



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

# Responsible Fatherhood State Profile: Pennsylvania

[www.fatherhood.gov](http://www.fatherhood.gov)

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## Pennsylvania

### Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

#### *State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities*

Recent funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has enabled organizations in Pennsylvania to offer marriage preparation activities around the state. For example, Family Guidance, Inc.'s TWOgether Pittsburgh program uses the PREPARE/ENRICH, PREP, and PAIRS curricula to provide marriage education to high-school students, married couples, and unmarried couples in the greater Pittsburgh area. Another organization, Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America (OICA), will offer marriage skills education and relationship skills training to high school students, unmarried expectant mothers, and unmarried fathers in the Philadelphia area.<sup>i</sup>

#### *Other Marriage Initiatives*

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has also provided funding for programs designed to support and improve the relationships of married couples. For example, the Children's Aid Society in Clearfield County and Community Services for Children, Inc., will each offer marriage enhancement and marriage skills trainings to low-income married couples in order to help them improve communication skills and their overall relationships.<sup>ii</sup>

### Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

#### *State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs*

The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare provides funding to a number of Family Centers in order to: encourage economic self-sufficiency; promote healthy child development and health care for children; promote effective parenting; support and strengthen families; and provide a network of services for children. These Family Centers offer a number of programs specifically designed for parents, such as the Parents as Teachers program, which is designed to increase knowledge about child development and improve parenting skills.<sup>iii</sup> In addition, the Department of Public Welfare provides funding for 20 Fatherhood Initiatives offered at Family Centers around the state. These programs are designed to increase father involvement and education, improve parenting and job skills, increase noncustodial fathers' support payments, and encourage fathers to serve as positive role models for their children.<sup>iv</sup> Services offered include support services and activities, outreach services, educational and training opportunities, and employment training.<sup>iv</sup>

*Take Time to Be a Dad Today*

In addition, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently provided funding to five responsible fatherhood programs in Pennsylvania. These organizations will offer a range of services and activities designed to increase fathers' self-sufficiency, parenting skills, and involvement with children. For example, the Private Industry Council of Westmoreland/Fayette, Inc., will offer training sessions, fatherhood education, and monthly activities to encourage father-child interactions. Another program is Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh, which offers case management, job training and placement, and other services in order to increase fathers' economic stability.<sup>v</sup>

### *State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood*

Pennsylvania offers several programs designed to prevent teen pregnancies. For example, the Bureau of Community and Student Services administers the Pregnant and Parenting Teen (PPT) and the Education Leading to Employment and Career Training (ELECT) programs to offer pregnancy prevention information, parenting education, counseling services, day care, and child development education in order to encourage teens to complete high school.<sup>vi</sup> The ELECT after-school component, administered with funds from the federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant, works with youth at risk of experiencing early parenthood to offer academic support, personal development activities, and parental involvement activities.<sup>vii</sup>

Furthermore, four Family Planning Councils provide family planning services in 250 clinics around Pennsylvania. Among other services, these clinics offer contraception information, testing and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, and physical exams for men and women.<sup>viii</sup>

### *The Family and Medical Leave Act*

Pennsylvania is subject to the federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), which requires employers with 50 or more employees to offer up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to parents upon the birth or adoption of a child, to recover from an illness, or to care for an ill family member. The FMLA protects the jobs of parents who have worked with the same organization for at least one year and have worked at least 1,250 hours within the past year. In addition to the federal FMLA, Pennsylvania requires that public sector employers allow sick leave to be used to care for family members. Pennsylvania has no state provisions for paid leave.<sup>ix</sup>

### *Domestic Violence Services*

The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence offers technical assistance to domestic violence coalitions and government agencies, provides information and resources about domestic violence to the media and to the public, coordinates a network of 61 domestic violence programs across the state, and provides training to law enforcement officials and other professionals.<sup>x</sup> Pennsylvania also has an address confidentiality program for survivors of domestic violence to ensure that batterers cannot use public records to locate former victims.<sup>xi</sup>

### *Child Custody Policy*

In cases involving child custody, the Pennsylvania courts consider factors such as the preferences of the child, the likelihood of each parent to encourage contact with the other parent, each parent's engagement in violent or abusive conduct, each parent's criminal history, and any other factors that affect the child's well-being.<sup>xii</sup> When in the best interest of the child, the court may award joint custody if: one or both parents petition for joint custody; the parents have agreed to joint custody; or the court deems it appropriate.<sup>xiii</sup>



### *Paternity Establishment*

Establishing paternity for a child born outside of marriage allows the father's name to be shown on the birth certificate; provides the child with rights to health care, Social Security, inheritance, and military benefits; and helps secure financial support for the child. In Pennsylvania, if paternity is undisputed, both parents can sign an Acknowledgement of Paternity form. If the mother refuses to sign an Acknowledgement of Paternity form, the father can still complete this form and, in doing so, will be made aware of legal proceedings about the child. However, if the father wants paternal rights, he must go to the county Domestic Relations Section (DRS) of the Court of Common Pleas and submit to genetic testing in order to establish paternity. If the paternity of a child is unknown, the mother and alleged father can establish paternity through the court system by going to their county DRS and undergoing genetic testing.<sup>xiv</sup>

