

Memorandum on Joint Guidance on Supporting Responsible Fatherhood Efforts

June 16, 2000

Memorandum for the Attorney General, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, the Secretary of Education

Subject: Joint Guidance on Supporting Responsible Fatherhood Efforts

One of the fundamental goals of my Administration has been to strengthen fathers' involvement in their children's lives. In support of that goal, I directed all executive departments and agencies to review their policies, programs, and initiatives to ensure that they supported men in their role as fathers. The review concluded that the Federal Government can play an important role by providing coordinated guidance and resources that support responsible fatherhood to individuals and State and local governments.

Under the leadership of Vice President Gore, my Administration has made significant progress in promoting greater father involvement, within the Federal workforce as well as through Federal programs and resources, and through partnerships with States and communities, foundations, and the research community.

As you know, my Budget for Fiscal Year 2001 substantially expands our efforts to promote responsible fatherhood and strengthen families. The Budget proposes \$255 million for the first year of a new "Fathers Work/Families Win" initiative to promote responsible fatherhood and support working families, allows States to simplify child support distribution rules, provides incentives to States that pass through more child support payments directly to families, and extends Welfare-to-Work grants to help noncustodial parents move into lasting unsubsidized jobs. In addition, my Budget proposes to increase the Earned Income Tax Credit by nearly \$24 billion over 10 years, providing an additional work incentive of as much as \$1,200 in tax relief to an estimated 6.8 million hardworking mothers and fathers.

Recent research indicates that promoting and rewarding work for low-income families can support marital stability, increase employment and earnings, reduce domestic violence, and improve

children's behavior and school performance. In addition, research confirms that child support is an important factor in lifting children out of poverty. There is also evidence that a large proportion of unmarried fathers are involved with their children at birth, but that these relationships tend to weaken over time. And employed fathers are more likely to be able to support their children financially and emotionally.

These results, as well as the 1995 review, show the importance of providing Federal guidance and resources to States that can support responsible fatherhood, work, and family. Therefore, I direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services, in conjunction with the Secretaries of Labor, Agriculture, Education, Housing and Urban Development, and the Attorney General, to develop and provide, within 90 days of the date of this memorandum, coordinated guidance on Federal resources and opportunities for promoting responsible fatherhood.

This guidance should:

- (1) clearly identify existing resources available, including Federal welfare reform block grant funds, Welfare-to-Work and workforce development resources, educational resources, paternity establishment and child support, Food Stamp Employment and Training, and low-income housing and community development funds;
- (2) help States, local governments, community- and faith-based organizations, fatherhood practitioners, and families, identify and use Federal resources and opportunities to strengthen the many roles of fathers in families;
- (3) clarify the extent to which existing policies and practices, including child support policies, can be modified to help ensure available resources effectively serve lower-income fathers;
- (4) identify opportunities to build on and sustain the involvement of fathers in low-income, unmarried parent, "fragile families"; and

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- (5) list contact information to help interested parties access information on a regular basis.

This guidance should be accessible, and made available through the websites of Federal agencies, as well as in printed form.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: This memorandum was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 16 but was embargoed for release until 10:06 a.m. on June 17. An original was not available for verification of the content of this memorandum.

The President's Radio Address

June 17, 2000

Good morning. Tomorrow America pauses to honor the countless contributions and obligations of fatherhood. When I think back on all the titles I've held, from attorney general of Arkansas to Governor to President, none of them comes close in importance and in fulfillment to the simple title of father.

Fatherhood is one of the great blessings of life and also one of the greatest challenges any man can have, especially at a time when it's becoming more and more difficult to balance the pressures of work and family.

Today I want to share some evidence with you about the critical role fathers play in their children's lives, and I want to talk about our obligation as a nation to help more fathers provide both the emotional and the financial support their children need.

We've known for a long time now that students do better in school and later in life when their parents are more actively involved in their learning. But over the years, parent involvement often has meant mothers' involvement. This assumption misses the importance of fathers. Research now confirms that involvement of both parents in a child's education makes a positive difference, and that father involvement during infancy and early childhood also contributes to a child's emotional security and enhances problem-solving in math and verbal skills.

In fact, one study showed that the chances of a child getting mostly A's increased by over 40 percent in two-parent families where the father was highly involved. Even in families where the father isn't living with his child but remains actively involved, those odds of getting A's increased by a full third.

Clearly, fathers matter when it comes to early childhood development and education. And

while there is now a growing understanding of that fact, it was Vice President Al Gore who put a national spotlight on this issue during his 1994 Family Re-Union Conference, and he's worked tirelessly on it ever since.

Our combined efforts are paying off. I'm pleased to release a report today from the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services that offers educators and early childhood providers information, strategies, and tools to successfully involve more fathers in their children's learning—from encouraging more fathers to read with their kids at home to inviting more of them to volunteer in schools and child care centers.

The report highlights model programs around the country and provides resource information for practitioners. We also know that noncustodial parents who continue to be involved with their children are more likely to pay child support. The sad fact is that one in three children in America today lives without his or her father. They shouldn't be punished, either emotionally or financially, because of that. That's why for 7½ years now we've made child support enforcement a top priority.

And today we've got some further evidence that our efforts are paying off. Child support collections increased 10 percent during the past year, reaching a record of nearly \$16 billion. That's double what it was in 1992. This means fewer women on welfare, fewer children in poverty, more families living in dignity.

When it comes to protecting children and building strong families and strong communities, all of us have a role to play. But first and foremost, it's about caring mothers and fathers and then about supporting community. But Government also must do its part. And we mustn't