. Under the leadership of the Judicial Branch, a committee is now exploring this model and the legislation will provide the necessary legal imprimatur to assist in the establishment of Problem Solving Courts in Connecticut.

The Commission is working with Representative Bruce Morris and the Judicial Branch on substitute language for this section that will clarify that the goal is to authorize the Judicial Branch to establish Problem Solving Court as a system wide practice in dealing with child support cases where these barriers to payment exist.

Section 2: Under the leadership of the 2003 General Assembly, Connecticut instituted an arrears management program and charged the Department of Social Services with promulgating regulations for its implementation. Since its inception, fewer than ten (10) residents have qualified to participate in the arrears management program due to the complicated nature of the eligibility guidelines and administrative procedures.

This section seeks to require DSS to report on its current arrear management program. It also "caps" arrears in excess of five hundred dollars for noncustodial parents living at or below the federal poverty level – a promising practice that evolved in New York.

The Commission would also recommend consideration of requiring the Commissioner of DSS to expand the number of fatherhood programs participating in the arrears management program and to streamline the application and approval process to bring the program closer to its legislative intent.

Section 3b: Requires DSS to report on its efforts to reduce teen fatherhood and the number of noncustodial parents participating in job training and the number becoming employed.

Focusing on prevention is a smart investment and assisting non-custodial parents in securing employment will lead to more stable child support income. Two common-sense measures that begin with asking DSS to report on the current status of these efforts.

Section 3c: Directs DSS to utilize federal funds for these purposes if funds become available.

Clearly, government alone cannot reverse the growing trend of father absence. However, government can enact policies and fund programs that help reduce the number of young men who become teen parents and encourage active participation by fathers of all ages in raising their children. We encourage passage of AAC Responsible Fatherhood and Strong Families as it supports these basic tenets, builds off existing resources and aligns our work the federal "Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act" expected to be reintroduced by the Obama Administration.

H.B. 5144, An Act Concerning An Appropriation to Expand the Nurturing Families Network

The Commission's work on behalf of children focuses on primary prevention- what does the science of brain development and child youth development research tell us about what children need from birth to age 21 in order to achieve optimal health and development. The Commission has championed legislation to move state budget expenditures from crisis spending to prevention. The bill before you represents a sound investment in primary prevention. The Nurturing Families Network works successfully with families to prevent child abuse and neglect, but does so in a positive framework by providing guidance and training to ensure parents have the skills and knowledge to be competent, caring parents. The Commission support expansion of this program and believes there is a opportunity with the new Obama Administration to claim certain home visitation functions in the Nurturing Families Program in the Medicaid Program. This would provide the necessary funding to expand the program if the dollars were reinvested in this program.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning.

WHY FOCUS ON FATHERS?

What Policymakers Should Know

There is no social network where low-income fathers can go for help.

Unlike welfare services for women, there is no single point of access where fathers can obtain services.

Most fatherhood programs exist at the local level through community organizations; few have formal relationships with state institutions.

Most states do not have a statewide strategy regarding low-income fathers.

Children who have access to two parents are at reduced risk for school dropout, teen pregnancy, juvenile delinquency and substance abuse, even if their parents are not married.

Service delivery systems were created for married or divorced families; there is no mechanism to deal with intact families that are not married.

Most low-income fathers are in committed relationships with the mother of their children at the time their child is born.

At birth, many low-income mothers and fathers indicate their interest in marrying.

Most low-income fathers care about their children and want to be involved, and many women want fathers to be involved.

Many low-income fathers grew up without their own fathers; they lack realistic examples of what a father should do and think that if they cannot provide financially, their families are better off without them.

What Policymakers Can Do

- 4 Use state institutions—child support and welfare agencies and the courts—as access points to connect low-income fathers with services.
- 4 Develop a statewide strategy for service delivery that combines state and local partnerships.
- 4 Develop outcome-based performance measures to assist state agencies to direct efforts toward developing comprehensive fatherhood services.
- 4 Use independent boards or commissions to oversee fatherhood projects.
- 4 Use the budget process to direct money for fatherhood programs administered by an independent board that will solicit proposals from service delivery entities.
- 4 Review policies within the child support and welfare agencies, judicial and educational systems to determine whether laws, regulations and policies deter or prevent father involvement.
- 4 Develop mechanisms that recognize fragile families and provide appropriate intervention.
- 4 Develop flexible service delivery options within welfare and child support agencies that address the needs of different types of families—referral to services, traditional enforcement or diversion.
- 4 Use voluntary paternity establishment to connect low-income fathers and mothers with parenting and child development skill-building activities.
- 4 Ensure relationship building and peer support networks are available to help fathers develop skills that allow them to be better fathers.
- 4 Include mothers in the recruitment process for fatherhood services; they can help reinforce father involvement beyond financial contribution.
- 4 Provide access to mediation and parenting plan development to never-married families similar to the way these services are made available to divorcing parents.

