

A NATIONAL FATHERHOOD POLICY:

**THE BLUEPRINT FOR
EMPOWERING AND STRENGTHENING
FATHERS, FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES,
AND A NATION**

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For America's Married Fathers, Divorced Fathers, Custodial Fathers, Non-Custodial Fathers, "Stay-At-Home" Fathers, Incarcerated Fathers, Military Fathers, Teenage Fathers, and Single Fathers, creating and implementing plans that will move their families forward and positively shape the minds and souls of our children – our future – our bridge to the future -- has become a daunting responsibility in the Millennium. The creation of a proposed National Fatherhood Policy would provide America's Married Fathers, Divorced Fathers, Custodial Fathers, Non-Custodial Fathers, "Stay-At-Home" Fathers, Incarcerated Fathers, Military Fathers, Teenage Fathers, and Single Fathers with key "pieces of the puzzle" to developing and implementing plans that will move their families forward; positively shaping the minds and souls of our children – our future – our bridge to the future; and strengthening and empowering the communities in which they live and work.

The creation and implementation of a National Fatherhood Policy would be in the best interest of the United States of America. It is the blueprint for empowering and strengthening Fathers, families, communities and a nation.

A National Fatherhood Policy will bring together Fatherhood Advocates, Fatherhood Practitioners, faith-based organizations, social entrepreneurs, religious institutions, academic institutions, legislators, legal professionals, health care professionals and providers, social services professionals and providers, grassroots community organizations, and concerned individuals who have key "pieces of the puzzle" that can effectively address the critically unique issues that confront America's Married Fathers, Divorced Fathers, Custodial Fathers, Non-Custodial Fathers, "Stay-At-Home" Fathers, Incarcerated Fathers, Military Fathers, Teenage Fathers, and Single Fathers. These key "pieces of the puzzle" may take the form of, for example, innovative ideas that await implementation, existing programs that have a successful track record, and health, legislative and male parenting education initiatives. Imagine, if you will, a National Fatherhood Policy that would lead to the development and implementation of legislative initiatives that resolve the critical state of Men's Health in the United States. The establishment of a **Federal Equal Custody Act** under the auspices of a National Fatherhood Policy would enable America's 25,000,000 Divorced and Non-Custodial Fathers to have a dominant presence in the lives of our children – our future – our bridge to the future. And a National Fatherhood Policy would pave the way for the institution of **Parenting Time Credit** which would allow Non-Custodial Fathers to have an increased presence in the lives of our children – our future – our bridge to the future.

Several examples of legislative and male parenting education initiatives which could become the framework for a proposed National Fatherhood Policy are set forth below.

LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

MEN'S HEALTH ISSUES – THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN OFFICE OF MEN'S HEALTH

The alarmingly rising incidence of colon cancer, prostate cancer, heart disease, stroke, diabetes and Alzheimer's Disease among American men has made men's health a critical issue. And due to the fact that many men are Fathers, the critical state of men's health has become a Fatherhood issue. America needs healthy Fathers to positively shape the minds and souls of our children – our future – our bridge to the future -- and to create and implement plans

that will move their families forward. America needs healthy Men – especially Men who are Fathers – to empower and strengthen families and the communities in which they live and work.

HOW CRITICAL IS THE STATE OF MEN’S HEALTH IN THE UNITED STATES?

It is estimated that American women are outliving American men by approximately six (6) years and that approximately 22.1% of men in the United States have **coronary heart disease**. According to the American Cancer Society, **prostate cancer** is the most common cancer in American men. It accounts for approximately 9% of all cancer-related deaths in men in the United States. The American Cancer Society (www.acs.org) projects that 1 out of 6 men in America will be diagnosed with **prostate cancer** and that 1 out of 35 men will die from **prostate cancer**. In 2009, according to the Washington, D.C.-based Men’s Health Network (www.menshealthnetwork.org), approximately 186,000 American men will be diagnosed with **prostate cancer**.

It is estimated that 1 out of 10 American men will be diagnosed with **Alzheimer’s Disease** by their 55th birthday. The Center for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov) which collects and maintains **diabetes** statistics has found that men are more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes than women. Approximately 77,250 men were diagnosed with **colorectal cancer** in 2008 and at least 24,260 male colorectal cancer patients succumbed to the disease. Approximately, 10.9 million men in the United States -- or 10.5% of all American men -- who are over the age of 20 are estimated to have **diabetes**. **Diabetes** increases significantly the risk for an individual to suffer a **stroke** or **heart disease**. And not surprisingly, the incidence rate for **stroke** and **heart disease** is high for American men.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE KEY “PIECES OF THE PUZZLE” TO RESOLVING THE CRITICAL STATE OF AFFAIRS OF MEN’S HEALTH IN THE UNITED STATES?

