



## Fatherhood White Paper

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### Background

"Just like Moms... Dad's Matter." – Center for Fathers and Families

Recent data from the [US Census Bureau](#) and related organizations provide insights into Fatherhood in the United States:

1. **Fathers Living with Children Under 18:** As of 2022, over one in four men—approximately 34.3 million—have a biological child under 18. Among these fathers, four out of five live with at least some of their children. ([2022 Census](#))
2. **Single-Parent Families:** In 2022, there were 10.9 million one-parent family groups with children under 18. Of these, 80% were maintained by mothers, indicating that fathers headed about 2.18 million single-parent families. ([2022 Census](#))
3. **Stay-at-Home Fathers:** In 2021, 7% of fathers did not work for pay, serving as stay-at-home parents. This figure has remained stable since 2016. ([Pew Research](#))
4. **Children Living Without Fathers:** According to the National Fatherhood Initiative, approximately 17.6 million children, nearly 1 in 4, live without a biological, step, or adoptive father in the home. ([NFI](#))
5. **Children Living with Resident Fathers:** Encouragingly, the proportion of children growing up with a resident father has reached a 34-year high. In 2023, 75.9% of children, or 54.5 million out of 72.3 million, lived with their fathers. ([NFI](#))

These statistics underscore the evolving dynamics of Fatherhood in the US, highlighting both the challenges and positive trends in paternal involvement.

**Cross-culturally, fathering is qualitatively different than mothering. As a result, fathers bring unique strengths to the parenting equation.** - *Father Facts, 9th Edition*

Children growing up in father-absent homes face significant challenges; this is true in North Carolina and mirrors the national trend. In NC, 35% of children come from single-parent households, and it is 37% in Mecklenburg County. Single mothers predominantly lead these homes. Fathers are absent from approximately 80% of single-parent homes.

[KidsCount](#)

The absence of a father figure is associated with a range of adverse outcomes. Children in father-absent homes are nearly four times more likely to live in poverty. In NC, 18.2% of children live in poverty. Children in father-present homes have a poverty rate of 7.5%, compared to nearly 40% in father-absent homes. [US Census Bureau](#)

Children from father-absent homes are more likely to experience emotional and behavioral problems. Data from the Centers for Disease Control indicates that 85% of such come from father-absent homes. 71% of all high school dropouts come from father-absent homes – 9 times the average. (National Principals Association Report). 63% of youth suicides are from father-absent homes (US Dept. Of Health/Census) – 5 times the average. Reports from Fulton County, GA, show that 85% of all youths in prison come from father-absent homes.

Additionally, the absence of a father in the home often leads to strained family dynamics, making it harder for children to form stable relationships in adulthood. (americafirstpolicy.com)

Richard Reeves' book *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male Is Struggling, Why It Matters, and What to Do About It* explores the unique challenges boys and men are facing in the modern world. In the chapter on *Fatherhood and Family Life* in *Of Boys and Men*, Richard Reeves delves into *The Importance of Fathers*. Reeves argues that boys benefit immensely from having a father or father figure present in their lives. Fathers often serve as role models, guiding boys in developing emotional regulation, discipline, and social behavior. He notes that boys raised without their fathers are statistically more likely to face academic, social, and emotional challenges.

**Family Structure and Policy:** Reeves critiques how modern family policies often overlook the importance of Fatherhood. He advocates for reforms that make it easier for fathers to stay involved in their children's lives, even in cases of separation or divorce. This includes policies that promote joint custody arrangements and encourage greater work-life balance for fathers, allowing them to be more present at home.

Each year, The Children's Alliance explores public policy issues to focus on. This year, we decided to investigate Fatherhood. We have spent significant hours researching and identifying problems related to Fatherhood, including the impact of absent fathers in homes, the bias of courts against fathers, and other challenges fathers and vulnerable families have. A subcommittee was established to do this work.

**We identified three goals:**

1. Know what available programs and services are in Mecklenburg County
2. Look for collaboration and education opportunities in terms of programs and services
3. Explore opportunities for public policy work – county, state, and even federal issues that impact Fatherhood.

We also agreed that we should make recommendations to the entire Children's Alliance Membership as appropriate.

## **Nonresidential v Noninteractive**

The terms "nonresidential father" and "noninteractive father" describe different aspects of a father's involvement in a child's life:

**Nonresidential Father** - A nonresidential father is a father who does not live with his child or children. This typically occurs when parents are separated, divorced, or never cohabited.

