



U.S. Department of Health
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Administration for Children
and Families
Office of Family Assistance



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National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

NRFC State Profiles: Alabama 2009

Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs

The Alabama Department of Human Services began funding its Fatherhood Initiative in 2000, in an effort to develop and strengthen programs for fathers in the state. Programs funded in communities across Alabama offer curricula that teach fathers critical parenting and life skills and educate them about the rights and responsibilities of fatherhood. Current programs target married, unmarried, noncustodial, and imprisoned fathers.ⁱ In addition, the Children's Trust Fund of Alabama, which operates under the Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention, has a Fatherhood Program that funds more than 20 programs across the state that help fathers remain responsible and involved participants in their children's lives.ⁱⁱ

State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood

Alabama funds multiple programs directed at young men at risk for unwanted or early fatherhood. The Alabama Department of Human Resources, in partnership with the Alabama Fatherhood Initiative, uses federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding to support community-based organizations in offering a variety of programs—including pregnancy prevention programs—to young, low-income men.ⁱⁱⁱ The Department of Human Resources also works with organizations such as the Alabama Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy to build community support and offer resources to teenagers at risk of becoming parents.^{iv} Federal funds are currently being used to support the Alabama Abstinence-Until-Marriage Education Program (AAEP), which uses abstinence education to prevent pregnancy among adolescents in the state.^v In addition, the Alabama Department of Public Health operates a network of family planning clinics that aim to prevent unwanted pregnancies and abortions and to promote family well-being, responsible behavior, and health. The clinics are open to men and women ages 14 or older throughout the state of Alabama, with some individuals qualifying for free or reduced-cost services.^{vi}

The Family and Medical Leave Act

Alabama has a Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which allows both fathers and mothers time off after the birth or adoption of a child, or during an illness, without fear of losing their jobs. Parents are entitled to up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave over a one-year period to care for a new child, an ill family member, or to recover from their own illness. The FMLA protects fathers and mothers who have worked with the same organization for at least one year and have worked at least 1,250 hours within the past year. The federal FMLA also allows eligible family members to take up to 26 weeks of leave annually to care for a military service member who has been injured in the line of duty. Alabama has no state provisions for paid leave.^{vii}

Domestic Violence Services

With federal funding from the Violence Against Women Act, which was enacted in 1994 and reauthorized in 2006, a number of community-based programs have been established in Alabama under the Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Department of Public Health. These programs provide 24-hour crisis hotlines, individual and group support and counseling, legal and medical advice, support groups, and specialized children's services.^{viii}

Child Custody Policy

When married couples with children separate voluntarily, both parents have the right to petition any Alabama circuit court to determine the custody of the children. In cases of abandonment by

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the wife, the husband is granted custody of the children, if he is deemed a suitable person to have such charge.^{ix} In addition, the Department of Human Resources and the Alabama Administrative Office of Courts use federal TANF funds to provide mediation to unmarried parents regarding child visitation and custody prior to court hearings.^x

Paternity Establishment

Alabama has an in-hospital paternity acknowledgement program. Paternity establishment ensures a child's right to a range of public benefits, including survivor's insurance, education, health care, and workers compensation. Establishing paternity gives a child born outside of marriage the same legal rights as a child born to married parents. When paternity is uncontested, parents can establish a child's paternity either in the hospital or through submitting an affidavit of paternity. In cases in which paternity is contested, parents must go through a judicial process in which the alleged father may have to submit to genetic testing. In Alabama, the paternity establishment process may begin at any time up until the child turns 19.^{xi}

Child Support Assistance

The Child Support Enforcement System has as its primary objectives: 1) to ensure that children have the financial support of both their parents; 2) to foster fathers' responsible behavior towards their children; and 3) to reduce welfare costs associated with child support delinquency. Alabama operates a child support program through its Department of Human Resources Child Support Enforcement Division. This program aims to improve the well-being of children by enhancing noncustodial parents' self-sufficiency and subsequent payment of child support. Individuals who are eligible for payment of child support in Alabama include: all those receiving TANF benefits; custodial parents; grantee relatives with care and control, but not custody, of the child or children; alleged fathers wanting to establish paternity; representatives of agencies holding custody of a child by order of the court; custodial parents with emancipated children who are owed arrears that accrued under a court order while the children were minors; pregnant women; and certain noncustodial parents. Individuals seeking to receive child support in Alabama must contact their TANF worker or any County Department of Human Services in the state.^{xii}

