

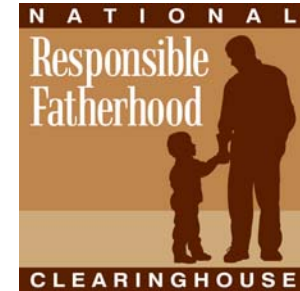


U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services
Administration for Children
and Families
Office of Family Assistance

Responsible Fatherhood State Profile: Louisiana

www.fatherhood.gov

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Louisiana

Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

State-Funded Marriage Promotion Activities

Louisiana does not use state funds to support marriage preparation activities. However, marriage programs funded by the federal government and by nongovernmental sponsors are available in the state.ⁱ In 2004, Louisiana created the Louisiana Commission on Family and Marriage to study and review marriage and marriage policies in the state and to propose and analyze programs to foster healthy marriage and relationships that Louisiana could develop with state or federal funding.ⁱⁱ

Other Marriage Initiatives

Both nongovernmental and federal funds are used to support healthy marriage education programs in Louisiana. Under Title X of the Public Health Service Act, the federal government provides funding to the Louisiana Office of Public Health Family Planning Program for family planning counseling and education services.ⁱⁱⁱ The Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services currently funds several marriage programs in the state. An access and visitation grant supports efforts to give noncustodial and custodial parents in Louisiana the necessary tools to parent children effectively. Marriages That Matter provides healthy marriage education and child support services to ethnically diverse unmarried parents. The program is administered through the South Baton Rouge Christian Children's Foundation, Refined By Fire Ministries, Inc., Dixon Correctional Institute, and the Louisiana Department of Support Enforcement Services. The Louisiana Department of Social Services sponsors a healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood community demonstration initiative that combines child support services and marriage education. The goal of the initiative is to increase couples' awareness of the benefits of healthy relationships.^{iv}

Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs

Head Start programs emphasize the role of fathers and effective parenting. Louisiana's Caddo Head Start administers a program to encourage father participation in the lives of children and to build strong families. The program's activities include a father initiative council, a monthly newsletter, monthly training and activities for fathers, events called Family Nights Out, and a fundraiser called Hoops for Dads.^v The Louisiana Family Council is a statewide nonprofit organization whose mission is to "Strengthen Families Throughout Louisiana." The program has three divisions—the Center for Marriage, the Center for Fathering, and the Center for Mothering. These divisions seek to reach out to parents and their

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children to provide services that enable them to create and maintain healthy families, such as premarital and marital marriage education services. The Center for Fathering addresses the needs of all fathers and teaches the importance of being a father.^{vi}

State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood

Louisiana uses state funds and funds from the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant to implement teen pregnancy prevention programs. Projects aim to reduce teen pregnancy through community-based services designed to provide life skills, mentoring, social skills, and parenting education with a strong message of abstinence. The Louisiana Adolescent Health Initiative coordinates all the activities and resources available to adolescents, with funding provided by the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, foundations, and the state.^{vii} The initiative focuses especially on preventing teen pregnancy.^{viii} The Louisiana Office of Public Health Family Planning Program provides family planning services throughout the state to help families space the births of their children or limit the size of their families; this program also emphasizes the prevention of teen pregnancy.^{ix}

The Family and Medical Leave Act

Louisiana is subject to the federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), which requires employers with 50 or more employees to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to parents upon the birth or adoption of a child, to recover from an illness, or to care for an ill family member. 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. Additionally, Louisiana provides families with more than the 12 weeks of unpaid leave that is guaranteed by the FMLA. In addition, Louisiana guarantees up to four months of short-term disability leave to private- and public-sector employees who are temporarily disabled because of pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions.^x

Domestic Violence Services

The Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence (LCADV) is a statewide network of battered women's programs, supportive organizations, and individuals working to combat domestic violence. The LCADV works to eliminate domestic violence through education and training to create public awareness of the problem, the need for change, and the services available in Louisiana.^{xi} The state also helps victims of domestic violence obtain protective orders against their abusers and has established the Louisiana protective order registry, a database of court orders that police and law enforcement agencies can access from anywhere in the state.