### *Child Support Assistance*

The Pennsylvania Child Support Program is supervised by the Department of Public Welfare, Bureau of Child Support Enforcement and helps to ensure that children receive child support from both parents.<sup>xv</sup> The Child Support Program helps locate noncustodial parents, establishes paternity, establishes and enforces child support orders, reviews and modifies child support orders, and monitors and distributes payments.<sup>xvi</sup> Parents may ask the court to review and modify child support orders at any time if there is a change in circumstances.<sup>xvii</sup>

Furthermore, the Bureau of Child Support Enforcement offers an Access and Visitation Grant Program and the Pennsylvania Parenting Program to increase child support payment and contact between noncustodial parents and their children.<sup>xviii</sup>

### *Child Support Enforcement*

In order to collect unpaid child support, county Domestic Relations Sections (DRS) of the Courts of Common Pleas may take a number of actions. A DRS may withhold money from the parent's paycheck; suspend or revoke a driver's license; seize a bank account or other assets; intercept tax refunds, lottery winnings, or other income; and report the parent's debt to credit bureaus.<sup>xix</sup>

## **Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability**

### *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits*

Cash assistance for needy families in Pennsylvania is available through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. There is a lifetime limit of 60 months on receipt of TANF benefits in the state of Pennsylvania. During the first 24 months of TANF benefits receipt, adults must conduct a job search for at least four weeks or until they secure employment for at least 20 hours per week. If they are unable to do so within four weeks, they must participate in additional work activities. Work activities may include subsidized employment, job search activities, job readiness activities, community service, on-the-job training, vocational or general education, job training programs, and ESL courses. After 12 months, vocational or general education, ESL classes, and job skills training must be supplemented by additional work activities. Upon having received benefits for 24 months, adults must be involved in work and/or work activities for at least 20 hours per week. At this point, applicable work activities include subsidized employment, work experience, on-the-job training, community service, and workfare.<sup>xx</sup> Two-parent families in Pennsylvania face stricter requirements for TANF assistance than one-parent families.<sup>xxi</sup>



The Department of Public Welfare's Time-Out Initiative encourages TANF recipients to participate in more than the minimum amount of work activities by providing incentives. For example, single parents working 30 or more hours per week and two-parent families working 55 hours or more per week in paid employment are eligible for the Time-Out Initiative. Receipt of benefits under this program is not counted toward the 60-month lifetime limit on TANF receipt. Pennsylvania also offers one-time diversion assistance to low-income families with a currently- or recently-employed parent and who are at risk of needing TANF assistance.<sup>xxii</sup>

### *Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers*

In addition to programs offered to fathers incarcerated in state correctional facilities, Pennsylvania offers a number of other programs for noncustodial fathers. These programs include Fatherhood Initiatives to increase fathers' parenting skills and Access and Visitation programs to increase father-child interactions.

### *Job Training and Employment Services*

The Department of Labor & Industry offers apprenticeship, job training, and job search assistance to Pennsylvania residents.<sup>xxiii</sup> Furthermore, low-income adults receiving TANF benefits are eligible to receive a number of employment and training services, including on-the-job training, employment skills education, job search assistance, and support services.<sup>xxiv</sup>

## Incarceration and Reentry

### *Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers*

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections has offered a number of programs for incarcerated fathers. For example, the Reading to Your Children program, which enables parents to read to their children through the use of tape recordings, has been offered at all state correctional facilities. Foundation Parenting, which has been offered to fathers at eight correctional institutions, uses group sessions and individual counseling to help fathers improve their parenting and overall relationship skills. Long Distance Dads, which has been offered to incarcerated fathers at 13 state institutions, encourages fathers to improve parenting skills, examine their morals and values, respond positively to difficult situations, and understand the consequences of violence.

Other programs in Pennsylvania correctional facilities include Fresh Start, which aims to improve infant care skills and teach anger management; Parenting Program Services, which is designed to help parents understand child development, acquire positive parenting skills, and understand the effects of prison on families; and Parenting Anonymous, which is designed to improve communication, increase knowledge of child development, and improve overall parenting skills.<sup>xxv</sup>

## Resources

- **Pennsylvania Family Centers.** This Web site provides information about the purpose of and services offered at Family Centers across the state; available at <http://www.center-school.org/familycenters/>
- **Pennsylvania Department of Corrections.** The documents at this page describe parenting programs that have been offered to fathers incarcerated in state correctional facilities; available at [http://www.cor.state.pa.us/stats/cwp/view.asp?A=384&QUESTION\\_ID=133437](http://www.cor.state.pa.us/stats/cwp/view.asp?A=384&QUESTION_ID=133437).

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