**Noninteractive Father**—A noninteractive father is a father who is little to no involved or interacts with his child, regardless of his living situation.

### **Key Differences:**

1. **Residential Status vs. Emotional Engagement:** The term "nonresidential" relates to where the father lives, whereas "noninteractive" refers to how much a father engages with the child emotionally, intellectually, or socially.
2. **Contact with the Child:** A nonresidential father can still be highly involved, whereas a noninteractive father is largely absent from the child's life in terms of meaningful communication and support.

## **Mecklenburg County Research**

A big focus for the committee was researching available programs in our county that are doing work to support Fatherhood.

Determining the exact number of nonresidential fathers in Mecklenburg County is challenging due to limited publicly available data at the county level. However, broader statistics can help estimate this figure:

1. **Statewide Single-Parent Households:** In North Carolina, 35% of children live in single-parent households. (37% in Mecklenburg County)
2. **Single-Father Households:** In 2017, there were 98,434 single-father households in North Carolina, accounting for 8.1% of all households with children.

Applying these percentages to Mecklenburg County's population can provide an approximate estimate:<sup>2</sup>

1. **Mecklenburg County Population: As of 2023, the county had a population of approximately 1.13 million people.**
2. **Estimated Households with Children: Assuming an average household size of 2.5 people, there would be about 452,000 households in the county. If 30.6% of these households have children (consistent with state data), that equates to approximately 138,312 households with children.**
3. **Estimated Single-Father Households: If single fathers head 8.1% of these households, there would be around 11,200 single-father households in Mecklenburg County**

It's important to note that this estimate pertains to fathers who are the primary caregivers and does not account for nonresidential fathers who do not have primary custody but are still involved in their children's lives.

## **Economic Mobility**

There is a community prioritizing and advocating for Fatherhood. Family Stability was identified by the Leading on Opportunities Task Force as one of the important pillars of Economic Mobility. Leading on Opportunity in Mecklenburg County highlights the importance of family stability in promoting upward mobility and positive outcomes for children. According to their research, children thrive in stable, secure households, which is key to academic and social success. Family instability, often exacerbated by poverty, can lead to difficult choices for caregivers, affecting their ability to provide consistent support and impacting children's well-being.

A significant pillar of economic mobility includes supporting two-parent families and promoting father involvement. Leading on Opportunity recognizes the critical role that committed, engaged fathers play in creating stable family environments. They emphasize that maintaining strong family units and improving access to mental health, housing, and income stability services are essential to breaking cycles of poverty and improving economic mobility. As an important pillar of support, Leading on Opportunity encourages organizations working with fragile families in our community to invest effort and funding in family support.

In 2014, 62% of children lived in a household with two married parents, 7% were not married, and 26% had only one parent.

## **Youth in Detention**

A significant portion of youth in detention come from father-absent homes, though exact percentages can vary depending on the study or region. However, various sources suggest that a high percentage—often cited around 70% to 85% (Fulton County, GA)—of youth in detention or those involved with the juvenile justice system come from homes without a father or father figure.

For instance, a report by the National Fatherhood Initiative in the US indicated that approximately 85% of youths in prison grew up in a father-absent home. Other studies also show a strong correlation between a father's absence and a higher likelihood of involvement in crime, including juvenile delinquency. National data suggest children from father-absent homes are 279% more likely to carry guns and sell drugs than their peers.

*If we want to make the largest impact on families, we must empower dads and strengthen families. This starts with focusing on father inclusion. - National Fatherhood Initiative*

## **Mecklenburg County Fatherhood Advocates & Programs**

In addition, the subcommittee talked to the following individuals in Mecklenburg:

*70% of incarcerated individuals are Fatherless (AFPI)–  
Who will Teach them to be Fathers?*

### **Life Connections – Glenn Smith**

In 1998, Glenn M. Smith, founder and CEO of Life Connections of the Carolinas, Inc., partnered with the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office to create a reentry program providing services to thousands of incarcerated individuals. The Life Connections ReEntry Program is presently the longest-running and largest provider of life skills instruction with the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office.

The original life skills curriculums were created to provide research-based instruction to improve recidivism and the personal development of incarcerated individuals. Life Connections presently offers over 15 courses, including one focusing on parent skill building. This course gives incarcerated fathers the skills to become effective parents and the confidence to stay connected in their children's lives.