What Policymakers Need to Know and
What They Can Do

WHY FOCUS ON FATHERS? (CONTINUED)

- Q: Won't providing services to low-income fathers take away from services that help mothers and children?
- A: No. Fatherhood services help fathers to be financial providers and help them become better partners and parents. This can benefit mothers and children, particularly as they move off welfare rolls. Many programs can work with mothers and fathers together.
- Q: There are lots of fathers out there doing the right thing without any special help. Why should we direct time and money into helping fathers who can't meet their obligations?
- A: There are a group of low-income fathers whose partners are making the transition off welfare or could be at risk of going on welfare. These fathers share many of the same characteristics as their female counterparts—low levels of literacy, unemployment, poor work history or low-wage employment. Mothers and children may not receive formal child support from these men because they do not make enough to pay child support. Other times, low-income fathers feel as though they have nothing to offer their children if they cannot provide financially. Through welfare agencies, women and children have access to a variety of programs and services in all parts of a state. However, no formal network exists where fathers can turn for assistance. Helping fathers get jobs can help them reconnect with families; providing peer support networks can help address communication barriers with mothers. Children do better with the involvement of two parents, even if the parents are not married. Developing services to help men be better fathers can provide children with access to parents who work together to raise their children and help ease the hardship many single mothers face.
- Q: Why do fathers need help learning how to be a father? They had no problem fathering their child.
- A: Many low-income fathers grew up without the presence of their own father, so they lack real-life examples of what a father should do and what he should provide. Many men equate their worth as a father by the financial contribution that they can make. In the eyes of fathers, this notion often is reinforced by the attempt to collect child support in the absence of other types of assistance to help fathers gain access to their children. Helping men feel as though they contribute in a positive way to their families fosters self-esteem, and fathers feel as though they have something to offer their children. Access to other types of services can help fathers develop better communication skills to interact with their partners and skills that help them be better parents.
- Q: Won't directing funds to fathers reduce the amount of money that goes to programs that serve mothers and children?
- A: No. Under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, states can provide services to both mothers and fathers even if they are not married or do not live together. Welfare caseloads have declined by more than 40 percent nationally, leaving resources that would have been spent on cash assistance available to reinvest in other types of programs or services. Additionally, the new welfare allows states to target resources to poor families—including fathers—to reduce the likelihood that mothers and children will sink deeper into poverty once they leave welfare, or to prevent them from going on welfare in the first place.

HOW THE CHILD SUPPORT SYSTEM AFFECTS LOW-INCOME FATHERS

What Policymakers Need to Know

Guidelines formulas that determine child support orders are a matter of state discretion and these guidelines can be formulated in statute.

Not all dads who do not pay child support are deadbeat dads; some fathers lack the financial resources to pay mandated child support amounts.

Low-income fathers face many of the same barriers that welfare mothers face—low literacy, few job skills and poor employment history.

Child support enforcement agencies are traditionally a cost-recovery agency set up to reimburse the state for welfare payments, although fewer than 15 percent of welfare families actually receive support.

Child support agencies were not designed to deal with low-income parents who were never-married.

Most enforcement tools are targeted toward parents with assets and those who have means to provide support but actively evade paying support.

Current child support policy does not have effective mechanisms to distinguish fathers who evade paying support from those who would pay support if they had the resources. No longer is enforcement “one size fits all.”

Granting a downward modification to low-income fathers may make it easier for them to make continuous child support payments.