A number of Fathers, Fatherhood Advocates, Fatherhood Practitioners, health care professionals and providers, legislators, and concerned individuals point to **increased research, increased research funding, health awareness and education programs, and equal and greater access to health resources and support services** as key “pieces of the puzzle” to resolving the critical state of affairs of men’s health in the United States. A school of thought exists which proposes the creation of an **Office of Men’s Health** within the **United States Department of Health and Human Services** that would act as an advocate for men’s health issues in the same manner in which the Office of Women’s Health, established in 1991, acts as an advocate for women’s health issues. An **Office of Men’s Health** would help men obtain increased research and increased research funding for their unique health issues, orchestrate regional health awareness and education programs, and provide all American men with equal and greater access to health resources and support services.

The need for the creation of an **Office of Men’s Health** within the United States Department of Health and Human Services has not gone unnoticed by American legislators. In **1994**, the United States Congress established **National Men’s Health Week** which is observed during the week leading up to and including Father’s Day of each year. As an example, in 2009, Men’s Health Week will be observed from 15 June 2009 through 21 June 2009 (see www.menshealthmonth.org/week and www.cdc.gov/men).

In **2001**, United States Congressman Randy Cunningham of California (R-San Diego) and United States Congressman James McDermott of Washington State (D-Washington) first

introduced into Congress the Men's Health Act ("The Men's Health Act") as legislation which would establish an Office of Men's Health within the United States Department of Health and Human Services and promote men's health in the United States. The Men's Health Act has been introduced into Congress annually since 2001. In **2007, H.R. 789**, the **Office of Men's Health Act Of 2007**, was introduced in the 110th Congress. The last known "major action taken" in connection with **H.R. 789** has been reported as occurring on 2 February 2007, at which time the legislation was "referred to the House Subcommittee and referred to the Subcommittee on Health" (see Washingtonwatch.com at http://www.washingtonwatch.com/bills/show/110_HR_789.html). It is my understanding that, in 2009, legislation is being prepared and proposed for reintroduction into the 111th Congress which, if passed and enacted, would establish an Office of Men's Health within the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

THE CREATION AND ENACTMENT OF A FEDERAL EQUAL CUSTODY ACT

There is an estimated aggregate of approximately 25,000,000 Non-Custodial and Divorced Parents, the overwhelming majority of which are Men in the United States. Non-Custodial and Divorced Fathers in the United States say that the courts relegate them to spending time with and seeing our children – our future – our bridge to the future -- approximately two weekends per month which they estimate to be about 14% of parenting time. Many of these Non-Custodial and Divorced Fathers refer to themselves as "*Fourteen Percenters*". And many of these Non-Custodial and Divorced Fathers are attempting to change public policy and legislation which determine the amount of time that they are allowed to spend with our children – our future – our bridge to the future -- through the creation of "equal parenting initiatives". Non-Custodial and Divorced Fathers are clamoring for the creation and enactment of a **Federal Equal Custody Act** that would establish equal parenting as the law of the land. Their argument for the enactment of a **Federal Equal Custody Act** revolves around the school of thought that the establishment and enforcement of equal parenting legislation is "in the best interest of the child". Researchers in the United States and in a number of countries outside of the United States support this school of thought.

The hope of American Non-Custodial and Divorced Fathers for the creation and enactment of a **Federal Equal Custody Act** in the United States has been buoyed by the fact that, in October 2007, Denmark, which has a high divorce rate, enacted and implemented equal parenting legislation. What does that mean? It means that Danish children of divorced or separated parents have equal access – on a 50/50 basis -- to both Dad and Mom. It means that Danish Dads now have joint physical custody and parenting time which amounts to 50%.

What would the creation and enactment of equal parenting legislation in the form of a **Federal Equal Custody Act** mean for Non-Custodial and Divorced Fathers in the United States? It would provide a mandate for American family courts to award joint equal custody and joint physical custody of children in divorce matters.

A LOOK AT STATE EQUAL PARENTING INITIATIVES IN CALIFORNIA, INDIANA, MICHIGAN, AND WEST VIRGINIA

In the absence of the creation and enactment of a **Federal Equal Custody Act**, **Non-Custodial and Divorced Fathers are working to create and place equal parenting initiatives on the ballot in a number of states**. Equal parenting initiatives have found their way to the ballot box in a number of states which include, but are not limited to, **California, Indiana, Michigan, and West Virginia**.