In 2022, the parenting program was expanded to a virtual platform where incarcerated fathers could visually connect and participate with the mothers of their children and any other children in their household. Classes were held over six weeks, during which the family could work together to improve communication and conflict resolution, make agreements on household procedures, and develop principles by which they would commit to living. Graduates of the program were then granted a face-to-face visit, which included a meal, awarding certificates, and delivering presentations from what they had learned.

More recently, this fatherhood program has expanded to include Forensic Peer Support Specialists being available for when individuals come back to the community to assist in the transition back to the workplace and their family. If the recently released parent is not entering the household, the Peer Support Specialists will be ready to advocate that the father and their children are provided with ample opportunities to connect.

### **Chablis Dandridge, Local Advocate and Author of Letters to My Sons**

Chablis Dandridge has been a consumer of social/human services all his life, from the justice system to the mental health system and every system in between. Chablis received his college degree while serving a 13-year prison sentence and paralegal certification, and he learned to speak Spanish fluently during that time. Today, he focuses on reform advocacy and community outreach work and has authored several books, including "A Letter to My Sons, Leaving A Legacy of Love". He devotes part of his professional attention to providing transitional housing for individuals returning to the community from incarceration. He speaks publicly on human rights and social justice issues and is a

tireless champion for recidivism reduction initiatives and youth intervention programs. He is a massive proponent of Forensic Peer Support. He is committed to devoting the rest of his life to ensuring that the profession is recognized and employed nationally and internationally.

Letters to My Sons by Chablis Dandridge is a heartfelt and reflective collection of letters written by a father to his son. The book covers a range of essential life lessons, values, and guidance that the father wishes to impart to his son as he grows and navigates through life's challenges. Some key themes include: The Importance of Integrity and Character, Resilience and Overcoming Challenges, Personal Growth and Self-Reflection, Relationships and Love, and Spirituality and Faith.

The book is deeply personal, written in a nurturing and caring tone, aiming to provide long-lasting wisdom that the son can carry with him throughout his life. It reflects universal values that are relevant to all individuals, regardless of the specific challenges they may face.

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*Having a father in a position to be a better father, more involved with his children, and have a better relationship with the custodial parent can change the trajectory of our communities. It's already been demonstrated that we can cure social ills if we just install fathers back into the lives of their families.*

- Kenneth Smith, Grace-Mar founder and President

### **Mental Health, Child Support & Fathers – Kelly R. Little, Urban Institute for Families/Fatherhood expert and Founder/CEO**

Kelly Little's diverse background includes consulting with at-risk youth, empowering fathers, educating mothers, collaborating with practitioners, and laser-focused commitment to transformational service delivery for children and families. He worked for 20+ years with the Mecklenburg County government, working with the RISE Program, Area Mental Health, and Child Support Services Department.

Kelly R. Little, founder and CEO of the Urban Institute of Strengthening Families, is a renowned author, fatherhood expert, and emotional intelligence change agent. Committed to elevating humanity, he is a nationally recognized fatherhood leader specializing in executive coaching, youth programming, and emotional wellness. Kelly's transformative work in shifting perceptions of Child Support Services has garnered nationwide recognition. A certified professional mindfulness teacher, executive coach, and fatherhood expert, He holds an MBA and a Master of Science and Leadership from Pfeiffer University. His passion lies in empowering fathers and fostering healthy connections between young people and mature men to restore communities.

## **Child Support**

1. Child support can be a combative environment between two parents who both are dealing with emotions and grief. When you put people in unreasonable situations, they have unreasonable reactions.
2. Child support caseworkers are overwhelmed as they have a very demanding job. It is one of the most arduous and challenging jobs. It can be very difficult, which results in turnover. It takes years to be good at this job, and when skilled workers leave or retire the company loses institutional knowledge. Fathers and Families lose in the end.
3. NC has a debt compromise situation that requires them to pay for 24 months before they can get relief. This is an old policy that will take time to correct. They have made significant progress in working with fatherhood programs to create balance in the state of NC as they have changed their name from Child Support Enforcement to Child Support Services.
4. NC Child Support has proactively used the Federal Waiver to support Fatherhood since 2010 and has been a national champion of the work.
5. Second-chance citizens have difficulty getting jobs, so there because a challenge with access to visitation because of the inability to pay child support.
6. There are no policies for unmarried fathers, and courts feel biased toward mothers.
7. Many fathers are not in a financial place where they can hire a lawyer.