Many fathers do not know they can ask for a modification, or what circumstances warrant a modification

What Policymakers Can Do

- 4 Establish formulas and guidelines that take low-income obligors into consideration.
- 4 Ensure that guidelines allow low-income parents enough income to meet their needs after their child support is paid.
- 4 Connect fathers with employment and training opportunities that allow them to obtain employment and develop skills that provide wage advancement opportunities, and establish (or modify) realistic support order amounts.
- 4 Establish child support orders that reflect a father's real income.
- 4 Include service delivery and referral mechanisms alongside traditional cost-recovery efforts.
- 4 Create customer service centers within IV-D agencies to allow fathers easier access to information about their case and the child support enforcement process.
- 4 Devise policies to serve both parents as a family unit regardless of their marital status.
- 4 Ensure that child support agencies develop partnerships with court systems, welfare agencies and local service providers to assist fathers to meet their financial obligations.
- 4 Develop procedures to sort deadbeat dads from deadbroke dads and determine whether punitive enforcement, referral to services or modification is the appropriate course of action.
- 4 Develop customer service lines that can answer basic questions regarding modification procedures.
- 4 Ensure that fathers are aware that they can ask for a modification if their economic situation changes.
- 4 Ensure that agencies and courts have procedures to streamline the modification process.



What Policymakers Need to Know and
What They Can Do

HOW THE CHILD SUPPORT SYSTEM AFFECTS LOW-INCOME FATHERS (CONTINUED)

What Policymakers Need to Know and What They Can Do

What Policymakers Need to Know

Many child support orders for low-income men are set as a result of a default order that may not take into consideration the actual wage earnings of a father, resulting in an order that is set too high.

Fathers often receive default orders if they do not attend their court hearing. Fathers avoid these hearings because they are fearful that the child support system's only interest is in punishing them.

Most families who receive welfare do not receive any collected support because the state retains this money to reimburse itself for money spent on welfare. Fathers view this as a disincentive to pay through the system.

One of the barriers that low-income men face in paying child support orders is the massive arrearages that accumulate once a mother receives welfare.

Many low-income fathers are present at their child's birth and are in a serious relationship with the child's mother.

Women may begin receiving welfare without disclosing the location of the father, though the father may, in fact, be present within the house

What Policymakers Can Do

- 4 Insist that child support workers establish proactive procedures that encourage fathers to come forward before default orders are entered.
- 4 Provide easy access to information about the child support system that helps both mothers and fathers navigate the court system.
- 4 Inform fathers about their rights and the child support proceeding before their court date to eliminate any misperceptions that could discourage fathers from attending.
- 4 Pass through collected support to families—states can count these expenditures in their maintenance of effort.
- 4 Develop procedures that ensure welfare case-workers adequately communicate the implications of assigning child support rights to the state in exchange for receiving welfare benefits.
- 4 Compromise arrearages for fathers who demonstrate a compliance with payment plans or employment requirements.
- 4 Develop flexible policies regarding the accumulation of interest on past arrearages.
- 4 Require that state agencies set welfare debt equal to the amount of a father's support order.
- 4 Analyze how arrearages are set—retroactive to birth or to the date of a court proceeding—and craft policy that insures a father's debt will be set at an amount he is likely to pay.
- 4 Conduct paternity establishment as early as possible. Suspend enforcement of an order if parents are cohabitating.
- 4 Connect families with services to assist them to develop parenting and relationship skills.
- 4 Conduct outreach to connect fragile families with services before they apply for welfare.
- 4 Connect families with services to assist them to become and stay employed to minimize the use of welfare.



HOW THE CHILD SUPPORT SYSTEM AFFECTS LOW-INCOME FATHERS (CONTINUED)

