

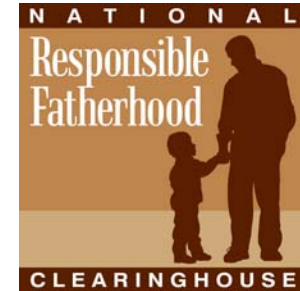


U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services
Administration for Children
and Families
Office of Family Assistance

Responsible Fatherhood State Profile: Maine

www.fatherhood.gov

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Maine

Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities

Maine does not use state funds for marriage promotion activities.

Other Marriage Initiatives

Marriage programs funded by governmental and nongovernmental sponsors are available in Maine. For example, a Promoting Responsible Fatherhood grant from the Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is used to support a course in Maine that targets low-income fathers, fathers of children in Head Start programs, and male middle and high school students. The course focuses on responsible fatherhood and the causes of domestic violence, and also offers counseling and mentoring.ⁱ Maine also receives an Access and Visitation grant through ACF's Office of Child Support Enforcement to provide co-parenting education and required mediation services for all couples in the state who have a conflict.ⁱⁱ The Family Division of the Court System administers this grant. ACF funds are also used to support the Character Counts In Maine project, which is developing a public advertising campaign and school education program to provide teens with information on healthy marriage, relationship skills, and communication skills.ⁱⁱⁱ

Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs

Maine's Parent Works Program, administered through the state's judicial branch, teaches parents how to effectively co-parent through separation and divorce, as well as helps parents examine obstacles to parenting and learn how to resolve conflicts successfully.^{iv} Similarly, the Moving Forward Program educates parents about understanding the needs of their children, especially during the divorce process.^v

State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood

Maine uses state funding, in conjunction with federal funding from the Maternal and Child Health block grant, to support several programs that seek to improve the health of adolescents and prevent unwanted or early pregnancies. For example, the Teen and Young Adult Health Program (TYAH) focuses on issues related to adolescent sexuality and adolescent access to health education and services and provides technical

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assistance to other groups that seek to address these issues. Maine supports a wide range of programs and services in this area, ranging from school-based clinics to family life education consultants to community-based education.^{vi}

The Family and Medical Leave Act

Maine is subject to the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993, which allows leave for mothers and fathers after the birth or adoption of a child without fear of losing their jobs. The FMLA provides 12 weeks of leave over a one-year period to care for a new child or an ill family member and protects the parents' jobs during this leave if they have worked with the same organization for at least one year and worked at least 1,250 hours within the last year. Maine also has a state FMLA. Private- and public-sector employers of more than 15 employees (as opposed to 50 under the federal FMLA) are required to give 10 consecutive paid weeks of leave in any two years for the birth or adoption of a child or serious illness of a family member. Maine residents can choose whether to be covered under the federal or state FMLA.^{vii}

Domestic Violence Services

In 2002, Maine established an address confidentiality program for domestic violence victims to ensure that their abusers cannot use public records to locate them.^{viii} The Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence is the only statewide organization with the primary goal of stopping domestic violence. Services offered include a 24-hour hotline, temporary emergency housing, referrals and information about community resources, help in obtaining Protection from Abuse orders or other court orders, support groups, batterers' education groups, outreach and community education, school-based education about domestic violence, programs for children exposed to domestic violence, and advocacy and lobbying for policy development and legislative initiatives related to combating domestic violence.^{ix}

Child Custody Policy

If there is a child custody dispute, parents must undergo mediation in an attempt to resolve the conflict without having to go to court. If the case does go to court, the court will consider the best interests of the child in making a decision.^x

Paternity Establishment

Paternity establishment provides a child with a legally recognized father and enables a child born to unmarried parents to have the same rights as a child born to married parents. These rights include survivor's insurance, education, health care, and workers' compensation. In Maine, an Acknowledgement of Paternity form can be signed for free in the hospital at the time of birth, at any municipal clerk's office, at the Office of Vital Records, at any office of the Division of Support Enforcement and Recovery (DSEER), or in front of an authorized notary public at any location.^{xi} Federal and state law requires that the mother name a father if she receives Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds. If only one parent signs the form, either parent may ask the DSEER to review the case and the division may refer the case to court, which may order genetic testing to establish paternity.^{xii}

Child Support Assistance

Both parents of a child are legally obligated to support that child. The noncustodial parent is required to provide that support in the form of cash payments to the custodial parent. The state's Department of Human Services assists in establishing paternity and establishing or enforcing child support orders.^{xiii}



Child Support Enforcement

The DSER is responsible for the rules and policies to ensure that all noncustodial parents contribute the correct amount of child support.^{xiv} The division is authorized to collect owed child support through asset and property seizure, contempt proceedings, and criminal actions against the nonpaying parent.^{xv}

Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

Welfare Benefits

In Maine, two-parent families are not eligible to receive public assistance benefits on the same basis as one-parent families; instead, they face stricter work and income requirements. There is no lifetime limit on the length of time for which recipients can receive benefits, but recipients must participate in work activities after having received benefits for 24 months. Parents may keep up to \$50 of their child support orders; however, the remaining payments are given to the state to recover some of the cost of public assistance benefits.^{xvi} Maine requires all unmarried minor parents who receive TANF to receive benefits as voucher payments instead of as a direct cash payment. In addition, unmarried minor parents receiving TANF benefits must live with parents, other adult relatives, or in an adult-supervised supportive living arrangement unless certain good cause reasons exist. The intent of these policies is to discourage teen pregnancies. Maine also provides financial benefits to children and families when the principal wage-earning parent is unemployed.^{xvii} The state's Parents as Scholars program allows single parents on welfare to go to college but continue to receive welfare benefits.^{xviii}

Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers

TANF recipients are eligible for family planning services to help them make decisions about future pregnancies and are eligible for parenting education to help them develop parenting skills.^{xix}

Job Training and Employment Services

Maine uses TANF funds for the Additional Support for People in Retraining and Employment (ASPIRE) program to help TANF recipients find jobs that will pay enough to enable them to leave the welfare rolls. The program also includes job education and training.^{xx}

Incarceration and Reentry

Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

Project HIP—Helping Incarcerated Parents—supports incarcerated parents in the Maine Correctional Center by helping them strengthen ties with their children and offering support and education groups.^{xxi}



Resources

- **Maine Department of Health and Human Services.** This Web site provides information on child support, paternity, welfare benefits, and other services in Maine; available at <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/index.shtml>.

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