Kelly created the Urban Institute for Strengthening Families in 2016. The institute works with boys and men, helping them develop into productive citizens by empowering them through healing, emotional intelligence, and service work that connects them intimately to communities that need them.

"No single factor is more important in a child's life than the love and support of caring, committed adults" –My Brother's Keeper Task Force Report to the President.

1. When Fathers are engaged and involved with children, their impact is positive for children. Research confirms that when Fathers are not emotionally engaged with their children, there is a traumatic impact on children. Engagement is emotional and financial (Presence is Critical)
2. Parents need a space for healing – not just children.
3. Generational trauma can become generational blessings. Struggles can become opportunities if we intentionally create space for that opportunity.

## **Educational Opportunities**

Little has consulted and worked with Dr. Shears and Dr. Herring, who are local professors of Social Work (UNCC and JCSU) champions of strengthening families that value fatherhood and its impacts, especially in communities of color. From our conversations and engagement, we heard about the following variables:

## **Strengthening Families –**

**Dr. Jeffrey Shears, School of Social Work UNC-C; Dr. Joshua Kirven, Family Advocate**

### **Making Organizations Father Friendly**

Every child has a father. Men need to recognize the unique gifts and contributions of a father in a child's life. Society often sees fathers only as providers. We need to shift the narrow focus of monetary impact and embrace the benefits of consistent involvement.

1. Currently, the system is configured to help moms and moms-to-be. Services are available for mothers. However, there are many barriers and often very few services for men (Housing, Shelters, Financial Support).
2. A father can be a non-resident but highly involved; the term does not capture the impact of the men who are assets to children and communities.
3. We must encourage maintaining a strong co-parenting relationship with the mother despite not living with the child. Conversely, a father can be residential but noninteractive, offering little in terms of emotional support or day-to-day involvement, which causes significant trauma.
4. Society has classified responsible Fatherhood as a financial component and negated the importance of presence.
5. Challenge organizations to create a father-friendly checklist for their agency to identify growth opportunities. We must understand that people's experiences with their fathers may impact how they treat the fathers whom they serve.

### **How Do We Make Agencies More Father Friendly?**

Making your agency more "father-friendly" involves creating an environment that encourages and supports a father's engagement. Recognizing a father's unique roles in families and communities. Here are several strategies to enhance father inclusivity in nonprofit services:

1. Create a Welcoming Environment
  1. Inclusive Language: To show that fathers are explicitly welcome, use materials, signage, and communication that specifically mention them, not just "parents" or "caregivers. "
  2. Visual Representation: Ensure marketing materials, posters, and brochures include images of fathers interacting with their children, especially in diverse cultural contexts.
  3. Train Staff: Educate staff on the importance of father involvement and eliminate any biases that might assume mothers are the primary caregivers. Sensitivity training can help staff engage fathers respectfully and equally.
2. Offer Flexible Services for Fathers
  1. Flexible Hours: Schedule programs or services when fathers, especially those who work full-time, can attend (e.g., evenings, weekends).



2. **Father-Specific Programs:** Design programs explicitly tailored to fathers, addressing their unique challenges and roles, such as parenting skills, legal rights, mental health support, and employment assistance.
3. **Partner with Father-Focused Organizations:** Collaborate with organizations specifically targeting fathers (e.g., fatherhood initiatives) to broaden outreach and better serve dads.
3. **Create Father-Friendly Policies**
  1. **Promote Equal Parenting:** Advocate for equal parental involvement by encouraging co-parenting in programs or advocating for policy changes that provide fathers with the same parental leave and rights as mothers.
  2. **Offer Co-Parenting Support:** Provide programs that help fathers and mothers work together, even if separated or divorced, to raise their children in a supportive environment.
  3. **Legal and Child Support Guidance:** To help fathers navigate child support, custody, or family law issues and remain engaged in their children's lives, offer support or referral services.
  4. **Bogues, B. (2022). An Ode to Fathers. The Triangle Tribune, 24(24), 9A.**

### **Changing Societies Norms for Black Fathers**

The myths of the Black father have been perpetuated for years. Various studies and reports have repeatedly told us that Black fathers are overwhelmingly absent from their children's lives.

