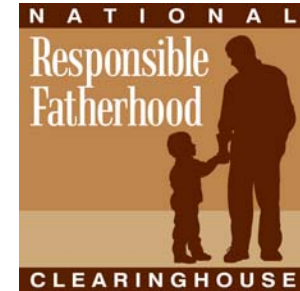




U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services
Administration for Children
and Families
Office of Family Assistance

Responsible Fatherhood State Profile: Michigan

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www.fatherhood.gov

Michigan

Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

State-Funded Marriage Promotion Activities

Michigan does not use state funds to promote marriage activities directly, but it does use funds obtained through the Healthy Marriage Initiative of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to support a variety of programs that promote healthy marriages and relationships. One such program, the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians Healthy Relationship Project, provides workshops on marriage and relationships to youth and adults.ⁱ The federal Healthy Marriage Initiative also provides married individuals, particularly African American couples, with the skills and knowledge needed to build and maintain healthy marriages.ⁱⁱ Healthy Marriages and Healthy Relationships, a project sponsored by the Michigan Family Independence Agency, provides marriage education through faith-based and community organizations. The project aims to improve child outcomes by providing relationship skills training to married couples and couples expecting children.ⁱⁱⁱ

Other Marriage Initiatives

The Michigan Child Family Resource Council offers a number of educational and support services to Michigan parents. For example, the Council's Encouraging Family Foundations Healthy Marriage Demonstration Project offers marriage and relationship education, including financial and career assistance.^{iv} A Michigan State University program called Together We Can – Creating a Healthy Future for Our Family is studying the results of using marriage education materials in family support education programs. The researchers will develop healthy marriage curricula for program practitioners.^v

Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/ Responsible Fatherhood Programs

Encouraging Family Foundations, mentioned above, provides single parents in Kent County with parenting skills education and community resources. Biological fathers and any partners of single mothers are encouraged to attend the project's programs. The group aims to improve children's financial and medical well-being through positive parenting.^{vi} The Proud Fathers-Proud Parents program, a project of Michigan's Department of Human Services, builds responsible parenting and healthy marriages through community groups.^{vii}

Take Time to Be a Dad Today

Other Parenting/ Responsible Fatherhood Programs

A number of programs in Michigan serve as resources to encourage male parental involvement. The Michigan Fatherhood Coalition connects fatherhood programs across the state and assists human service practitioners to work more effectively with fathers to help them become better parents.^{viii} The Learning Community Fenton Lawn Education Center's Men at WORK (Working on Relationships with Kids) group helps fathers build skills to communicate with their children. The center also offers Father and Child Evenings and Dad's Nights, which feature activities geared toward fathers and children, as well as a weekly Turn the Page class to teach fathers how to read to children. Through Families First of Michigan, fathers can access 24-hour family education crisis services to encourage positive parenting and prevent volatile family dynamics.^{ix} The Talk Early and Talk Often program provides workshops and materials to help parents talk to young teens about sex and pregnancy.^x

State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood

The Michigan secondary school curriculum covers education on a number of parenting issues, including the costs and responsibilities of raising a child, parents' legal obligations to children, and paternity establishment. Brochures, surveys, quizzes and resource lists are used to inform high school students of the reality of becoming a parent.^{xi} In addition, Michigan schools are required to provide STD/HIV education, which must teach abstinence as part of the curriculum. Schools also may offer sexuality education classes, which can include information on family planning.^{xii} The Michigan Abstinence Program, part of the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH), promotes sexual abstinence, as well as the avoidance of risky behaviors such as smoking and drinking alcohol. The program funds community agencies that work with children and youth.^{xiii} MDCH's Family Planning Program offers individuals counseling, contraceptive education, health information, and other services through contracts with 51 local agencies statewide.^{xiv}

Family and Medical Leave

The federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) requires an employer to grant at least 12 weeks of unpaid family and medical leave each year. The employee is also entitled to a continuation of medical benefits. The employer must also provide the same job or an equivalent job with no loss in pay, seniority, or benefits upon the employee's return from leave.^{xv} In Michigan, each employee earns 60 days of immediate paid parental leave per two years. If the parental leave lasts more than two consecutive weeks, it is the responsibility of the employee to provide the employer with documentation of the birth, adoption, illness, etc., of a dependent.^{xvi}