- Q: Why should child support enforcement agencies give fathers who don't pay child support "a break" instead of putting them in jail or using other enforcement measures?
- A: Child support agencies should use their enforcement tools for fathers who actively evade child support. For fathers who lack the financial resources to pay support, directing strong enforcement measures does not result in increased child support payments—an ineffective use of state and federal dollars. These policies may well keep fathers from participating in the formalized system. Child support enforcement results in collections for less than 20 percent of poor families. Developing policies that make it more feasible for fathers to pay support can help ensure they will pay continually over time.
- Q: Aren't child support policies set by the federal government, leaving the states with little discretion to decide on alternative policies?
- A: Most child support decisions regarding establishing and modifying orders are a matter of state law or regulation. Federal law sets general guidelines regarding enforcement, but states can use their discretion to decide how orders are set and modified and when they are enforced. State legislatures can affect on these policies by directly putting policy in statute, directing agencies to follow specific guidelines, or developing outcome-based performance measures for agencies to follow.
- Q: What can child support agencies do if they find an obligor who can't pay child support because he is unemployed or underemployed?
- A: Agencies can modify support orders to make the current order more feasible and refer fathers to service providers who can help them find jobs or find better jobs.
- Q: Won't lowering a support payment result in less money for the mother and child?
- A: In most cases the mother and child are not getting *any* support, so applying a downward modification can be an investment in ensuring future payments. It can help to establish a positive relationship between the father and the child support agency.
- Q: Why should a state forgive part of a father's debt— isn't that money he should be obligated to pay?
- A: Depending on the amount of the debt, it may be unrealistic for a low-income father to ever repay massive amounts of past debts—in many cases these amounts are thousands of dollars. Forgiving a portion of arrearages also can help ensure future payments if fathers see repayment as a realistic achievement, reducing the likelihood that fathers will revert to providing "underground support." Given the poor collection rates for this population, states have little to lose by trying a new approach.
- Q: Won't a state be losing money if it forgives child support debt?
- A: States are not collecting large amounts of money on state debt from this population. Essentially, they are spending money on enforcement with little cost benefit. Forgiving some portions of past arrearages may help generate future payments.

BUILDING SERVICES TO HELP FATHERS

What Policymakers Need to Know

Low-income fathers share many of the same characteristics as women on welfare—low literacy, poor employment history and low-wage employment.

Low-income men come into contact with many state systems—child support, the courts, corrections and welfare agencies.

Low-income fathers often fall behind in their child support obligations because their earnings are not enough to support themselves and a family.

Many low-income mothers and children do not receive child support.

Federal law requires states to require low-income fathers to work or develop payment plans if they are behind in child support, although many states do not have a statewide strategy to address the issue.

TANF dollars can be used to fund programs and services for fathers without risk to time limits and work requirements for mothers.

TANF dollars can be used to support of variety of services for fathers—employment assistance, counseling, parenting plans, mediation, parenting education, substance abuse and domestic violence.

Like welfare recipients, some fathers have barriers—including substance abuse, domestic violence and anger—that hinder their success in the work force.

There is no social network where men can learn about child rearing and building relationships.

Many low-income men grew up without their own fathers; often, they do not know what a real father does or what is expected of him

What Policymakers Can Do

- 4 Develop networks of local providers to provide men with employment assistance.
- 4 Use state institutions to refer low-income fathers to local service providers.
- 4 Identify “nontraditional” partners—like voluntary paternity establishment programs, Healthy Start and Head Start—to connect fathers with needed services.
- 4 Connect with fathers through women who are participating in welfare programs.
- 4 Combine traditional cost-recovery efforts in child support enforcement with service referrals to local or community employment providers.
- 4 Inform fathers that they can request a modification of their support order if an order is set too high for them to pay.
- 4 Give judges the option of referring fathers to services instead of jail if they are behind in child support due to unemployment.
- 4 Develop a statewide policy regarding strategies to assist low-income fathers and their families.
- 4 Use the budget process to direct funding for the development of fatherhood programs and services.
- 4 Use TANF funds to make competitive grants to local programs that operate fatherhood programs.
- 4 Direct agencies to use TANF funds to assist fathers.
- 4 Use employment as the catalyst to get fathers involved with programs, but offer other types of services—like peer support, counseling, anger management and parenting—that help fathers develop skills to keep jobs and build relationships with their families.
- 4 Ensure that programs offering peer support services are among the choices offered in the referral process.
- 4 Provide parenting and relationship building education components when requiring work and child support compliance.



What Policymakers Need to Know and
What They Can Do

BUILDING SERVICES TO HELP FATHERS (CONTINUED)



Questions to Anticipate

Q: Why should child support agencies be involved with providing services to fathers? Isn't their primary responsibility to collect support for mothers?

A: Child support agencies do try to collect support on behalf of mothers and children, but collection rates are low for poor families. Child support agencies do not need to be the service provider for fathers, but they can act as an access point to connect fathers with services that will help them get jobs so they can pay child support. Not only will it help child support agencies meet their goals of helping families, it is a federal requirement that they have procedures to help low-income fathers work if they are behind in their child support.

