

Child Support Report

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COMMISSIONER'S VOICE

Fatherhood Involvement



As a father and the commissioner of the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, I was invigorated by two fatherhood events during a week in June. First, I attended an International Fatherhood Conference in Richmond, Virginia, with Clarence Carter, director of ACF's Office of Family Assistance. We talked about where we've been and where we need to go in human services to help fathers and families become self-sufficient. Then we traveled on to Nashville, Tennessee, for ACF's first-ever national fatherhood summit, [Fanning the Fatherhood FIRE](#), to help support and expand fatherhood efforts across the country. This summit helped energize the human services field nationwide. In the opening plenary, James Murray represented OCSE on an ACF cross-program panel, discussing the programs and initiatives directed at fathers. James tells more in his article on page 2.

We know that fathers play a critical role in their children's lives, but many feel disconnected from their children. In my travels, I've heard from countless fathers about how they pay their monthly child support obligations but don't get to see their child. Research indicates that fathers who are able to spend time with their child will pay more child support, and pay it more consistently, than fathers without regular access to their children. We mentioned at the summit that parenting time agreements are something that summit participants could ask their local legislators to consider as possible solutions for the fathers and families that they serve. It was a novel idea for some. It's just one of the tools, though, that we can use to help men be more involved in their children's lives through the child support program.

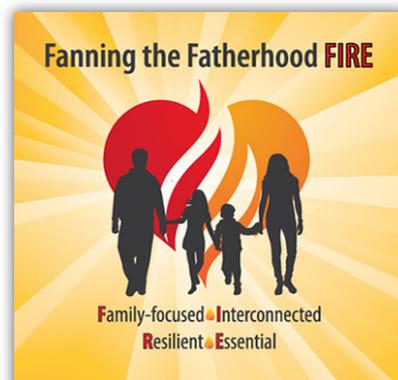
Children who have an involved father are often happier and healthier, even when the father doesn't live with them. So ACF and the Ad Council launched an ad campaign during the fatherhood summit to highlight the importance of small moments shared between dads and their children. The campaign, Dance Like a Dad, encourages dads to "bust a move" for the most important audience of all – their kids. Because when men spend time with their children, even if it's just to #DanceLikeADad, that moment can have a lasting impact.

The goal of the child support program is to make sure that children have emotional and financial support from both parents, even when they live apart. We can do that more effectively when we partner with other programs to help fathers be present. Events like the ones I attended help us broaden the discussions on fatherhood, develop new partnerships, and share the message that the child support program is here to help.

Scott Lekan

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Fanning the Fatherhood FIRE

OCSE's James Murray helped kick off the National Fatherhood Summit at the opening plenary session on June 4 in Tennessee. Read more about the summit on page 2.

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FATHERHOOD

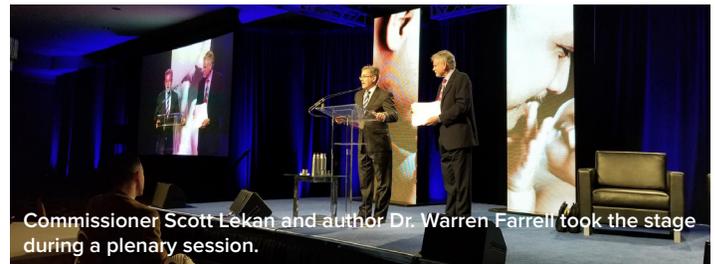
Fanning the Fatherhood FIRE Unifies Human Services Vision

James Murray, OCSE

Nashville, Tennessee, was buzzing with energy June 4 when more than 600 participants gathered with one focus in mind — engaging fathers to improve outcomes for children and families. ACF hosted the historic fatherhood summit to support the concept that fathers are essential to the healthy social, emotional, and economic well-being of their children and families. The theme, [Fanning the Fatherhood FIRE](#), increased attention to fathers as Family-focused, Interconnected, Resilient, and Essential contributors to their children, families, communities, and society.

ACF has two goals when it comes to father engagement across human service programs. One is to build a national culture that embraces the essential role that fathers play in society. It also wants to advance systems and practice to minimize the barriers fathers have to overcome to receive inclusive and effective family services. We saw at the summit that ACF is not alone. Leaders from various sectors including federal, state, and local governments, social service agencies, non-government organizations, and philanthropic organizations have the same goals. Business and community leaders, fatherhood practitioners, health and human service professionals, even academics, researchers, parents, and other stakeholders were on hand to lend their voices to the Nashville discussion.

