



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

# Responsible Fatherhood State Profile: Minnesota

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

## Minnesota

### Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

#### *State-Funded Marriage Promotion Activities*

Minnesota does not use state funds to promote marriage activities.

#### *Other Marriage Initiatives*

Recently enacted federal legislation allocates substantial new funding for healthy marriage efforts. In Minnesota, a combination of federal and private funding supports the Minnesota Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative, a demonstration project based in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. The program provides mentoring and marriage skills training to new unwed parents to encourage stable family formation. Minority parents who married after the birth of their child serve as mentors to unwed minority parents. The program also provides information about child support enforcement.<sup>i</sup>

### Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

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

There is currently no state funding allocated for direct service fatherhood programs, although more than 100 such programs exist around the state.<sup>ii</sup> In his budget proposal for 2007-08, Governor Tim Pawlenty set forth a Minnesota Fatherhood Leadership Initiative that would include block grants to faith-based and community organizations providing services such as parenting classes, marriage promotion activities to help strengthen families, and programs to address barriers to employment, education, and health.<sup>iii</sup>

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

In 2004, the Minnesota Department of Human Services received a 1115 Family Planning Waiver to create the Minnesota Family Planning Program. This demonstration project expands access to family planning services through Medicaid. By increasing access to publicly funded family planning, the state seeks to reduce the incidence of unintended pregnancies.<sup>iv</sup> In addition, the Minnesota Department of Health uses both federal and state funding to administer Minnesota Education Now and Babies Later (MN ENABL), an education program targeted at junior high school students that aims to reduce teen pregnancy by teaching adolescents to abstain from sex. Features of this program include curriculum

*Take Time to Be a Dad Today*



implementation, community organizing efforts, and a statewide public awareness campaign.<sup>v</sup> A privately funded program, Dads Make a Difference, aims to educate youth about responsible fathering and heighten awareness of issues relating to paternity and father involvement.<sup>vi</sup>

### *The Family and Medical Leave Act*

The federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993 allows both fathers and mothers time off after the birth, adoption, or foster care placement of a child, or during an illness, without fear of losing their jobs. Parents in companies with 50 or more employees 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. In addition, Minnesota's State Parental Leave Act ensures that parents working in companies of 21 or more employees receive up to six weeks of unpaid leave for the birth or adoption of a child.<sup>vii</sup>

### *Domestic Violence Services*

Minnesota's Office of Justice Programs, Crime Victim Services supports a network of services to assist crime victims in Minnesota, including victims of domestic violence.<sup>viii</sup> A primary function of the agency is the distribution of state and federal funds to programs serving victims throughout the state. Programs related to domestic violence include community advocacy programs, which provide 24-hour crisis intervention, assistance in pursuing court remedies, and a range of other services for victims of domestic violence; shelter programs, which provide emergency housing for battered women and their children.<sup>ix</sup> The Office of Justice Programs, Crime Victim Services also provides a listing of government and nonprofit organizations that serve crime victims. Listed programs are not necessarily funded or endorsed by the agency.<sup>x</sup>

### *Child Custody Policy*

When married couples with children separate voluntarily, both parents have the right to petition the state's family court system to determine the custody of the children. If parents cannot jointly agree to a custody arrangement, decisions are based on the best interest of the child.<sup>xi</sup> The state has a presumption or preference for joint custody of children.<sup>xii</sup>

### *Paternity Establishment*

Establishing paternity gives a child born outside of marriage the same legal rights and benefits as a child born to married parents, including Social Security benefits, veterans' benefits, tribal registration benefits, health care coverage, workers' compensation benefits, and inheritance rights. Minnesota offers an in-hospital paternity establishment program. Paternity is established by signing a Recognition of Parentage form, which must be completed by both parents and filed with the Office of the State Registrar. Alternatively, paternity may be established by pursuing legal action in court. If paternity is contested, court action is necessary to determine parentage and the court may order genetic testing. If the county child support office sets up the testing and the man is not the biological father of the child, he does not have to pay for the testing fees.<sup>xiii</sup>

### *Child Support Assistance*

The Child Support Enforcement Division supervises the child support program. Child support agencies provide services for establishing, enforcing, and reviewing or modifying court orders for support, and collecting and distributing payments. Agencies also help locate parents and establish paternity. A new formula for calculating financial obligations took effect January 1, 2007, which takes into account the number of children that a couple has and both parents' incomes to determine each parent's share of the cost of raising a child. The change applies to actions filed with the



court after January 1, 2007. If the gross income of a parent who owes child support is less than 120 percent of the federal poverty line, the court will order the minimum basic support amount for the number of children that the couple has.<sup>xiv</sup>

### *Child Support Enforcement*

In cases of child support nonpayment, the state may seize employment bonuses, assets held in financial institutions or in retirement funds, and periodic lump sum payments parents receive from the state or local agencies, including unemployment insurance. Past due payments can also be collected from tax refunds and state lottery winnings. The state may also suspend driver's, professional, and hunting licenses; deny passport applications; file liens against property; and freeze assets. If a noncustodial parent owes at least three months of child support, the Child Support Enforcement Division reports the delinquency to credit agencies.<sup>xv</sup>

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

### *Welfare Benefits*

The Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), funded by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, is the state's welfare reform program for low-income families with children and includes both cash and food assistance. The majority of families applying for cash assistance also participate in the Diversionary Work Program (DWP). This four-month program helps parents go immediately to work rather than receive welfare payments; the four months do not count towards the 60-month lifetime limit on welfare receipt. Parents are expected to formulate a work plan and seek full-time work immediately upon acceptance into the program. They are supported in working through child care assistance, food stamps, health care, and help with housing costs. After four months, families may be eligible for MFIP assistance. Most families can get cash assistance for only 60 months.<sup>xvi</sup>

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

Minnesota does not currently offer specific programs geared towards low-income noncustodial fathers. Low-income fathers applying for cash assistance can receive job training and employment services through the DWP. In addition, the state reduces child support payments for low-income noncustodial fathers.<sup>xvii</sup>

### *Job Training and Employment Services*

The majority of parents applying for cash assistance enroll in the DWP, as noted. Both parents must seek full-time work immediately and the DWP provides training and job-search services to help them find employment.<sup>xviii</sup> In addition, Minnesota's WorkForce Centers provide job training and employment services to all citizens, with a particular focus on youth and displaced workers. These centers represent a coalition of employment and training organizations across the state (including the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development). Most services are offered at no cost.<sup>xix</sup>



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### Incarceration and Reentry

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

The Minnesota Department of Corrections Facility Services Division offers parenting classes for incarcerated fathers in coordination with partner organizations.<sup>xx</sup> Curricula vary by provider, but typical topics include parenting from the inside, ways to connect with children, nonphysical punishment, effective communication, and co-parenting.<sup>xxi</sup>

### Resources

- **Minnesota Department of Human Services.** This Web site provides an overview of state services and policies for families, including child support, welfare, child care, and family planning; available at <http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/>
- **Minnesota Fathers and Families Network.** The mission of this statewide nonprofit organization is to initiate, promote, and support effective fatherhood programs and to educate the public about ways to enhance the responsible involvement of fathers in the lives of children, families, and the community. The network's Web site provides information about state and national fatherhood policies and an extensive directory of organizations in Minnesota that provide support services to fathers. Available at <http://www.mnfathers.org/default.htm>



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