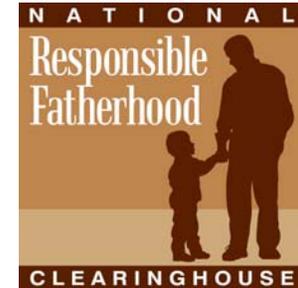




U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance

# Responsible Fatherhood State Profile: Illinois

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

## Illinois

### Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

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

Illinois does not use state funds to support marriage preparation activities. However, pilot marriage programs funded by the federal government and by nongovernmental sponsors are available in the state. For example, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently provided funding to the Illinois Healthy Marriage Initiative, which offers premarital education and marriage skills training to unmarried couples and communication and financial skills education to high school students. In addition, the SGA Youth & Family Services will use the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP®) curriculum to improve relationships among unmarried couples.<sup>i</sup>

#### *Other Marriage Initiatives*

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services also has provided funding for programs in Illinois that work with married couples to improve relationship skills. One such program, SGA Youth & Family Services, received funding to provide low-income married couples with marriage enhancement sessions, marriage skills training, support groups, and home visits, directed at increasing marital stability and quality.<sup>ii</sup>

### Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

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

The Illinois Department of Human Services provides funding to several responsible fatherhood programs across the state. For example, the Illinois Fatherhood Initiative's Boot Camp for New Dads works with new fathers in high-risk communities to encourage them to be involved actively with their children.<sup>iii</sup> Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has recently provided funding to a number of programs in Illinois that offer fathers parenting education, career counseling, job-search assistance, group counseling, financial services, and home visits to help improve parents' relationships and increase fathers' involvement with their children.<sup>iv</sup>

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

The state's Teen Pregnancy Prevention program funds community organizations that work with at-risk teens to prevent adolescent pregnancy. These organizations offer abstinence and/or sexuality education, family planning services, youth development services, and public education campaigns. Moreover, some of the organizations receiving state funds have male involvement components that provide counseling, job-skills

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development, parenting education, tutoring, mentoring, academic support, conflict resolution skills, and/or anger management sessions, with the goal of reducing early fatherhood.<sup>v</sup>

### *The Family and Medical Leave Act*

Illinois has a Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which allows both fathers and mothers time off after the birth or adoption of a child, or during an illness, without fear of losing their jobs. Parents 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. The FMLA protects fathers and mothers who have worked with the same organization for at least one year and have worked at least 1,250 hours within the past year. Furthermore, public sector employers must allow paid sick leave to be used to care for family members.<sup>vi</sup>

### *Domestic Violence Services*

The Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) provides funding to more than 65 domestic violence programs that offer a range of services to victims. These services include emergency shelter, crisis hotlines, counseling, legal advocacy, medical care, employment and educational assistance, child care, and specialized children's services.<sup>vii</sup> In addition, the DHS funds more than 30 programs aimed at providing assessments, education, referrals, and conflict resolution skills to perpetrators of domestic violence.<sup>viii</sup> Illinois also has an address confidentiality program for victims of domestic violence so that abusers cannot use public records to locate victims.<sup>ix</sup>

### *Child Custody Policy*

When a married or an unmarried couple with children separates, both parents have the right to petition the court system for custody of the children. In Illinois, custody decisions are made in the best interest of the child. The court considers the wishes of the parents and of the child, the relationship between the child and each parent, the child's adjustment, each party's mental and physical health, allegations of abuse, and the willingness of each parent to cooperate with the other. Illinois does not have a preference for or against joint custody. In certain cases, parents may be ordered to participate in mediation when establishing or modifying custody and visitation orders.<sup>x</sup>

### *Paternity Establishment*

Paternity establishment ensures a child's right to a range of public benefits, including health insurance, inheritances, Social Security benefits, and veterans' benefits; and ensures a father's parental rights. Establishing paternity gives a child born outside of marriage the same legal rights as one born to married parents. Illinois has an in-hospital paternity acknowledgement program. When paternity is uncontested, parents can establish a child's paternity by signing an Acknowledgement of Paternity form. When paternity is contested, parents must undergo genetic testing in order to establish paternity. In Illinois, paternity can be established at any time until the child turns 21.<sup>xi</sup>

### *Child Support Assistance*

The Illinois Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE) promotes children's well-being by ensuring that they receive financial, medical, and emotional support from both parents. The DCSE is charged with locating noncustodial parents, establishing paternity, collecting child support payments, modifying child support orders, and providing services to noncustodial parents to help them meet their responsibilities. All parents and guardians of children are eligible for DCSE services, and families receiving public assistance are automatically enrolled in enforcement services.<sup>xii</sup>

Noncustodial parents with child support orders are eligible to participate in a range of services and programs aimed at enhancing their ability to provide support for their children. These services include job training and job-search activities, referrals to community service providers, and information on child support issues.<sup>xiii</sup>

### *Child Support Enforcement*

Illinois utilizes a number of methods to recover past-due child support. For example, the DCSE may intercept federal and state tax refunds, unemployment benefits, and lottery winnings; place liens on property and bank accounts; and contact credit bureaus and federal agencies to report unpaid child support. If a noncustodial parent is 30 days delinquent in payment of child support, the state may suspend the parent's professional and occupational licenses; when a parent is 90 days delinquent, the state may suspend the parent's driver's license as well.<sup>xiv</sup>

## Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

### *Welfare Benefits*

Illinois offers welfare benefits to two-parent families on the same basis as to one-parent families. Welfare recipients must participate in work activities 24 months after benefit receipt begins; however, postsecondary education and training can fulfill at least part of this requirement. Recipients are subject to a 60-month lifetime limit on receipt of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits.<sup>xv</sup>

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

Noncustodial fathers whose children receive TANF benefits are eligible to participate in the Division of Child Support Enforcement's Earnfare program, a six-month training and employment program. Noncustodial parents who participate in this program earn up to \$294 per month, \$50 of which is automatically given to the custodial parent as child support.<sup>xvi</sup>

### *Job Training and Employment Services*

The state's Job Training and Economic Development Grant Program offers grants to community-based organizations that work with local businesses to provide training, support, and job-search assistance to low-wage and unemployed workers.<sup>xvii</sup> In addition, fathers may be eligible for employment services, including job-search assistance, career counseling, skills assessments, counseling, case management, skills training, educational programs, and adult education activities, through the Illinois Employment and Training Center network.<sup>xviii</sup>

## Incarceration and Reentry

### *Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers*

Several correctional facilities in Illinois offer inmates the opportunity to participate in positive parenting and life-skills programs. The Lifestyle Redirection program, for example, offers sessions on self-esteem, men's roles, anger management, domestic violence, and healthy relationships, as well as case management.<sup>xix</sup>

### Resources

- **Division of Child Support Enforcement.** This Web site provides an overview of services and programs available for noncustodial fathers; available at [http://www.ilchildsupport.com/noncustodial\\_parent\\_cs.html](http://www.ilchildsupport.com/noncustodial_parent_cs.html)

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