Child support was one of the hottest topics. Many people cited unemployment and underemployment as reasons why fathers can't make their full monthly child support payments. It came up in panel discussions and breakout sessions alike. The great news is that we have plenty of examples of positive, highly effective collaborations between



Commissioner Scott Lekan and author Dr. Warren Farrell took the stage during a plenary session.

child support and responsible fatherhood programs. Our challenge is that a lot of people outside of child support don't know that these programs exist. At the start of the summit, participants were asking for ways to help fathers overcome the challenges of complying with child support obligations. By the time it ended, many of those same people told me that they were glad to learn what child support is doing across the country.

Federal, state, county, and tribal child support professionals were on hand to help dispel myths about the child support program. Staff from Georgia and Tennessee presented a session with the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement to highlight the state-level fatherhood programs their child support offices initiated. Other states like Ohio, Missouri, South Carolina, North Carolina, Minnesota, and Maryland also have amazing child support/responsible fatherhood partnerships. The similarity in each instance is a passionate leader that wants to improve services for families across all programs.

The summit was our first step in fanning the fatherhood fire. It will take a concerted effort through the child support program to keep it burning. If you have an effective human services partnership that others could learn from, we would love to help you tell your story. If you have an idea to help innovate child support services in your state or county, or on your tribal reservation, contact your [regional OCSE office](#) to let us know about it.

For more information, visit the [OCSE Fatherhood webpage](#) or contact James Murray at james.murray@acf.hhs.gov.



HHS.gov @HHSGov
 [#DanceLikeADad](#) to get more involved in your child's life. Here are some fun ways to enhance your presence when spending time with your kid(s):
Fatherhood.gov



Make a moment
[#DanceLikeADad](#)

PROMISING PRACTICES

South Carolina's Interactive Pro Se Visitation Website

Stephen W. Yarborough, Assistant Director,
Office of Policy and Training, South Carolina
Child Support Services Division

South Carolina's Access and Visitation program, locally known as [Visitation Involvement Parenting](#) (VIP), serves more than 1,000 people annually. For 20 years, we've helped parents obtain court ordered visitation; and along the way, we've added parenting education, mediation, and a number of helpful referrals to other community organizations.

VIP operates in 16 counties and in two of our four regional child support offices. We also have dedicated workers in the Columbia and Charleston locations. The VIP Coordinators take referrals from the public, child welfare agencies, domestic violence agencies, individual family courts, and the South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families. While the program already reached some of the most populous portions of our state, three years ago it expanded into the densely populated northwestern region.

Collaboration increases services

One of the most frequent reasons noncustodial parents give for not paying child support is that they have little or no access to their children. About five years ago, some like-minded thinkers from the South Carolina Child Support Services Division, several other state agencies, and a couple legal aid nonprofits began talking about ways to help. With each contributing at least one of the resources — funds, procedural expertise, IT support, and advocacy — they formed a plan to develop a legal assistance pro se website. The group used a free, online legal software tool called [Access to Justice Author](#) to develop the web platform. They added an interactive video experience along with document completion capabilities, general education on the pro se legal experience, and guidance on the roles of individuals involved in the process.

The [SCVisitation.com](#) website has been up and running for about three years. In 2018, visitors used it to generate about 285 forms per month, with about nine users generating documents each day. It allows parents to schedule pro se hearings themselves without VIP program assistance. SCVisitation.com provides links to the South Carolina Department of Social Services' website as well as to the sites of three of the initial sponsors. The site can connect customers to a possible remedy for a problem that would ordinarily be outside the reach of the program, which the child support staff thinks is its most valuable feature.

