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Committee on Ways and Means

Subcommittee On Human Resources

Hearing on Child Support and Fatherhood Proposals

June 28, 2001

Statement for Consideration by the Committee

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The Men's Health Network welcomes the opportunity to submit testimony on the issue of fatherhood proposals. The Human Resources Subcommittee as well as the current administration should be applauded for recognizing fathers as an integral part of their children's lives. As current initiatives are being considered we must take efforts to ensure a fair and balanced approach is being applied in the grant selection process.

With each new Congress a fatherhood proposal is introduced as legislation with a wide array of support. This continued effort demonstrates the respect that our members of Congress have for the institution of fatherhood. Every year as Congress tries to promote fatherhood in communities that are in need of such efforts, their efforts are undermined by a variety of interests that try to distort the true goals of a fatherhood bill.

This year's proposal, HR 1471 has some interesting changes from previous bills. Domestic violence advocates, who have denounced previous fatherhood bills, have worked their own language into the bill. While domestic violence should never be considered acceptable, the attempts by these groups to bring fatherhood and domestic violence into the same venue are

unwarranted. Under the current language of HR 1471, individuals on the Grants Recommendations Panel “shall not be eligible to serve on the Panel unless the individual has experience in programs for fathers, programs for the poor, programs for children, program administration, program research, or **programs of domestic violence prevention and treatment.**” The approval for a grant should not be a referendum on domestic violence outreach.

There are additional references to domestic violence throughout the bill, including two sections that set up an interesting contradiction. This bill is willing to cancel arrearages “as a result of the father providing various supports to the family such as maintaining a regular child support payment schedule, living with his children, or marrying the mother of his children, unless the father has been convicted of a crime involving domestic violence or child abuse.” So if a father has been convicted of these crimes he is not eligible to participate in a fatherhood program. Fathers that are accepted will be educated about “the causes of domestic violence and child abuse and local programs to prevent and treat abuse...” So abusers are left out of the program with no outreach efforts and fathers that have never committed domestic violence are assumed to be a potential threat.

Preventing domestic violence is a legitimate concern, unfortunately this is the wrong forum for it. The committee should reevaluate the current language of HR 1471 to make sure it achieves its true purpose of promoting fatherhood in poor and unemployed communities, instead of assuming fathers are prone to domestic violence.