Domestic Violence Services

Michigan Adult Protective Services investigates abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and protects adult victims of these ills. The Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board, part of the state's Department of Human Services, provides funding for shelters and advocacy for victims. The board also develops domestic violence prevention policies, training and technical assistance.^{xvii} In addition, the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence represents over 70 programs that combat domestic and sexual violence programs and provide support services to domestic violence victims. These programs partner with over 200 organizations and individuals in advocating for survivors of abuse and providing support services for them.^{xviii}



Child Custody Policy

Child custody is determined by Michigan circuit court judges through a divorce, family support, or paternity case. It determines child custody and amount of parental time with the child, and is necessary for all minor children in the case of a custody dispute. The court does not favor the father or the mother but instead attempts to determine the best interests of the child. Court orders related to child custody are enforced by a “friend of the court” (the office that assists the circuit court in cases that involve minor children) and can be changed by agreement of both parents or by the court. The circuit court retains authority on custody until the child turns 18.^{xix}

Paternity Establishment

Child support officers assist parents in establishing paternity for children. In cases of married couples, paternity is assumed. When an unmarried woman has a child, paternity must be officially asserted by the father by signing an Affidavit of Parentage form. The prosecuting attorney’s office in each county pursues actions to establish paternity in the absence of a marriage or Affidavit of Parentage. Either party in a paternity suit may request genetic testing to determine the child’s biological father.

Child Support Assistance

Michigan’s Office of Child Support offers child support assistance to parents by locating noncustodial parents, enforcing child support mandates, establishing and monitoring custody agreements, and establishing paternity. This assistance applies to obtaining medical, child care and general support for children. The Michigan State Disbursement Unit collects and disburses child support payments.^{xx} Child support services are automatically provided to most people who receive public assistance for minor children living in their home, and services are also available to custodial and noncustodial parents of minor children.^{xxi}

Child Support Enforcement

If a noncustodial parent does not pay his or her child support, the Michigan Office of Child Support can withhold property or income from the parent, intercept state or federal tax refunds, place liens on personal property and bank accounts, issue a bench warrant for the parent’s arrest, or refer the case for criminal prosecution. If the parent owes the equivalent of two months’ arrearages, the debt is automatically reported to credit bureaus.^{xxii} Furthermore, Michigan law also allows the state court to rescind the parent’s driver’s, professional, occupational or recreational license. After two months without paying he or she will receive notice of intent to restrict a license, after which he or she has 21 days to pay arrears or to request a hearing.^{xxiii}

Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers’ Economic Stability

Welfare Benefits

The Family Independence Plan provides cash assistance to needy families with children or to pregnant women to help cover the costs of basic necessities, as well as job training and employment search services. Participants must meet the program’s requirements by actively seeking educational and work opportunities.^{xxiv} Two-parent families are eligible to receive benefits on the same basis as one-parent families.^{xxv} Parents with children under the age of six can meet a lower work requirement to receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits in



Michigan. Child support payments are also excluded from income when calculating TANF eligibility, and co-payments for child care subsidies are capped at 10 percent of family income for most families.^{xxvi}

Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers

The Michigan Welfare to Work program targets low-income noncustodial parents, particularly parents who have child support arrearages or are in danger of failing to pay child support. The program provides employment and training services through local Michigan Works agencies.^{xxvii}

Job Training and Employment Services

The Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth's JET: Jobs, Education and Training program connects local workforce boards, Michigan state employment agencies, and local Departments of Human Services to provide employment support to low or no-income individuals. The program offers job training and placement services, educational opportunities, and post-employment support for 90 days after an individual is hired.^{xxviii}

Incarceration and Reentry

Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

The Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) provides inmates with access to substance abuse treatment, education and vocational training programs. MDOC's Prison Build Program provides vocational training to inmates and helps them find employment after they are released by connecting them to employers and aftercare support.^{xxix} Before release, prisoners have the opportunity to work with MDOC staff to develop a plan for release and parole, including family reunification and housing.^{xxx}

Resources

- **Michigan Department of Human Services.** This Web site provides information on state policies and resources offered to families; available at: <http://www.michigan.gov/dhs>.

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