Mixed results

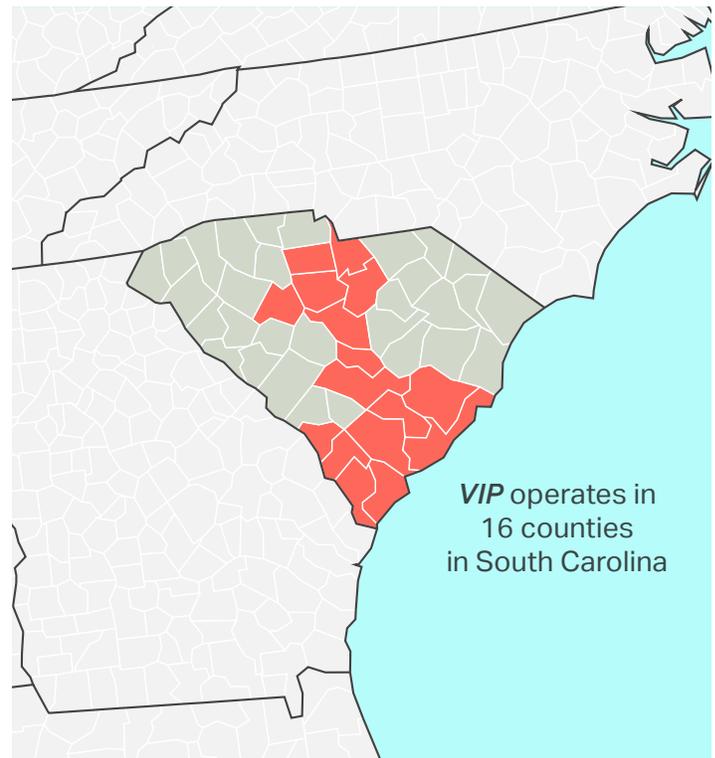
Even with two complementary offerings, the VIP program and SCVisitation.com, we can't fix everything. Occasionally, a parent's effort to seek a visitation order is unsuccessful. Sometimes concerns come up that could either hamper the process or bring it to a conclusion that doesn't please the requestor.

More often, though, we have pleasing outcomes. In one case, a coordinator heard a custodial party say that the noncustodial parent lacked adequate parenting skills, so they recommended parenting classes for both parties. Because the child had special needs, our staff recommended that the father attend a medical appointment with the mother to learn more about the child's condition. The mother agreed, and because of the trust that developed, we eventually completed a visitation agreement. Another couple attended mediation, reached a visitation agreement, ended up reconciling, and eventually got married, which is certainly not the norm.

Seek a well-rounded program

Here in South Carolina, we learned that a visitation program is both valuable and visible enough that one approach may not suffice. By adding the online pro se site, the Child Support Division is able to help parents obtain a visitation order either through trained, specialized VIP staff, or through the interactive website.

For more information, visit [SCVisitation.com](#) or the South Carolina [Child Support Services Division](#).



Editor's Note: Across the child support community, we're hearing about what the gig economy will mean for the parents and children we serve. Gretchen Tressler wrote [On the Move in the Gig Economy](#) in the July-August 2018 Child Support Report and Commissioner Lekan dedicated his [October 2018 blog](#) to the topic. This month, Tom Killmurray describes what he learned at a discussion sponsored by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. OCSE will provide more articles on the gig economy as it develops further in-depth analysis on emerging issues related to this growing world of work.

IN FOCUS

Is Child Support Ready for the Gig Economy?

Tom Killmurray, OCSE

Given all the twists and turns described in [Tressler's article](#), you might be wondering how the child support community will adapt to workers in the gig economy. Child support has always dealt with independent contractors and the self-employed. Gig workers are just a new segment.

Attraction of new platforms

OCSE and states are watching the employment opportunities of internet platforms — such as ridesharing and handyman apps and websites where people sell services and labor — because they are attracting workers and new business models favoring independent contractors over traditional employees.

Twelve states have expanded new hire reporting requirements to include independent contractors. Traditional tools like tax refund offsets and financial institution data matches can help caseworkers make collections where income withholding may not be possible.

Filling in missing data

The gig economy is dynamic and fluid. While some data sources suggest tremendous growth in recent years, IRS data on 1099 filings and the self-employed is the best indicator. The 1099 workforce accounted for nearly 12% of the total workforce in 2016. Alternative work arrangements grew almost 2% between 2000 and 2016. Those using online platforms drove more than half this growth between 2013 and 2016.

According to University of Illinois economist Professor Andy Garin, who presented at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, most gig workers do not earn large incomes from this type of work. For some, it's temporary because they're between jobs or trying to meet expenses in the short term. For others, gig work is part time according to the McKinsey Global Institute. Many try gig work, but don't stick with it.

The number of workers participating in the gig economy or alternative work arrangements depends on how you classify these workers. Experts in government, business, and economics have not settled on a single definition. Surveys by some researchers have indicated that more than 30% of the workforce have participated in freelance or other gig work.