CALIFORNIA

The groundswell for equal parenting legislation in California moved California State Assemblyman Merwyn Dymally, during his tenure as a state legislator, to become the principal author of California Assembly Bill No. 1307 (*Shared Parenting Bill 1307 (AB 1307)*). Thousands of California voters placed telephone calls and e-mailed, faxed, and “snail-mailed” letters in support of *Shared Parenting Bill 1307* to members of the California State Assembly. However, despite the demonstrated support for the equal parenting legislation, on 3 May 2005, California Assembly *Shared Parenting Bill No. 1307* was defeated in the California Assembly Judiciary Committee.

INDIANA

Indiana State Senator Dennis Kruse (Indiana State Senatorial District No. 14), on 20 January 2009 introduced *Senate Bill 560—Presumptive Joint Custody Following Divorce* – which, *inter alia*, requires that courts adopt the presumption that joint legal custody and joint physical custody are in the best interests of the child in divorce cases. Indiana *Senate Bill 560* also mandates that meetings, hearings, and conferences in family law litigation matters be recorded (as a general rule, to date, these meetings, hearings, and conferences are not usually recorded) and provides for (a) punitive action to be taken against a parent who knowingly (i) falsely accuses the other parent of child abuse, child neglect or spousal abuse; and (ii) prevents the other parent from exercising his or her right to parenting their child or children; (b) law enforcement officers to file a report with the law enforcement agency employing the said officers in connection with their responses to calls involving parenting time contempt; and (c) the mandatory collection of statistics on child support payment contempt charges – i.e., the number of individuals who are incarcerated for contempt of court for failing to pay child support, inclusive of the length of the sentence and the amount of time served.

MICHIGAN

In 2003, the DADS of Michigan Political Action Committee (www.dadsofmichigan.org) launched a petition drive to place equal parenting as a question on Michigan’s election ballot. Due to insufficient signatures, the move to place equal parenting as a question on Michigan’s election ballot was unsuccessful. On 5 April 2007, *House Bill 4564*, an equal parenting legislation, was introduced into the Michigan State Legislature by Michigan Representative Glenn Steil, Jr., a Republican. *House Bill 4564* was referred to the Michigan’s House Family and Children’s Service Committee. On 10 October 2007, *House Bill 4564* was reported in the Michigan House and it was recommended that the bill be referred to the Michigan House Judiciary Committee. *House Bill 4564* was referred to the Michigan House Judiciary Committee on 10 October 2007. As of this writing, an online review conducted by the undersigned concerning the status of legislation for 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 for the State of Michigan did not render any further mention of action taken with respect to *House Bill 4564*.

WEST VIRGINIA

Fathers, Fatherhood Advocates, Fatherhood Practitioners, and concerned individuals were successful in organizing an Informational Equal Parenting Legislative Hearing that was held on 30 January 2008 in the Capitol Building in Charleston, West Virginia at which time they

voiced their support to West Virginia legislators for the passage into law of *HB 4042 – Joint (Equal) Parenting Act*; *HB 3060 – Penalties For False Reports Of Child Abuse, Sexual Abuse, And Domestic Violence*; and *HB 4002 – Providing Procedures For Contesting Paternity*.

LEGISLATION MODIFYING CHILD SUPPORT GUIDELINES

Non-Custodial and Divorced Fathers, as a whole, understand and honor their financial obligations to our children – our future – our bridge to the future. Non-Custodial and Divorced Fathers, Fatherhood Advocates and Fatherhood Practitioners contend that it is the fairness of the calculation of the formula for child support and the child support guidelines which gives them “cause for pause”. The angst expressed by Non-Custodial Fathers, Fatherhood Advocates, and Fatherhood Practitioners centers around the contention of Non-Custodial and Divorced Fathers that access to our children – our future – our bridge to the future -- and the time allotted to them by the family court system to nurture, mentor and love our children – our future – our bridge to the future -- is miniscule when compared with the large sums of money that are garnished from their wages for child support. In 2004, the State of Indiana modified its child support guidelines to reflect the institution of ***Parenting Time Credit*** for Non-Custodial Parents. As a result, the amount of child support obligations to be paid by Non-Custodial Fathers in Indiana are reduced by the additional amount of time that Non-Custodial Fathers spend with our children – our future – our bridge to the future. The State of Indiana’s modification of its child support guidelines, through the institution of ***Parenting Time Credit***, represents a blueprint for modifying child support guidelines which can be considered for implementation throughout the United States.

