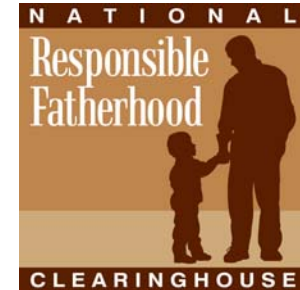




U.S. Department of Health  
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Administration for Children  
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Office of Family Assistance

# Responsible Fatherhood State Profile: Rhode Island

July 2008



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

## Rhode Island

### Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

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

Currently, there are no state-funded marriage preparation activities in Rhode Island.

#### *Other Marriage Initiatives*

Currently, there are no other marriage initiatives in Rhode Island.

### Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

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

The Rhode Island Fatherhood Coalition aims to develop and promote policies, programs, and practices that help fathers build and maintain supportive relationships with their children.<sup>i</sup> The coalition has members from the Office of Child Support Services; the Department of Children Youth, and Families; the Department of Corrections; the Department of Health; the Department of Human Services; the Department of Labor and Training; and the federal Administration for Children & Families. In the past, the Fatherhood Coalition has identified services and gaps in services for fathers in Rhode Island, identified barriers that keep fathers from accessing available services and programs, and helped state agencies and community organizations work together to provide supports for fathers.<sup>ii</sup>

Several community agencies in Rhode Island have come together to form the Father and Family Network, which shares information about best practices in working with fathers and provides information and referrals regarding fatherhood programs.<sup>iii</sup> The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently awarded funding to Children's Friend and Service, a community-based organization, for their Dads Making a Difference initiative. This program will offer case management and father support groups, with discussions focusing on communication, anger management, employment, substance use, and other issues facing fathers.<sup>iv</sup>

*Take Time to Be a Dad Today*

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

The Rhode Island Department of Health funds several programs designed to decrease unwanted pregnancies among young men. For example, the MEN2B program trains adults to serve as role models and to promote positive behavior, including responsible sexual behavior, among adolescent males. This program is designed to decrease sexual activity, STD rates, and pregnancy rates among Rhode Island teens.<sup>v</sup> Furthermore, the state's Family Planning program funds a number of health centers across the state; these centers offer contraception information, physical exams, STD testing, and referrals to state residents up to the age of 64.<sup>vi</sup>

### *The Family and Medical Leave Act*

Under Rhode Island law, all public employers with at least 30 employees and all private employers with at least 50 employees must provide up to 13 weeks of unpaid leave in any 24 month period. This leave can be used upon the birth or adoption of a child, to recover from an illness, or to care for an ill family member. In addition, employees who are temporarily disabled and unable to work, including for reasons related to pregnancy or childbirth, are eligible for up to 30 weeks of partial wage replacement.<sup>vii</sup>

### *Domestic Violence Services*

The Rhode Island Department of Health partners with the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CADV) to increase the number and range of services available to domestic violence victims in the state.<sup>viii</sup> The CADV and its member organizations offer crisis hotlines, support groups, housing, and other services to victims of domestic violence.<sup>ix</sup> The Department of Health maintains a list of approved batterers intervention programs around the state.<sup>x</sup> Rhode Island also has an address confidentiality program designed to ensure that batterers cannot use public records to locate their former victims.<sup>xi</sup>

### *Child Custody Policy*

In cases of divorce or legal separation, Rhode Island has no preference or presumption for joint custody.<sup>xii</sup> Instead, Rhode Island courts determine child custody based on the best interests of the child. Parents who are involved in custody cases may be required to participate in a parenting education program, such as Divided Yet United, that is designed to reduce conflict and help children cope with divorce.<sup>xiii</sup>

### *Paternity Establishment*

Establishing paternity for a child born outside of marriage provides the child with rights to Social Security benefits; inheritance rights; provides the child with a sense of identity; allows for the establishment of child support orders; and helps secure health insurance for the child.<sup>xiv</sup> In Rhode Island, parents can establish paternity by signing a Voluntary Affidavit of Paternity. If a man denies that he is the father, paternity can be established through the court system. In such cases, the mother, alleged father, and child must submit to blood testing.<sup>xv</sup>