Q: What kind of services do low-income fathers need?

A: Fathers need help finding jobs and developing skills that help them get better jobs. They also need help to make sure their child support orders are set at levels they can afford to pay. Fathers also need peer support to help them deal with their frustration over relationships or low self-worth at not being able to provide for their children. Services that help with anger management and developing parenting plans with their current or former partners also are beneficial.

Q: Won't providing services to low-income fathers take away from services that help mothers and children?

A: No. Fatherhood services help fathers to be financial providers and help them become better partners and parents, which can benefit mothers and children—particularly as they move off of welfare rolls. Many programs can work with mothers and fathers together.

Q: Why do low-income fathers need specialized services?

A: Through welfare agencies, women and children have access to a variety of programs and services in all parts of a state. However, no formal network exists where fathers can turn for assistance. Helping fathers get jobs can help them reconnect with families, and providing peer support networks can help address communication barriers with mothers. Children do better with the involvement of two parents, even if parents are not married. Developing services to help men be better fathers can provide children with access to parents who work together to raise their children.

Q: How can employment assistance help men be better fathers?

A: Many fatherhood programs offer employment services in tandem with other things like peer support, anger management and relationship building skills. Helping men feel as though they contribute in a positive way to their families fosters self-esteem, and fathers feel as though they have something to offer their children. Access to other types of services can help fathers develop better communication skills to interact with their partners and skills that help them know how to be better parents.



State of Connecticut
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
 STATE CAPITOL
 HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

REPRESENTATIVE BRUCE V. MORRIS
 ONE HUNDRED FORTIETH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING
 ROOM 4054
 HARTFORD, CT 06106-1591
 CAPITOL (860) 240-8585
 TOLL FREE (800) 842-8267
 FAX (860) 240-0067
 E-MAIL: Bruce.Morris@cga.ct.gov

MEMBER
 HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
 SELECT COMMITTEE ON HOUSING
 JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

Testimony of Representative Bruce V. Morris
 Assistant Majority Leader

Submitted to the Select Committee on Children
 Connecticut General Assembly
 February 26, 2009

Good morning Senator Musto, Representative Urban and Members of the Committee. I am the co-chair of the Fatherhood Task Force along with Senator Gary LeBeau. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on **Raised Bill 6486, AAC Responsible Fatherhood and Strong Families**. This bill represents a small portion of the hard work of the Fatherhood Task Force. I would like to thank the staff of the Select Committee on Children for all the hard work over the past few months. This bill builds on the work of the late Rep. John Martinez and more recently the late Rep. Faith McMahon who was the co-chair of the Select Committee on Children and a member of the Fatherhood Taskforce. The bill established in 1999 is nationally recognized. Connecticut was the first state to establish a fatherhood council.

Last session Speaker Amann convened the Fatherhood Task Force. Over the past few months the Task Force has gathered input from the public and key experts, including nationally-recognized child psychologist Dr. Kyle Pruett and fatherhood activist Dr. Bill Cosby. The bill before you is an initiative that has come out of the work from the Fatherhood Task Force. It seeks to implement nationally recognized best practices in the country to promote positive fatherhood involvement and address barriers to non-compliance with child support by low income parents. This bill seeks to establish problem-solving courts to alleviate the problems that impede the ability for parents' to engage in their children lives such as employment and poverty. Research has shown children with absent fathers are more likely to drop out of school, become teenage

parents, develop drug or alcohol problems, or become involved in violent criminal behavior.

This bill complements ongoing work done by the judicial branch. This proposal is a work in progress and we expect that there will be a larger body of work that will come out in the future. I am on the Human Services Committee and this bill will have opportunity to be further vetted in that Committee. Judge Monroe, the Chief Administrative Judge for Family Matters is very supportive of this initiative.

This bill will also require the Department of Social Services to report on the work that is being conducted. In the earlier bill that was established through Rep. Juan Martinez's leadership we found that there were no reporting requirements for the progress that had taken place. In this day in age of results- based accountability we need data to support our findings. This bill will require this type of accountability to ensure the outcomes we are seeking for families and children.

This bill also positions us to access new federal funds through the Obama administration for fatherhood purposes. I look forward to working with this committee and respectfully request that you vote out of Committee.