MALE PARENTING EDUCATION INITIATIVES

ESTABLISHING FATHERHOOD AND MEN’S STUDIES PROGRAMS IN AMERICA’S ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

The establishment and maintenance of Women’s Studies Programs in American academic institutions has done much to provide women with key “pieces of the puzzle” to resolving the myriad of unique issues which they have. First, conceived in the late 1970s, Women’s Studies Programs in America’s academic institutions have helped to empower women and transform society’s perception of women and their importance in our families, our communities and our world. A growing and strong consensus exists for the establishment and maintenance of Fatherhood and Men’s Studies Programs at academic institutions throughout the United States. Fathers, Fatherhood Advocates, and Fatherhood Practitioners have all expressed the need for the creation of Fatherhood and Men’s Studies Programs which would serve to provide key “pieces of the puzzle” for Men – especially Men who are Fathers – to resolving their unique issues. The establishment and maintenance of Fatherhood and Men’s Studies Programs in American academic institutions is perceived as a means of empowering men – especially men who are Fathers.

Akamai University which is located in Hilo, Hawaii is an academic institution that is answering the call of Men – especially Men who are Fathers – throughout the United States for the establishment and maintenance of **Fatherhood and Men’s Studies Programs** in America’s academic institutions. Akamai University under the leadership of its President, **Douglas Capogrossi, Ph.D.**, offers what has come to be viewed as one of the most uniquely comprehensive Fatherhood and Men’s Studies Programs in academia. If you are looking for either a national or global model for Fatherhood and Men’s Studies Program for an academic institution, you can look to Akamai University.

A LOOK AT AKAMAI UNIVERSITY'S FATHERHOOD AND MEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM

As President of **Akamai University** (www.akamaiuniversity.us), **Douglass Capogrossi, Ph.D.** presides over an academic institution that is “dedicated to the betterment and sustainability of the human condition and the planet”. Akamai University employs teaching techniques that moves and empowers its students to think “out of the box” and “beyond the confines of the classroom”. Having said that, it probably should come as no surprise that under Dr. Capogrossi's leadership, Akamai University creates key “pieces of the puzzle” to empowering and strengthening fathers, our families, and our world through its comprehensively unique **Fatherhood and Men's Studies Program**. In 2004, Dr. Capogrossi created a **University Council** whose members assist him in enhancing the curriculum offered at **Akamai University's Fatherhood and Men's Studies Program** and in attracting high-quality faculty and students.

What does a **Fatherhood and Men's Studies Program** offer students? Let's look at a Fatherhood and Men's Studies Program course offered at Akamai University – ***Selected Topics In Men's Studies (PEP 433)***:

***Selected Topics In Men's Studies (PEP 433)** explores, inter alia, marriage and fatherhood, Men's and Father's rights, new roles for fathers, midlife crisis, male spirituality, male bonding, and models of masculinity. Students enrolled in this course conduct library and online searches for academic literature, engage in reading documents and literature which explore the topics offered in this course, conduct observations on the topics offered in this course, and write an academic paper that explores topics offered in this course.*

INNOVATIVE PARENTING INITIATIVES FOR TEENAGE FATHERS

EDUCATING COMMUNITIES FOR PARENTING

Through meetings and online communications with staff members at **Educating Communities For Parenting**, beginning in 2006, I had an opportunity to learn about the innovative parenting education initiatives which it offers to **Teenage Parents** – particularly, **Teenage Fathers**. **Educating Communities for Parenting** (www.ecparenting.org) is a Philadelphia, Pennsylvania-based non-profit organization that has enjoyed a 30-year successful track record in instructing children, youth, families and communities about healthy parent and child relationships and practices. **Baby Watch**, a parenting program offered by **Educating Communities for Parenting**, provides students with an opportunity to observe parent-child relationships, ask questions, and predict changes in the infant's development. How does this work? The class “adopts” a baby and a parent/caregiver for one (1) year. As a result, the classroom is transformed into an interactive learning laboratory.

Empowerment Zone is another innovative program developed and administered by **Educating Communities for Parenting**. What is **Empowerment Zone**? **Empowerment Zone** is designed to assist young people in understanding the need for self-care and self-sufficiency, increased personal responsibility, healthy behaviors, and the impact of negative behavior on their families and communities. **Power To Parent**, another parenting education initiative developed and implemented by **Educating Communities for Parenting**, helps

students understand the importance of education for themselves and their children and provides instruction on child development, nurturing techniques, stress and anger management, health and safety issues, and positive methods of discipline.

Educating Communities For Parenting addresses the unique issues and needs of *Teenage Parents* – particularly, the unique issues and needs of **Teenage Fathers** and serves as an innovative model for teenage parenting education initiatives in communities throughout the United States.

