

## **D.C. Court Props Up Deadbeat Dads**

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It's a staggering statistic: D.C. has more children in the child support system than in its public school system. One factor is that noncustodial parents who are ex-felons often have trouble finding jobs.

In response, D.C. Superior Court, in collaboration with D.C. Attorney General Linda Singer's office, will begin a new Fathering Court on Oct. 1 to help fathers released from jail become better parents. Over a period of a year, the court will assist 45 D.C. fathers leaving the Rivers Correctional Institution in North Carolina who have child support orders. Initial enrollment is voluntary, but it will become a condition of supervisory release.

The program will offer job training skills and other support services, says Angela Thornton of the D.C. Attorney General's Office, with the goal of assisting participants in finding long-term employment and becoming an integral part of their children's lives. "When most people are released from jail, it's hard for them to find a job," says D.C. Superior Court Magistrate Judge Milton Lee Jr., who volunteered to serve as presiding judge over the Fathering Court. "They feel like they're beaten down after applying for jobs and hearing no after no after no."

Each participant will complete a training workshop and pay an initial \$50 toward his child support order after the first paycheck. Payments will increase to 25 percent of a child support order, followed by 50 percent, until the parent is making full monthly payments, Lee says.

This week, the court will begin hiring case managers to track the program's participants and start identifying those who fit the program's criteria.