

Illinois created a council on fatherhood, so why can't it get funding?

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By Jeffery M. Leving | Apr 27, 2022, 12:33pm CDT

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The state should fund the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood, Jeffery Leving writes. | Ashlee Rezin/Sun-Times

Last week, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a bill to invest \$70 million in programs that support involved fatherhood in his state. In Illinois, a similar program was set up in 2004, but it hasn't received 70 cents.

The Florida bill, dubbed the "Responsible Fatherhood" bill, aims to encourage fathers to take an active role in their children's lives and provides grants to community-based membership programs.

Set to begin on July 1, it will help fund resources for educational and mentorship programs to assist children, fathers, and families. The funding will enable its Department of Juvenile Justice to launch a mentorship program for at-risk youth, with initiatives including barbershop talks and fatherhood classes.

Additionally, Florida's Department of Children and Families will create a campaign to raise awareness of the importance of fatherhood and will support nonprofit organizations to help fathers remain engaged and connected with their children. The funding will also support case managers and resources to help fathers looking for employment opportunities.

Opinion

The initiative also sets aside \$32.6 million for grants aimed at helping fathers and will provide \$1,720 stipends for young adults who were in foster care.

In 2004, the Illinois legislature and the governor set up the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood, an organization for which the governor appointed me to serve as chairman. However, since its creation, the organization has not received any funding. Instead, I have personally donated thousands of dollars to keep it going — but am appealing for help now.

The Illinois Council On Responsible Fatherhood has four main goals. First, it sets out to promote the positive involvement of both parents in the lives of their children. It does this in four ways: 1) by raising public awareness of the impact of father absence on children; 2) assisting state agencies and other service providers with the resources they need to promote responsible fatherhood; 3) reforming perceptions within state agencies and other service providers regarding the role of fathers as parents; and 4) advocating for programs, policies and legislation that will encourage the positive involvement of fathers.

These are non-controversial goals, and they are vital.

More than 18 million children in the U.S. live without a biological, step or adoptive father at home, U.S. Census Bureau data show.

Numerous studies have shown that children tend to do much better behaviorally and emotionally when both of their parents play a meaningful role in their lives. Those studies have shown that children who are raised in sole-custody households are more likely to develop behavioral problems than those who spend time with both parents.

The Fatherhood Educational Institute has shared statistics showing that 72% of all teenaged murderers grew up without fathers; 60% of rapists were raised in fatherless homes; 70% of kids now incarcerated in juvenile corrections facilities grew up in a single-parent environment. Additionally, a growing body of evidence shows a high correlation between fatherlessness and violence among young men (especially violence against women).

The bottom line is that growing up without a father is a huge factor in America's violence problem and one that needs to be addressed. The state laid the groundwork with the creation of the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood in 2004, 18 years before Florida signed its bill. It's high time that Illinois commits to funding it.

Jeffery M. Leving is founder and president of the Law Offices of Jeffery M. Leving Ltd., and is an advocate for the rights of fathers.