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DIANE A. SEARS

DIANE A. SEARS is the **Editor/Author** of a book on **Fatherhood and Men's Issues – IN SEARCH OF FATHERHOOD®--TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES** (www.amazon.com; www.xlibris.com; www.borders.com); the **Managing Editor** of a quarterly international male parenting journal —**IN SEARCH OF FATHERHOOD®** which is **distributed in The Netherlands and the United States** on a subscriber basis; and the creator and moderator of **IN SEARCH OF FATHERHOOD®'s blog** at <http://globalfatherhooddialogue.blogspot.com> — all of which facilitates a “Global Dialogue on Fatherhood” for Men who are Fathers from all Walks of Life throughout our global village. The concept for IN SEARCH OF FATHERHOOD® was created by Sears' mentor, the late L.T. Henry, a classically trained jazz musician who briefly performed with the Philadelphia Orchestra and was a former drummer for internationally acclaimed songstress and film and television actress Ms. Della Reese; author; photojournalist; and sales and success motivation trainer who died in March 1999. Ms. Sears has perpetuated her late mentor's legacy and resurrected his vision for an interactive Fatherhood Forum through the launching of the quarterly international male parenting journal—IN SEARCH OF FATHERHOOD®, the publishing of a book, and the creation of a Fatherhood blog.

SEARS is a **member** of the **University Council for Akamai University's Fatherhood and Men's Studies Program** (www.akamaiuniversity.us) which is **located in Hilo, Hawaii**. She advises the President of Akamai University on Fatherhood issues and assists him in developing and implementing initiatives which enhance the institution's Fatherhood and Men's Studies curriculum and in forming strategic alliances with national and international Fatherhood organizations.

Ms. SEARS has **interviewed Men who are Fathers throughout our global village concerning issues directly and indirectly related to Fatherhood** and has **developed and maintains working relationships with male parenting organizations in Australia, Canada, Europe and the United States**. She has authored and published reviews for numerous books about Fatherhood and Men's issues including, but not limited to, *Father and Child Reunion: How To Bring The Dads We Need to the Children We Love*, by Warren Farrell, Ph.D.; *Swallowed By A Snake: The Gift Of The Masculine Side Of Healing* by Thomas R. Golden, LCSW; *The Ultimate Survival Guide for the Single Father* by Thomas Hoerner; *Nothing's Wrong: A Man's Guide To Managing His Feelings* by David Kundtz; *Hey Daddy, Read This* by Donald Roberts, an award-winning journalist and anchorman for Virginia's NBC-affiliate television station WAVY-TV; *We Fish: The Journey To Fatherhood* by University of Pittsburgh Professor Jack L. Daniel, Ph.D. and his son Omari C. Daniel, Ph.D.; *Death To Diabetes: The 6 Stages Of Type 2 Diabetes Control & Reversal* by DeWayne McCulley; *Fatherhood* by William H. Cosby, Jr., Ed.D.; *The Spirit Of Fatherhood: Embracing Our Role As Fathers And Reclaiming Our Children* by S. Bruce Olamina Stevenson; *My Soul To His Spirit: Soulful Expressions From Black Daughters To Their Fathers* by Melda Beaty; *Hiccups, Hickeys & Homework™: A Teenage Girl's Guide – Living And Loving* by Ms. Keysha Whitaker; *25 Things That Really Matter: A Comprehensive Guide To Making Your Life Better* by Gary A. Johnson, the Founder and Publisher of the Homework Help Page and Black Men In America.com and Founder of the Gary A. Johnson Company, a management-training and consulting firm; *The Self-Esteem Trap: Raising Confident And Compassionate Kids In An Age Of Self-Importance* by Polly Young-Eisendrath, Ph.D.; *A Promise To Ourselves: A Journey Through Fatherhood And Divorce* by television, film and Broadway actor Alec Baldwin; *A Father's Right* by Anthony Gallo; and *2011: The Global Depression* by global economist and economic consultant to the Government of Canada and the United Nations Economic Commission Ruben James.

SEARS co-moderated the **“New Media, Social Entrepreneur-ship and the Single Father Movement” Panel** at the **Eastern Communication Association's 97th National Conference** which was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in April 2006 and **presented a paper** entitled, **“Resurrecting A Vision -- -- Transforming Fatherhood: The New Media And the Fatherhood Movement”**. In June

2008, **SEARS** launched IN SEARCH OF FATHERHOOD®'s **INTERNATIONAL FATHERHOOD AND MEN'S ISSUES INTERNSHIP PROGRAM.**