Child Custody Policy

After an alleged father signs an acknowledgment of paternity form, he has the right to pursue visitation with the child and the right to petition the court for custody. The court has the right to grant the custody arrangement that is in the best interest of the child.^{xii} Louisiana has a presumption or preference for joint custody.^{xiii}

Paternity Establishment

Paternity establishment ensures a child's rights to a range of benefits, including survivor's insurance, education, health care, and workers' compensation. Establishing paternity ensures that children in the state have the same legal rights, whether they are born to married or unmarried parents. Under Louisiana law, paternity is established by a court or when the father signs an affidavit acknowledging that he is the father of the child. The alleged father may ask for a paternity test before signing the affidavit.^{xiv} Hospital personnel are required to give the parents of a child



born outside of marriage the opportunity to sign an acknowledgment of paternity form in the hospital when the child is born. If the alleged father refuses to sign this form, Support Enforcement Services attorneys may file a paternity suit asking a court to determine the child's paternity.

Child Support Assistance

The Louisiana Department of Social Services places the primary responsibility for child support on noncustodial parents in order to decrease children's dependence on public assistance. Louisiana's child support enforcement program helps locate missing parents, establish paternity for children born outside of marriage, establish child support orders, and collect and distribute child support payments.^{xv} If a child does not receive any cash assistance, the parents may make their own arrangements for child support. But if the child receives aid from the Family Independence Temporary Assistance Program (FITAP) or Medicaid, the mother is required to name the father, supply information to help find the father, or help determine the father of the child.^{xvi}

Child Support Enforcement

The Support Enforcement Services unit of Louisiana's Department of Social Services' Office of Family Support operates the state's child support enforcement program. Support Enforcement Services contacts the custodial parent to obtain information needed to determine the right amount of support to be paid and the availability of medical insurance. The court can then order the noncustodial parent to pay a certain amount of child support and order medical support from one or both parents. Any parent who receives aid from the FITAP or Medicaid automatically receives Support Enforcement Services. Otherwise, the parent may apply for these services and pay a \$25 fee. In cases of nonpayment of child support, the state may impose imprisonment of up to 90 days, a fine of not more than \$500, or both.^{xvii}

Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

Welfare Benefits

Louisiana's FITAP provides cash assistance to families with children when the financial resources of the family are insufficient to meet subsistence needs.^{xviii} The overall goal of the FITAP is to decrease the long-term dependency on welfare assistance by promoting job preparation and work.

Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers

The Administration for Children and Families of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services has granted Southern University and A&M College funding for the Fathers-N-Families program. This program, which is targeted at noncustodial fathers, provides services such as parenting education, life-skills training, responsible fatherhood training, family-building experiences, and job-skills education and placement.^{xix}

Job Training and Employment Services

FITAP recipients who are work-eligible must enroll in the Strategies to Empower People Program (STEP), which provides job training, employment, and supportive services.^{xx} Project Return, a nonprofit organization that also receives funding from the state legislature, provides services to former prison inmates. The services include GED/academic assistance and coursework; substance abuse education; computer, employability skills, and communication skills training; and community-building education.^{xxi}



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Incarceration and Reentry

Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

Louisiana's Department of Public Safety and Corrections operates CORE—Corrections Organized for Re-entry. This program teaches parenting skills to incarcerated fathers while they are in prison and monitors the men after their release.^{xxii} Louisiana also uses some of its TANF funding to implement programs for men in prison or being released from prison to provide job education, life-skills training, and the means and knowledge to take responsibility in the lives of their children.^{xxiii}

Resources

- **Louisiana Department of Social Services.** This Web site provides information about child support, welfare benefits, and other social services available in the state; available at <http://www.dss.state.la.us/index.htm>.
- **Administration for Children and Families—Currently Funded Healthy Marriage Projects.** This Web site details healthy marriage programs currently funded by the Administration for Children and Families in Louisiana; available at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/funding/child_support_past_projects.html.

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