However, while these numbers are nothing to ignore, they contribute to a damaging narrative about black men and negate the achievements of the number of black men who play an active role in their children's lives.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [published data](#) in 2013 stating that of the fathers who resided with their children, it was black Fathers who, 70% of the time were most active in their children's lives. Ahead of white fathers 60% and Hispanic fathers at 45%. The study defies stereotypes about Black Fatherhood, finding that black dads are more involved with their kids daily than dads from other racial groups.

In North Carolina in 2023 ([Annie E. Casey](#)), 63% of black children are born to unwed parents, with 39% Hispanic/Latino, 23% White and 39% two or more races. However, this does not indicate whether a father is residential or nonresidential.

### **Overrepresentation in the Juvenile Justice System**

There is an overrepresentation of black men in the Juvenile Justice system and the child welfare systems. Despite various focused interventions at the State and Federal levels, this continues to be a troubling systemic concern.

In Mecklenburg County, Black and Hispanic individuals make up about 46% of the population and account for 78% of the jail population, indicating a significant overrepresentation in the justice system.

**Twenty-two million parents cannot see their children as a result of parental separation or divorce.**

### **Custody- Gregory Hunt, Esq**

We began with a conversation with family lawyer Gregory Hunt to learn about custody. We wanted to get a snapshot of what happens in family court around divorce and learn about the "normal" process.

Hunt walked us through the Family Court process regarding custody cases: divorce, domestic violence, and child custody. Hunt represents both moms and dads.

Dads very often defer to moms. They inadvertently establish that as a status quo when they leave the house and leave the kids with Mom.

Mecklenburg County courts are more interested in the child and less interested in the parents' stories. As part of our inquiry, we met with (then) Chief District Court Judge Elizabeth Trosch to gain her perspective. Judges are looking for stability to see who is involved. Judges want to know the reasons the parents are having difficulty working together. In cases where the relationship has soured, it could be due to infidelity or money. Very often, this distrust influences parents' motivation in custody. (This excludes cases with domestic violence.)

### **Hunt's Advice - Five Things Dads Can Do:**

1. Pay your child support. If none is ordered, pay something. Don't get hung up on what it is being spent on. Do not dictate what it is spent on. That is seen by the judge to be controlling.
2. In the beginning – lay out expectations of what custody is upfront in a clear text or email.
3. When you are communicating to the other parent, communicate like you are talking to the judge. An email about your child is not a place for vulgarity.
4. When engaging with your child, leave any "new love" out of it.
5. Remember, you are a parent, too. You don't have to defer to the other parent. Do not use your work schedule as an excuse not to do things. Remember, the other parent is likely adjusting the schedule to be at the doctor's/education appointment. If you are a true co-parent, then so should you.

### **Lawyer vs. No Lawyer**

You do not have to have a lawyer in custody proceedings. If you take a no-lawyer track, it is called pro se. Pro se is a Latin term that means "for oneself" or "on one's own behalf." It

refers to the practice of representing oneself in a court of law without the assistance of a lawyer.

All judges are different. Some judges will not hold technical, procedural, or paperwork errors against the parents.

Very often a client will want to share their narrative. Some judges will allow it. A lawyer can listen to their client's narrative and help determine issues that need to be brought before the judge and shared in detail.

### **Domestic Violence/ Child Abuse**

Part of the custody process may involve allegations of domestic violence (DV) and/or child abuse.

Domestic violence is the pattern of intentionally using violent and/or controlling behaviors to gain power and control over a family member or dating partner. This behavior can occur during or after the relationship has ended. There are several forms this type of violence can take: physical, sexual, psychological, financial, and the misuse/manipulation of systems, to name a few. Currently, our statute focuses primarily on the physical, sexual, and psychological forms of domestic violence.

Chapter 50B of the North Carolina General Statutes provides domestic violence relief in the form of a protective order. N.C.G.S. §50B-1 requires someone seeking protection to show at least one of the following was done to them as a result of a personal relationship:

1. Actual or attempted physical injury
2. Fear of imminent serious bodily injury or continued harassment, as it is defined in G.S. 14-277.3A, causing substantial emotional distress
3. Sexual assault

Oftentimes, the Court is asked to make child custody determinations where domestic violence is or has been present.

Contrary to popular belief, an offending parent will not automatically be denied custody or visitation of a shared child. This is unless the offending parent is criminally convicted of certain forms of domestic violence related to sexual assault. Parents with a history of domestic violence are often required to continue interacting on some level with each other as well as the child to facilitate a custody arrangement and some form of co-parenting or parallel parenting.

