



**City  
of  
Milwaukee**

INTERDEPARTMENTAL

CORRESPONDENCE

LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU

---

## Memorandum

**To:** Ald. Mike McGee, Jr

**From:** Richard Withers, Legislative Research Analyst

**Date:** April 27, 2007

**Re:** Summary of the Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations of David Pate Jr., PhD, Relating to Non-Custodial African-American Fathers, Child Support and Involvement in the Care and Welfare of Their Children

---

David J. Pate, Jr., received his doctorate in Social Welfare in 2003. His thesis was entitled, "Documenting the Perspectives of Fathers with Children on Welfare in the Post-Enrollment Era: The Life Experiences of Thirty-Six African American Fathers in Milwaukee, Wisconsin." He has written a number of articles based on qualitative research studies exploring issues related to poor fathers, welfare policy, and their children.

Two recent publications authored by Dr. Pate are: "Deadbeat Dads or Fatherhood in Poverty?" in *Good Parents or Good Workers?: How Policy Shapes Families' Daily Lives*, editors Jill Duerr Berrick and Bruce Fuller (2005); and "African American Fathers and their Involvement in the Child Welfare System" in *Child Welfare for the 21st Century: A Handbook of Practices, Policies, and Programs*, editors Gerald P. Mallon and Peg McCartt Hess (2005).

The following is a brief summary of Dr. Pate's findings, conclusions and recommendations based upon these publications and other articles he has written that are available at <http://www.irp.wisc.edu>, the web site for the Institute for Research on Poverty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I trust that you will find this summary to be helpful prior to Dr. Pate's presentation to the Community and Economic Development Committee on Tuesday, May 1, 2007.

### Findings and Conclusions

- Non-custodial fathers, even those who have "...reneged on their moral and financial commitments to their families," still display caring at least in how they reflect upon their responsibilities, and they attempt to attend to their family obligations in different ways.

Deadbeat Dads or Fatherhood in Poverty? at pp. 171-172.

- Many low-income, noncustodial fathers – unlike their stereotype as irresponsible absentee parents who must be compelled legally to fulfill their obligations – are, in fact, "...closely connected with their children; they make informal payments in excess of their support obligations and have physical custody of children."

African American Fathers and Their Involvement in the Child Welfare System, at p. 641.

- Many fathers, however, have "...neither the education nor the knowledge to grasp the basics of the child support system."

African American Fathers and Their Involvement in the Child Welfare System, at p. 643.

- Policies "...aimed at extracting resources from these fathers lead to unintended consequences and distorted incentives."

Deadbeat Dads or Fatherhood in Poverty? at p. 172.

- Child support enforcement mechanisms that include imprisonment and tax refund interception, rather than promoting the goal of benefiting the families of poor fathers, have often resulted in anxiety and frustration for fathers, including those who are already emotionally and financially involved with their children.

Deadbeat Dads or Fatherhood in Poverty? at p. 173.

- Even though noncustodial parents understand the penalties associated with not paying formal support, "...many prioritize informal support, which goes directly and immediately to their children. This type of support may be preferred by both fathers and mothers, and yet it is generally ignored by the child support system."

Report of March 2006, at p. 23.

<http://www.irp.wisc.edu/research/childsup/csde/publications/pate-j1.pdf>

- Often, noncustodial fathers, are not informed when their children are under consideration for placement with the state due to neglect or abuse, even though they consider themselves emotionally and financially responsible for their children.

African American Fathers and Their Involvement in the Child Welfare System, at p. 652.

## Recommendations

Policy and program changes that might be considered include:

- Forgiving large child support arrearages owed to the state that will not be passed through to the children.
- Prioritizing cases for collection of arrearages from non-custodial parents who have the greatest ability to pay.
- Reconsideration of incarceration where the noncustodial parent does not have the means to pay arrearages or ongoing support.
- Implementation of a full pass-through of child support and an income disregard for child support received.
- Recognition by case workers, the courts and others of the informal ways in which noncustodial fathers support and connect with their children.

Deadbeat Dads or Fatherhood in Poverty? at p. 172

- More comprehensive education and information about paternity, custody and child support.
- Recognition of promising practices for locating and identifying noncustodial fathers in child welfare.
- Exploration of promising programs for responsible fatherhood and programs that focus on incarcerated parents.

African American Fathers and Their Involvement in the Child Welfare System, at pp. 639-641.

LRB07141-memo 2  
RLW  
4/27/2007