

**Committee on Ways and Means**

**Subcommittee on Human Resources**

**Hearing on Federal Resources Available for Child Care**

**March 16, 1999**

**Statement Submitted for Consideration by the Committee**

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The taxpayers should not pay for childcare if a parent or immediate family member is willing to do it for free. Childcare assistance is an important element in moving adults from welfare to work. If a parent or immediate family member is willing to take care of the children, they should be given priority in the matter. Studies find that parents and family members are more able to take care of children and are preferred by the children.

Before a person can receive subsidies for child care, they must prove the following criteria:

1) That the other parent has declined to care for the child, or is unfit to care for the child.

And, if the other parent has declined or is unfit to care for the child:

2) That members of the child's immediate family have declined to care for the child, or are unfit to care for the child.

In today's world divorced and unwed parents are common. If the custodial parent works, is in job training or an education program, the non-custodial parent should become the first option in childcare. If the non-custodial parent is unwilling or is unfit to care for the child, the immediate family should be the next choice. If neither of these options is available, only then should the government subsidize childcare.

Numerous studies cite the importance of parental involvement in their children's lives. Whether wed, divorced or unwed, both parents have a right to participate in the upbringing of their children. The most obvious of these rights and responsibilities is to provide for the day-to-day care of the child. The federal government has acknowledged that childcare assistance is crucial in moving welfare recipients into the working world. Thus, if one member of the family is willing to provide the childcare, not only does this relieve the burden from the government and

taxpayer, but it also strengthens the bond between parent and child and has a positive developmental influence on the child.

All too often fathers have been overlooked as willing caretakers of their children. Not only are many fathers willing and able to take care of their children, but a 1994 Census Bureau report (Who's Minding the Kids?, Child Care Arrangements: Fall 1991, P70-36) found fathers to be the preferred day care providers. To quote Mary Hawkins, co-author of the report, "We are increasingly finding fathers to be the preferred provider for child care..." (Press Release, May 20, 1994).

Unfortunately, the data collected also appear to highlight the barriers placed between children and fathers, if the father has been displaced from the home or has never lived with the mother. "Divorce and separation agreements may be responsible for these lower rates of child care participation. Also, divorce or separation may result in geographic moves by either parent that make a father's participation in child care impossible. In addition, divorce or separation usually create strained relationships that may not be conducive to frequent daily contact between former spouses and their children" (O'Connell, 1993).

A 1993 analysis by the Population Reference Bureau highlights how many children are being cared for by their fathers. "In 1991, there were more children under age 15 living in married-couple families who had fathers as the primary care providers (3.2 million) than the combined number of children in child care centers and nursery schools (2.2 million)" (O'Connell, 1993).

Day care costs were also studied, and the findings will be of interest to those studying childcare guidelines. This is a very lengthy and complicated study (61 pages) and we suggest that the reader obtain a copy for a better understanding of the definitions and terms used in the report. (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C. 20233).

The involvement of fathers in their children's lives leads to positive outcomes. Studies from as early as 1975 have detailed the advantages of father involvement. The *Child Study Journal* reported "... significant differences favoring the academic achievement of both boys and girls from father present homes..." Whereas "father absence had a much greater effect on ... boys and girls... whose I.Q. was above 100" (Sciara, 1975).

The misconception that fathers are less suited to child raising than the mother is continuing to be debunked by researchers. "Child development is enhanced by more father involvement ... there is less sexism in the children." Fathers "are able to meet the emotional and nurturance needs of children" (Hanson, 1985).

A 1981 study noted that "the father plays an active and unique role in part in his child's development." Unfortunately "fathers participate in child care as much as the mother allows" (Jones). This proves to be an argument for allowing non-custodial fathers to be the first option in childcare for their children, should the mother choose to move from welfare to work.

Not only do researchers promote fathers as an essential component of child development, but it also has been shown that when a father is absent, children suffer. “Children whose relationship with their fathers were disrupted were more vulnerable to a wide range of problems” (Beeson, 1984). While researchers do a wonderful job of interpreting data, the views of the children should not be overlooked.

**Dan age eight:** His mother was angrily attempting to prevent any contact with the boy’s father. Dan spoke of “...awful bad problems I’m having sleeping at night” (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976).

**Sonia** rushed into her classroom and announced “... with glee...” that her father had moved out the night before. Soon thereafter, she began vomiting in her breakfast, and alternately clung to and angrily shouted to her mother. Fearfully and repetitively she asked her mother, “Don’t you love me?” For Sonia, the separation meant the loss of the parent that clearly favored her, while she remained in the custody of a rejecting mother who openly preferred her sibling (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976).

**Bill:** Teacher reported that, since the separation, Bill seemed frightened and prone to outbursts of crying. At home, Bill was moody, irritable, and forlorn at the loss of his father (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976).

**Mary age nine:** “... If my father could visit more often, I probably wouldn’t mind so much (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976).

**Four-year-old girl:** Reacted to the loss of her father with nightmares, depression, and withdrawal from peers and activities. (She had) strong guilt feelings, which pushed her to a depressive, stage (Rosenthal, 1979).

**Jane:** Cried on the telephone when speaking with her father, “I want to see you. I want to see you. I miss you...we only see you once a month. That’s not enough” (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976).

Professional studies also document the detrimental effects of decreased involvement of fathers.

“(The) duration of contact with the father was directly related to the quality of the father-child relationship and, indirectly, to the child’s adjustment. (The) key factors (are:) insure that the father (has) easy access to his children and input into his children’s lives, both of which are frequently denied fathers in actual practice” (Shanon, 1977).

Additional studies support the concept that the presence of a father is tied to psychological adjustment of the child.

“Findings indicate a statistically significant association between time lost in the presence of the father and current adjustment. The more time lost, the higher the maladjustment

score. The direct impact on the child's psyche of reduced contact with the father is an important factor to be considered in further research" (Jacobson, 1978).

With overwhelming evidence that fathers are important in their children's lives, why not offer them the opportunity to provide for childcare? When the mother is working, in job training or an educational program a willing, non-custodial father should be the first option in childcare. Along with the obvious advantage of strengthening the child-parent relationship, there are the additional benefits of lowered government costs and involvement. Taxpayers should not be forced to support a welfare program that circumvents childcare by non-custodial parents or family members.

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