### *Child Support Assistance*

The Rhode Island Office of Child Support Services, part of the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, is responsible for child support collection and enforcement in Ohio. This office can help noncustodial and custodial parents establish paternity, establish medical and financial support orders, and enforce unpaid support orders.<sup>xvi</sup>



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The Office of Child Support Services also offers a number of fatherhood initiatives designed to increase payment of child support and to improve relationships between noncustodial parents and their children. For example, the Incarcerated Parent's Program provides information on child support services to men who have been sentenced to state correctional facilities. Furthermore, the Office of Child Support Services has developed the PAPA curriculum to help young parents understand the responsibilities of being a parent. The Office of Child Support Services also provides job assistance and orders modification assistance to noncustodial parents.<sup>xvii</sup>

### *Child Support Enforcement*

The Rhode Island Office of Child Support Services may take a number of steps to collect unpaid child support. It may intercept federal payments through an administrative offset; intercept a parent's federal tax refund; place liens on the parent's bank accounts and/or personal property; intercept insurance settlements or lottery payments; deny or revoke a parent's passport; revoke the parent's driver's, professional, business, or occupational license; or file a motion to have the parent held in contempt of court. If the parent owes more than \$10,000 in unpaid support or fails to pay support for more than three years, he or she may be subject to criminal prosecution and may be sentenced to up to five years in prison.<sup>xviii</sup>

## Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

### *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits*

Low-income families in Rhode Island can receive cash benefits through the Family Independence Program (FIP), instituted in 1997 by the Family Independence Act (FIA). There is a lifetime limit of 60 months of FIP benefit receipt, but benefits to children can continue after this time limit has been reached. Within the first 24 months of benefit receipt, recipients must participate in: at least 20 hours of paid employment, on-the-job training, or subsidized employment per week; at least 20 hours of community work experience per week; a training or a work readiness program; a job placement program; an individual job search; secondary or post-secondary education; ESL classes; or job skills/vocational training. Upon having received benefits for 24 months, adult recipients must be engaged in paid or unpaid employment for at least 20 hours per week. In two-parent families receiving FIP benefits, one or both parents must participate in work activities; if a two-parent family is receiving a child care subsidy, both parents must work for a total of 55 hours per week.<sup>xix</sup>

Under FIP, all working families earning up to 250% of the poverty line are entitled to child care subsidies; and all children in families earning up to 250% of the poverty line are eligible to receive health care.<sup>xx</sup>

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

The Rhode Island Office of Child Support Services offers programs for noncustodial men, such as the PAPA curriculum and the Incarcerated Parent's Program.<sup>xxi</sup> Furthermore, the Rapid Job Entry Program offers pre-employment and employment services to noncustodial parents.<sup>xxii</sup>

### *Job Training and Employment Services*

The Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training and the Department of Human Services administer the Rapid Job Entry Program (RJEP), designed to help families prepare for employment, find jobs, and remain employed. RJEP services are available to individuals receiving public



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assistance benefits, to noncustodial parents, and to those referred to the program by the Family Court. Among other services, RJEP offers employment readiness workshops, work search activities, pre-employment training, and workforce retention programs.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Additional employment services offered at the state's One-Stop centers – known as netWORKri Centers – include resume writing assistance, screenings and assessments, job referrals and placements, job search workshops, and referrals to education and training programs.<sup>xxiv</sup>

### Incarceration and Reentry

#### *Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers*

The Rhode Island Office of Child Support Services administers the Incarcerated Parent's Program to inform inmates and prison staff about available services.<sup>xxv</sup> The state Department of Corrections' Rhode to Reentry program also includes family support and reunification activities to ease parents' transitions from prison back into society.<sup>xxvi</sup> Parenting education programs are also available at several state correctional facilities.<sup>xxvii</sup>

### Resources

- **Rhode Island Fatherhood Coalition.** This Web site provides information about the state's fatherhood coalition and includes an overview of programs available for fathers in the state; available at <http://www.rifatherhood.org/>

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