



May 23, 2024

INFORMATION ACTION

SUBJECT: UNFINISHED BUSINESS: FATHERHOOD INITIATIVE

Strategic Plan Priority Area 3: Family Resilience

Goal: All families have the knowledge, skills, and resources to support their child's optimal development

BACKGROUND FOR THE ITEM

As a part of its 2022 Budget planning process, Commissioners discussed the possibility of funding an initiative focused on fatherhood that would leverage multiple state partners (California Department of Social Services, Health and Human Services), many of whom had begun conversations on father inclusion in policy and practice and the construction of a fatherhood council. In September 2022, former First 5 California Ex Officio Member Marco Mijic raised the importance of a fatherhood initiative in a Commission meeting, alongside other investments for consideration of adoption. After Commission discussion and staff input, the Commission approved staff to move forward with outlining a proposal for a \$5 million investment.

Executive Director Jackie Wong directed Chief Deputy Director Dr. Angelo Williams to lead this effort. After multiple stakeholder and internal staff conversations, site visits to the local and national fatherhood program sites, and discussion with subject matter experts, Dr. Williams organized the initial strategy for future investment focused on creating a common base of knowledge to inform staff and Commissioners related to contemporary research regarding fatherhood (academic literature review) and an environmental scan of existing fatherhood programs and programming (practitioner knowledge/mapping the locations of fatherhood programs) within the "First 5 Universe." The academic literature review and environmental scan will be presented to the Commission along with suggestions for initial investments based on First 5 California's Levers for Change (Advocate, Convener, Catalyst and Broadcaster).

SUMMARY OF THE ISSUE

In the United States, 18.4 million children, or 1 in 4, live without a biological, step, or adoptive father in the home. In California, of families with their own children under age 6, 8.83% are families with a male head of household and no spouse present. According

to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Health Statistics Report, “fathers’ involvement in their children’s lives has been shown to have a positive effect on children and their well-being in many areas, for example, on increasing the chances of academic success and in reducing the chances of delinquency and substance abuse.”

Research by the National Fatherhood Initiative indicates that a child raised in a father-absent home is:

- At a four times greater risk of poverty
- At a two times greater risk of infant mortality
- At a seven times greater risk of teen pregnancy
- At a two times greater risk of obesity
- At a two times greater likelihood of dropping out of school
- More likely to have behavioral problems
- More likely to go to prison
- More likely to commit crime
- More likely to face abuse and neglect
- More likely to abuse drugs and alcohol

While this research paints a stark picture, children can and do grow and thrive in all family structures. Over time, family types have increased in diversity with blended families, same-sex parent families, children living with non-parent relatives, among others. It is important to note that not all children living in single parent households face the same circumstances; children born to single parents who choose to have children through donors or surrogacy may not face the same socioeconomic disadvantages and parental stress faced by some other single parents. As noted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the topics of family structure and single-parent families are “nuanced and evolving issues.”

Research does demonstrate a connection between family structures that includes fathers and positive outcomes for children and mothers. Many moms and dads agree that a father’s involvement is an important part of ensuring a child’s well-being. Despite the significance of a father’s involvement, many human service organizations are primarily mother-focused, and many often lack the funding, resources, and staff training to be intentionally father-inclusive.

Research indicates a connection between family structures that include fathers and positive outcomes for children and their mothers. Despite the significance of a father’s involvement, many human service organizations are primarily mother-focused, and often lack the funding, resources, and staff training to be intentionally father-inclusive. California has a rich landscape of existing fatherhood related initiatives and efforts to learn from and strengthen. This *First 5 California Fatherhood Focused Environmental Scan & Literature Review* provides high level summaries of the existing research on fatherhood initiatives, as well as a preliminary landscape of California’s fatherhood related efforts and initiatives, in order to inform potential future investments and work of First 5 California.

NEXT STEPS

With explicit intention related to Information Items leading to Action Items, staff will, after the presentation to the Commission, continue engaging with fatherhood program leaders within the First 5 Universe and beyond, including listening sessions, site visits, collaboration with state agency partners, collaboration with fatherhood programs at First 5 California's upcoming Summit, and additional research. Based on input from county commissions and additional research, First 5 California staff will present an action item for consideration at the May Commission meeting.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. First 5 California Fatherhood Focused Environmental Scan & Literature Review