

Statement submitted for consideration by the Committee

Committee on Ways and Means

Subcommittee on Human Resources

Hearing On Fatherhood

April 27, 1999

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I welcome the opportunity to submit written testimony on the issue of fatherhood to the Human Resources Subcommittee. This vital interest needs to be addressed, not just by this Subcommittee but by the current Administration. In September 1998, I was afforded the honor of preparing material and presenting to the "White House Commission on Public Policy" regarding the Fathers Count Act of 1998.

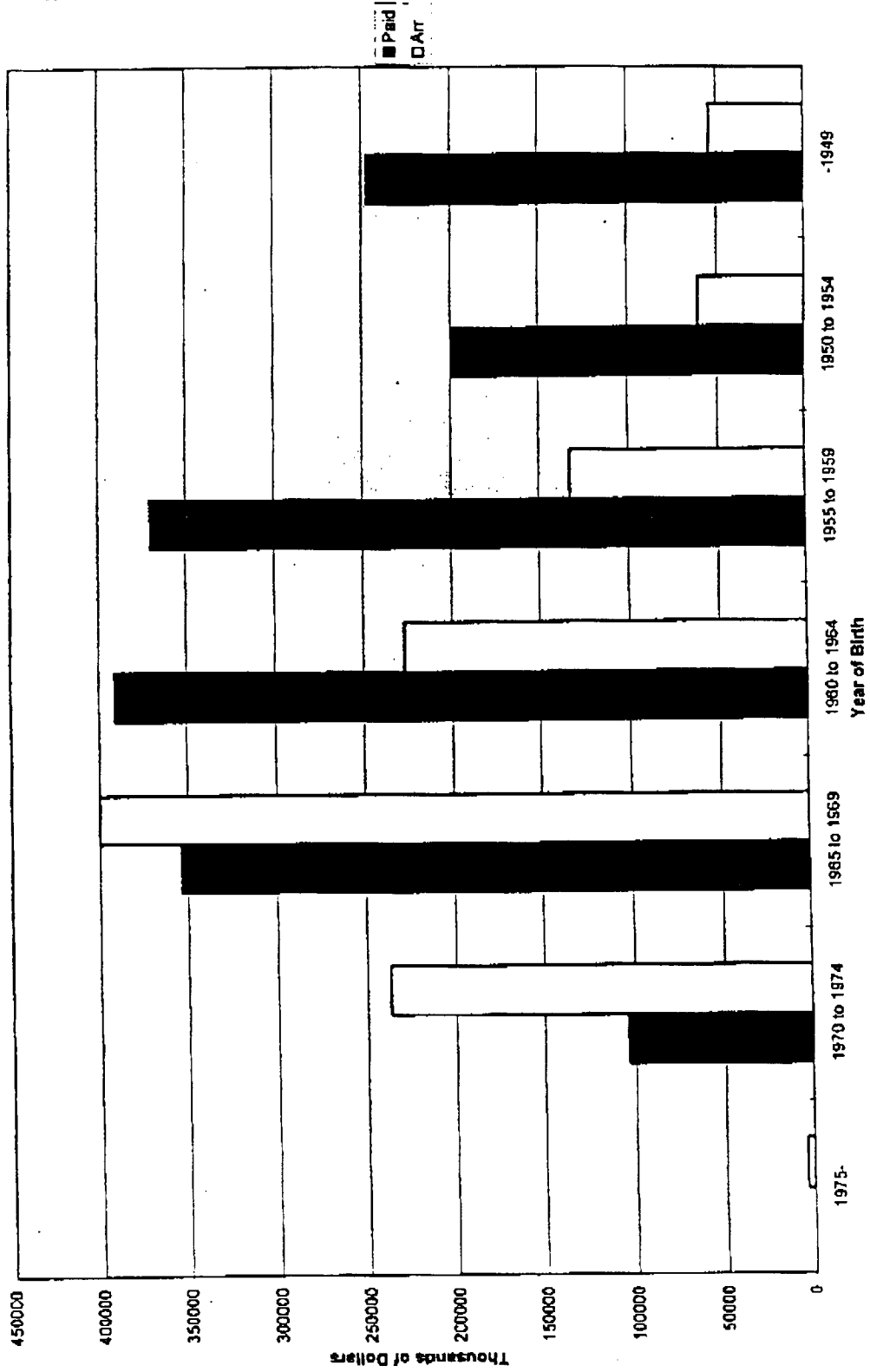
In the last decade, we have seen an increase in the efforts of programs to assist fathers in becoming and remaining involved with their children. Work still must continue to negate the many barriers left-standing that prevent many fathers, especially low-income fathers from becoming vital components of their children's lives. From 1989 through 1998, I coordinated the Paternity Parenting Time Program through the Wayne County Friend of the Court, Third Judicial Circuit of Michigan, in Detroit. The intent was to provide non-custodial parents, mainly fathers with the opportunity to obtain parenting time through a court order. The thought was that if the fathers were granted parenting time and be able to have access with their children, the amount of child support paid by these fathers would also increase, or, at the least, remain stable. In 1996 an analysis was completed of over 600 of these cases: 300 cases of fathers with parenting time orders and 300 cases of fathers without parenting time orders and the interaction with child support payments. Based upon categories of ages, the fathers without parenting time orders were substantially lower amounts of support paid (graphs attached). Fathers that had orders for access to their children were willing and eager to provide financially for their children.

A major complaint from fathers is that the amount they are in arrearage also effects their seeing their children. Under the current federal law, if they accumulate arrearage for any reason, their child support arrearage cannot be adjusted , except from the date that the motion to modify is filed. While presenting fatherhood/parenting issues to incarcerated individuals recently, the men's primary concern was their child support was continuing to grow while they were locked up with no means to pay. These fathers wondered how they would be able to contribute to their children's well-being and financial security when they were already so deep in debt that they could not see their way out.

This Court is attempting to secure funding for a program that would allow the placement of satellite Court offices in the community, especially communities where the default rate on paternity cases sometimes reaches 60% or more. These fathers have not had any contact with the Court regarding acknowledging paternity, yet were adjudicated to be the father, have had a child support order entered against them and yet have not had any meaningful contact with the Friend of the Court to address these concerns. These fathers, many of whom are low-income or unemployed will boast an inordinate arrearage level; one from which they have little if any hope of ever escaping from. Only the Judges have the authority to use discretion in addressing these cases, however with the Bradley Amendment in effect, the Judges cannot offer any workable solution to these fathers.

Payment Arrearage History:
Fathers with Visitation Orders

In the 2 youngest age groups, fathers were 2 times behind in the amount of arrearage -y- payments. The 3rd category was only 1/8 behind and all others were 2-4 times paid more.



**Payment Arrears History:
Fathers without Visitation Orders**

In every age group except fathers 36-40 and 56 and older, the arrearages were higher than payments.