Fathers who are unable to pay their owed child support to the mother or mothers of their children can participate in a workforce preparation program offered through the Alabama Fatherhood Initiative (AFI), a network of state agencies, private organizations, and the Alabama college system. The AFI sponsors a program that provides skills, education, and assistance to nonresident parents who cannot afford child support payments because of unemployment. This program helps parents prepare for and secure employment and, in turn, earn money that enables them to pay their child support orders. The AFI also educates nonresident fathers on their responsibility to pay child support for their children.^{xiii}

Child Support Enforcement

The Alabama law revokes the driver's, professional, and sport/recreation licenses of noncustodial parents who do not pay child support. The state can collect owed child support from the noncustodial parent's paycheck or tax refund, and can place liens on the parent's property and/or bank accounts to induce payment. As arrears rise, the state may also report the debt to credit bureaus or revoke the noncustodial parent's passport.^{xiv}

Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities

The Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention, in cooperation with the Department of Human Resources and the Children's Trust Fund of Alabama, currently uses TANF funds to support a Healthy Marriage Program that funds programs across the state aimed at promoting healthy relationships and marriages.^{xv} In addition, marriage programs funded by the federal government and nongovernmental sponsors are available in the state. For example, Auburn University was awarded a grant to fund the Alabama Community Healthy Marriage

Initiative (ACHMI), which partners with Family Resource Centers around the state that work with community and faith-based organizations to provide marriage education and services.^{xvi}

Other Marriage Initiatives

The Family Service Centers, which offer support and counseling to married couples facing challenges in their relationships and economic instability. Family Service Centers in Alabama provide “integrated, coordinated services that support, strengthen, and preserve families and that vary in intensity to meet the needs of children and families.”^{xvii}

Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers’ Economic Stability

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits

Alabama offers welfare benefits to two-parent families as well as to single-parent families. Moreover, if parents marry or reconcile while one is receiving welfare benefits, the new spouse’s income is not factored into welfare eligibility for three months.^{xviii} Parents receiving financial assistance must participate in Alabama’s Job Opportunities and Basic Skills training program (JOBS) for at least 32-35 hours a week; however, postsecondary education and training can fulfill at least part of the work requirement.^{xix}

Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers

The Alabama Fatherhood Initiative (AFI) provides funding for community-based educational programs targeted at improving the education and employment of low-income noncustodial fathers. Specific programs include the AFI Short-Term Skills Training Pilot Project, established in 2002, which offers noncustodial parents skills training and employment assistance. In addition to this program, the AFI also funds a number of community-based organizations that offer vocational and parenting education to imprisoned and other noncustodial fathers.^{xx} Finally, Alabama’s Child Support Enforcement Division offers support and training to low-income fathers to enhance their ability to pay child support.^{xxi}

Job Training and Employment Services

Job training and employment services are available to low-income, noncustodial fathers through the AFI’s Short-Term Skills Training Pilot Program. As is evident from the name, through this program, fathers receive short-term training and employment assistance to help them meet their child support responsibilities.^{xxii} Additionally, men in families receiving welfare benefits participate in the JOBS program, which helps men find jobs and/or provides them with service referrals.^{xxiii}

Incarceration and Reentry

Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

Alabama offers incarcerated fathers the opportunity to participate in parenting education programs. The Fatherhood Responsibility Training Program, which operates in all major correctional facilities, educates men about the importance of father involvement for children, encourages men to take responsibility for their children, and promotes increased communication and involvement between incarcerated fathers and their children. In addition, the Connecting Fathers Program targets post-release felony offenders and their children by offering services to improve parenting skills, provide families with case management services (e.g., educational, employment, and counseling), and provide ongoing peer support and legal assistance.^{xxiv}

Resources

- **Alabama Department of Human Resources.** This Web site provides an overview of state services and policies for families, including information about child support, welfare, protective services, child care, and fatherhood; available at <http://www.dhr.state.al.us/Index.asp>
- **Alabama Fatherhood Initiative.** This Web site offers a general overview of the Alabama Fatherhood Initiative and the programs and services provided through the Initiative; available at <http://www.dhr.state.al.us/page.asp?pageid=427>

- **Alabama Fatherhood Directory.** This document presents information about programs for nonresident/noncustodial fathers across Alabama and helps them become aware of services and opportunities available to them; available at http://www.dhr.state.al.us/large_docs/FatherhoodDirectory.pdf

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