Defining the Gig Economy

Independent Contractor: A business owner or contractor who provides services to other businesses is generally considered self-employed

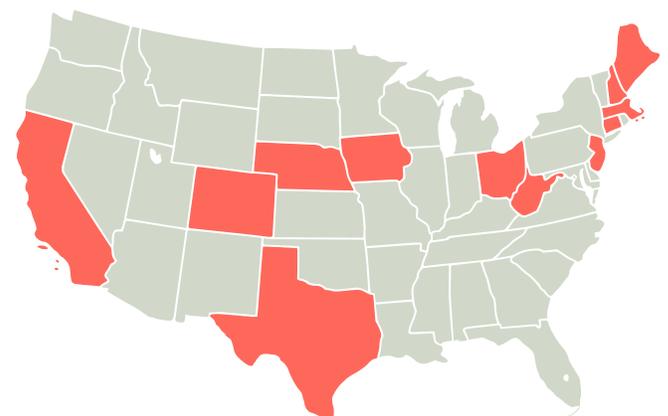
Self-Employed: A person who is in a trade or business as a sole proprietor, a member of a partnership that carries on a trade or business, or is in business for themselves

IRS 1099 Forms: A series of information returns for individuals who receive certain types of income (self-employment, etc.) during the year

Gig economy: An informal category of people who work outside of regular jobs as independent workers who are loosely connected to organizations or who sell directly to a consumer

Federal Offset Program: Enforcement tools to collect past-due child support from noncustodial parents, including federal income tax refund and administrative offsets

Financial Institution Data Match: A comparison of information on accounts held by banks, savings and loan companies, brokerage houses, and other participating financial institutions against information on child support obligors who owe past-due support (arrearages)



12 states have expanded new hire reporting requirements to include independent contractors

Garin also provided geographic information that indicates gig work is more likely in urban areas while the highest rates of traditional self-employment occur in northern New England and some states of the Midwest, Great Plains, Rocky Mountains, and West Coast. Over 70% of gig workers are male.

Businesses, state wage and hour enforcement offices, courts, and legislatures are all struggling with categorization of workers as employees versus independent contractors. Employees are reported as new hires, while contractors are not reported unless they work in the 12 states that have expanded new hire reporting.

- ◆ *Gig work is more likely in urban areas.*
- ◆ *Over 70% of gig workers are male.*

Next steps

OCSE continues to monitor the gig economy and the actions of state child support programs to adapt to the self-employed segment of the caseload. For example, five states are considering legislation that would expand new hire reporting to include independent contractors. Maryland has enacted legislation requiring drivers with ridesharing companies to be professionally licensed. The legislation includes provisions that allow data matching with child support. And Massachusetts has a workgroup studying the gig economy.

OCSE continues to update resources like the income withholding order form and [State/Employer Contact and Program Information matrix](#) on nonemployees or independent contractors. Other options OCSE and states are exploring include:

- Data matching with large businesses that use independent contractors
- Working with businesses to encourage them to search their payroll accounts (which pay employees) and accounts payable databases (which pay their independent contractors) after the employer receives an income withholding order
- Data matching with online payment portals because they are frequently used for paying independent contractors
- Enhancing OCSE's [Child Support Portal](#) to allow secure communication between child support agencies and businesses

If your state or organization is working on innovations around the gig economy, please let us know what you're doing.

For more information, contact Tom Killmurray at tom.killmurray@acf.hhs.gov.

Research Brief: Child Support and the Gig Economy

The emergence of the gig economy presents a new dimension to the longstanding challenge of establishing and enforcing child support orders for noncustodial parents working outside traditional salaried employment in jobs that are often temporary, part time, and contingent. The HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation recently posted a report by MEF Associates, [Independent Contractors and Nontraditional Workers: Implications for the Child Support Program](#), that child support professionals might find useful. These are a few key findings.

- Recent economic shifts and increasing opportunities for nontraditional workers may result in less consistent payments for children and more work for child support programs.
- One-time collection techniques and outreach to employers, noncustodial parents, and custodial parents remain critical tools in collecting support payments from nontraditional workers.
- Existing automated income withholding methods may have limited effectiveness for collecting nontraditional workers' income.

For more information, read the [report](#) or view the [infographic](#).

Child Support Report

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