Child Abuse – This goes straight to CMPD, DSS, and Pat's Place. For physical evidence, photo evidence can be presented. Mental Health providers are also part of the intervention process in situations where that is called for.

## **Defacto Presumed Shared Parenting**

The legal term de facto (Latin for "in fact" or "in practice") refers to situations, relationships, or states of affairs that exist in reality, even if they are not formally recognized by law. It is often used to describe circumstances that function in a certain way without formal legal recognition or status.

According to Judge E. Trosch, Mecklenburg County Judges start at a defacto 50/50. If any bias is seen, it is that moms lose jobs less frequently, and judges seem to lean more toward keeping children on mom's insurance.

We also talked to a father, Dann Gwyn, who fought for custody in both New Hanover and Mecklenburg County. He had a mixed experience and had no significant barriers to custody or legal representation. He is now a volunteer working with the National Parent Organization (NPO) to ensure all parents have the opportunity for equal parenting time.

Equal Parenting impacts more than just the absence of a father in a child's life. It extends through the family and the loss of connections made. Our own Shelia Peltzer shares her heartache in her book *Yetta's Diamond* over the broken connection in her family when her son lost custody and his children's mother moved away. Shelia continues to fight so no other family experiences this loss.

*Last year, grandson Ben turned 30, but we were not together to wish our Earth Day boy a happy special birthday. He never answered my calls and texts. In his honor, I decided to donate money to Trees Charlotte to help plant trees all over our lovely city. Now Ben's name is engraved on a metal leaf in Freedom Park's Memorial Garden. However, will he ever see it?*

*Meanwhile, I carry Yetta and Morris on my finger—and all our grandchildren in my heart.*

*Now I live at The Cypress of Charlotte, a retirement community for seniors, and enjoy other grandparents' grandchildren when they visit. I pray Ben will come someday. I'll give him a huge hug, a kiss, and Yetta's diamond.*

**Exert** – *Yetta's Diamond*, by Shelia Peltzer

## **North Carolina's Battle for Shared Parenting**

### **National Parent Organization (NPO):**

Kentucky was the first state to pass a shared parenting presumption law in 2018.

Kentucky law presumes joint legal custody and equal physical custody for temporary and final court orders. However, a preponderance of evidence can rebut this presumption, and domestic violence and child abuse cases are an exception.

These [overwhelmingly popular](#) laws have resulted in fewer contested divorces, fewer cases of domestic violence, and better lives for Kentucky's children. Since NPO's groundbreaking work in Kentucky, NPO has helped get strong, equal shared parenting laws enacted in other states: [Arkansas](#) (2021), [West Virginia](#) (2022), [Florida](#) (2023), [Missouri](#) (2023), and New Hampshire (2024). ([NPO](#))

### North Carolina 50/50 Presumptive Shared Parenting Efforts

North Carolina	Grade	Positives	Negatives
North Carolina Child Support Guidelines	<b>D-</b>	<p>North Carolina's PTA appropriately takes into account the effect of the PTA on both parents' households.</p> <p>North Carolina's PTA appropriately results in no presumptive child support transfer payment when parental income and parenting time are both equal.</p>	<p>North Carolina's PTA has an extraordinarily and unjustifiably high threshold of 123 days.</p> <p>North Carolina's PTA has an extremely large discontinuity (or discontinuities), creating an extremely large cliff effect or multiple cliff effects.</p> <p>North Carolina's PTA significantly overestimates the fixed, duplicated costs involved in shared parenting.</p>

*(Above: In the first-of-its-kind study, NPO has examined in detail the child support guidelines of each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, grading them on the degree to which they encourage or discourage shared parenting. In particular, the 2022 NPO Child Support and Shared Parenting Report Card evaluates the states on their parenting time adjustment (PTA), sometimes called a 'parenting time offset' or a 'residential time credit.' This is a mechanism by which child support guidelines allocate resources for rearing children between the children's two homes.)*

NC presumed shared parenting advocates have made several efforts to pass legislation in conjunction with the National Parents Organization (Matt Hale). Ashley Nicole-Russell, an attorney in the eastern part of the state, has spearheaded this in the past. A hurdle has been the lack of support from the Family Law lobbyist and some children's advocates. Our subcommittee met with both Hale and Nicole Russell to gain their perspectives.

