

Department of Legislative Services  
 Maryland General Assembly  
 2005 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 1194 (Delegates Rosenberg and Haynes)  
 Health and Government Operations

Building Strong Families Act of 2005

This bill replaces the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood with the Maryland Commission on Fathers and Families (MCFF) and creates the Healthy Relationships and Marriage Program (HRMP) and the Healthy Relationships and Marriage Fund (HRMF). The bill requires the Governor to include at least \$250,000 in the State budget for fiscal 2006 and annually thereafter for the new fund.

The bill is effective July 1, 2005.

Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** General fund expenditure increase of at least \$250,000 for HRMF as required in the bill. Any expense reimbursements for MCFF members are assumed to be minimal and absorbable within existing resources. Staffing for MCFF could be provided with existing resources.

(in dollars)	FY 2006	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	250,000	250,000	250,000	250,000	250,000
Net Effect	(\$250,000)	(\$250,000)	(\$250,000)	(\$250,000)	(\$250,000)

*Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate effect*

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

## Analysis

**Bill Summary:** The Commission on Responsible Fatherhood is renamed as the Maryland Commission on Fathers and Families. The structure established for the existing commission is retained for MCFF and its focus is expanded to include encouragement of healthy marital and nonmarital relationships between biological parents.

One of the purposes of MCFF is to thoroughly examine the extent and implications of single-parent families, the benefit of healthy marital and nonmarital relationships between biological parents, and gather information on laws and services relating to healthy relationships and marriage in Maryland and other states. Other purposes include identification of obstacles that impede or prevent the formation and maintenance of two-parent families and involvement of responsible fathers in the lives of their children. Another purpose is to identify strategies that are successful in encouraging responsible fatherhood and promoting strong, healthy marital and nonmarital relationships between biological parents, as well as promoting these relationships.

MCFF is required to advocate for and encourage a comprehensive approach to address problems impeding healthy relationships and marriages; as well as develop a comprehensive, coordinated statewide plan, collect and analyze data, promote statewide policies, and provide advice to local public and private agencies to promote the goals of the bill. MCFF must recommend distribution of community incentive grants to entities that promote the purposes of the bill.

This bill creates a Healthy Relationships and Marriage Program in the Department of Human Resources (DHR). The purpose of HRMP is to implement recommendations from MCFF and provide funding to eligible community-based organizations, administer federal marriage funds, use federal funds to implement a program to inform communities of the benefits of healthy two-parent homes and the involvement of fathers in family life, and develop other programs that promote healthy relationships and marriage.

The Healthy Relationships and Marriage Fund is established to implement healthy relationship and marriage programs. The fund consists of appropriations in the State budget and any other funding from any other source. An entity may apply for a grant that promotes healthy relationships and marriage for any fiscal year by submitting a proposal to DHR by May 1. The proposal must contain a plan for implementing the program, a plan to adopt a curriculum, a description of any model curriculum that the entity plans to use, and a plan to incorporate discussions of family law and domestic violence issues.

DHR is required to review the submitted plans and determine which entities are eligible to receive funding, review renewal applications, and distribute the grants. Any entity that

receives State funding under the bill or receives federal funding from the Healthy Marriage Initiative must ensure that domestic violence counseling services are provided to program participants. Entities that receive funding under this bill are not prevented from obtaining funding from private sources.

DHR is required to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs and report to the Senate Budget and Taxation and the House Appropriations committees annually by July 1 on the healthy relationships and marriage programs that receive funding under this bill.

**Current Law:** The Commission on Responsible Fatherhood is an independent commission that is required to be housed in the Child Support Enforcement Administration (CSEA) for budgetary and administrative purposes only. The commission consists of 18 members appointed by the Governor, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Delegates, and the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, as specified. Membership includes relevant departmental secretaries or their designees; legislators; family services advocates; local government representatives; and those with academic, programmatic, or life experience relating to noncustodial fathers.

The purpose of the commission is to increase awareness of what happens if a child is raised without a responsible father and identify obstacles and strategies that encourage responsible fatherhood. The commission is also responsible for distribution of community incentive grants from the State or federal governments; establishing a coordinated network of services; and making available funds, personnel, and facilities from non-State sources. The commission is prohibited from operating any programs or providing any direct services.

**Background:** According to the *Maryland Manual*, the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood last met in September 2002. The commission is not housed in CSEA, but in the Community Services Administration in DHR. The commission was created as part of the Welfare Innovation Act of 2001 (Chapter 395).

DHR has established the Maryland's Initiative for Fathers and Families, which is an umbrella organization of programs intended to promote self-sufficiency, responsibility, and accountability. Fathers are offered services in personal development, life skills, health and wellness, relationships, and employment development.

The Young Fathers-Responsible Fathers Program is part of this initiative. The Young Fathers program is targeted to unwed or expectant fathers who are considered at risk of forsaking their parental responsibilities. The goal of the Young Fathers program is to provide educational and emotional support and employment opportunities to at-risk fathers. Another program in this initiative is the Access and Visitation Program, which encourages noncustodial parents to have greater access to their children through

programmed activities and services. Programmed activities include mediation, parenting classes, development of parenting plans, advocacy, and employment skill building. This program operates in Caroline, Dorchester, Harford, Queen Anne's, and Washington counties and serves 600 families.

There is also a demonstration program operating in Baltimore City called the Baltimore City Partners for Fragile Families Demonstration, which is designed to increase the ability of economically disadvantaged fathers and mothers to support their children. This program is operated by the National Center for Strategic Non-Profit Planning and Community Leadership, in partnership with the Ford Foundation.

**State Expenditures:** General fund expenditures could increase by \$250,000 in fiscal 2006, as the bill requires the Governor to include at least that amount for HRMF.

Expenditures for meetings of the commission could be handled with the existing resources of the member agencies.

Staffing for the commission is expected to be provided with the existing resources of DHR and/or the member agencies of MCFF. DHR advises that when the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood was active, staffing was provided from the existing resources of DHR. It is expected that the new commission established in this bill would also be staffed with the existing resources of DHR. The bill also authorizes the member agencies to designate staff from the member agencies to assist MCFF in carrying out its functions.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Department of Human Resources, Governor's Office, Maryland State Archives, Department of Legislative Services

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