NPO has been supporting these efforts in North Carolina. Often, there are concerns about the appropriateness of shared parenting arrangements for young children and for cases where there is ongoing conflict between the parents. Sound research supports the conclusion that shared parenting benefits children in both situations. We have some compelling research indicating that presumptions of shared parenting, far from putting potential victims of intimate partner violence at risk, decrease the incidence of such violence.

The implementation of 50/50 shared parenting laws has been associated with a decline in domestic violence cases in Kentucky. In the year prior to the enactment of any equal-parenting laws in July 2016, Kentucky recorded 22,512 domestic or family-related cases. By

2018, two years after the initial legislation, these cases had decreased to 19,991, indicating a reduction of approximately 11%. ([Washington Post](#))

Furthermore, in the five years following the passage of the rebuttable presumption of equally shared parenting time in 2016, the number of domestic violence claims filed alongside family court filings fell by half, continuing a downward trend that predated the new law. ([Institute for Family Studies](#))

These statistics suggest a correlation between the implementation of shared parenting laws and a reduction in domestic violence cases in Kentucky. However, it's important to note that correlation does not imply causation and further research is necessary to establish a definitive causal relationship.

In February 2025, a new bill was introduced in the North Carolina General Assembly. This bill is SB 162.

### **Opposition In North Carolina**

Opposition over the years has come from the NC Family Law Council, Rep. Sarah Stevens (a family lawyer), the Domestic Violence (DV) community, and some children's advocates.

We met with local children's advocates in Mecklenburg County and with leading Shared Parenting Attorney advocate Ashley Nicole-Russell. The gap against this law is closing. A sticking point is important language surrounding domestic violence and child abuse – a preponderance of the evidence versus beyond a reasonable doubt.

Children's advocates agree with the spirit of the law. The pushback comes from most families in Family Court are "pro se" (with no attorney). This is an additional burden for families who cannot afford a lawyer. The legal system is complex, and this law would make an addition of providing proper proof that one parent is abusive or unsuitable for sharing 50/50 custody. Thus, further burdening our families in poverty and tying the hands of judges in the case of unproven harm.

Is there another way to ensure there is parenting balance besides a law?

## **Summary**

For over a year, the Fatherhood Committee explored the challenges and impacts of father absence, particularly in Mecklenburg County. Fathers are critical in promoting children's emotional, social, and academic well-being. Many conversations highlighted the correlation between the absence of a father and issues like poverty, juvenile delinquency, and family instability. We spoke to many local experts who advocate for policies supporting father involvement, such as shared parenting laws and accessible resources for noncustodial fathers. We learned about community programs and leaders promoting Fatherhood, such as Life Connections and the Urban Institute for Strengthening Families. We spoke to advocates who challenged us to make agencies more "father-friendly" by addressing systemic biases and enhancing support services.

## **Recommendations to Children's Alliance Members:**

1. This subcommittee recommends that this report be shared with the entire Children's Alliance Membership and that each agency in our network examine its current practices and policies to determine how "father-friendly" the agency is. After 60 days of the White Papers release, we will have a check-in for our members to discuss results or changes.
2. The next step in creating a "father-friendly" agency is to examine the staff's bias toward fathers. It is crucial to have constant conversations about the role of fathers in children's lives. These biases, like other biases, may influence decisions made.
3. A "shared parenting" bill was introduced in February 2025 in the NC General Assembly. How far this bill might proceed through committees and the overall legislative process is uncertain. That said, we recommend that once the bill is introduced, The Children's Alliance carefully examines it to determine if previously identified concerns have been adequately addressed. We must be sure the final version does not endanger children. If so, the entire membership determines whether a formal endorsement is appropriate.
4. If appropriate, create a summary page of this whitepaper and make this a resource for members.

## **The Fatherhood Subcommittee:**

**Team Contributing Members/Agencies:** Glenn Smith, Life Connections of the Carolinas; Sheila Peltzer, KN2P; George Metz, Freedom School Partners; Carrie Christian, Families Forward Charlotte; Jenny Harbin, The Children's Alliance; and Frank Crawford, The Children's Alliance

## **Special Thanks to Members of Our Community Who Contributed to Our Research:**

Chablais Dandridge; Dann Gwyn; Gregory Hunt, Esq; Dr. Kirven; Kelly Little; Dr. Shears; Judge E. Trosch; National Parent Organization

**We appreciate all advocates and community members who spoke with us over the past 2 years.**