Obama and Bayh Reintroduce Fatherhood Bill

U.S. Senators Evan Bayh (D-IN) and Barack Obama (D-IL) introduced the Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2006 (S. 3607) on June 29, 2007. According to comments made by Senator Obama upon introducing the bill, it will "provide support for fathers who are trying to do the right thing in making child support payments by providing them with job training and job opportunities and expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit. It also stops penalizing marriage in the tax code, and makes sure that children and families, not the government, receive every penny of child support." The bill would:

- Increase federal funding for responsible fatherhood programs from $50 million to $100 million per year.
- Eliminate separate work participation rates for two-parent families.
- Ban the recovery of birth costs for Medicare recipients.
- Require that the full amount of child support paid on behalf of children receiving TANF be paid by the state to the family.
- Prohibit states from conditioning eligibility for TANF benefits on the assignment of child support rights to the state.
- Require states to treat child support payments in the same way as earned income in determining the amount disregarded when calculating the amount and type of TANF assistance.
- Prohibit states from considering any part of a period of incarceration as voluntary unemployment that would disqualify the parent from obtaining a review and adjustment of the child support obligation.
- Temporarily suspend a support obligation, its enforcement and any interest that would accrue during a period of incarceration. Custodial parents would be given notice and opportunity to challenge the suspension.
- Award grants to states to:
  - Establish court- or child support agency-supervised programs of employment for noncustodial parents with barriers to employment (programs are required to offer the services prior to the establishment of a contempt order for child support nonpayment).
  - Provide transitional jobs, with a required minimum of 20% and maximum of 50% of weekly hours spent in educational or other activities designed to address employment barriers.
- Increase the Earned Income Tax Credit income eligibility limit for individuals with no qualifying children from $5,280 to $10,712 per year, with cost-of-living adjustments each year.

The full text of the bill and its status in the Senate is available at [http://thomas.loc.gov/](http://thomas.loc.gov/).
Britain Scraps Child Support Agency
A British Commons Public Accounts Committee has released a report that confirms the failure of the country’s Child Support Agency (CSA). The CSA was established in 1993, and has consistently underperformed. By October 2006, one in four applications for maintenance received by the Agency since 2003 were still waiting to be cleared, there was a backlog of a quarter of a million cases waiting to be processed, and around 36,000 cases were “stuck” in the system. According to the report:

- More parents and children are receiving nothing in child support under the CSA system than under its predecessor.
- Approximately 60% of the $3.5 billion in unpaid child support is considered uncollectible.
- About 250,000 absent parents owe child support, and 127,000 of these parents have paid nothing. Approximately 230,000 of the parents who owe child support have had no enforcement actions taken against them.

Legislation passed recently will replace the CSA with the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission, which will be empowered to deduct cash direct from non-payers’ bank accounts and would also impose curfews on and withdraw passports from non-payers.

This summary was compiled from several recent news articles. Additional developments or information could be found by searching on-line for stories related to “child support” and “United Kingdom.”

New Publication Explores Opportunities To Improve Lives of African American Males
A recent report prepared for the Ford Foundation, *Why We Can’t Wait: A Case for Philanthropic Action*, provides foundations and grant makers with a current view of the challenges and opportunities that present themselves when working on issues affecting African American men. For the report, the authors investigated research, practice and policy. Some of the key points and recommendations include:

- A majority of the organizational leaders who were interviewed for the report felt isolated professionally and expressed a need for support and learning networks.
- Practitioners who were interviewed for the study consistently focused on capacity issues such as fund development, technology and succession planning. Many organizations began as a response to a community need; creating an ongoing program was not an original priority. As one interviewee states: “We figured out how to start an organization, but maintaining it is a whole other story. We started out just wanting to help young brothers get off the streets….now we’re trying to figure out how to evaluate our work and a fundraising strategy.”
- Many practitioners spoke of being disconnected from policymakers and elected officials and of the inaccessibility of academicians whose institutions were sometimes just blocks from the distressed communities in which they work.
- The authors conducted a follow-up to a study done in 1995 by the Urban Institute that involved a site visit to 51 programs serving black male youth. Approximately 75% of these programs were no longer engaged in programming targeted to black male youth, and just over 25% were no longer in existence at all.
- Some of the policy issues that are discussed in the report include the following:
  - Different high school graduation rate calculations downplay the extent of educational issues facing black males.
  - Underinvestment and disinvestment in federal workforce training programs have significantly impacted black men.
  - Extreme child support penalties significantly impact the ability of low-income
black men to participate in the labor market.
• Black males are disproportionately affected by disparities between crack and cocaine sentencing policy.


**News from the States**
• Payday loans have been capped at a maximum interest rate of 36% in Oregon, with a limit on the origination fee of $10 for every $100 loaned to a maximum of $30, making Oregon one of the strictest states in its regulation of payday loans. Ten states ban payday loans altogether, but lenders are proliferating in many others. Borrowers of payday loans often take out the two-week loan and then roll over the loan for another two-week period, resulting in interest and charges that can average $80 for every $100 borrowed.
• The Connecticut Supreme Court has ruled that a 2004 law that extends child support orders to a child’s high school graduation or to the age of 19, whichever comes first, should apply to all child support cases, including those decided prior to 2004. The law was originally designed to give children of unwed parents the same rights as children of married parents, but nothing in the language specified that it could be applied retroactively.
• Beginning May 1, Tennessee implemented a $25 fee that must be paid by custodial parents once $500 in child support has been collected by the child support agency. The fee is federally mandated, but states may opt to collect the fee from the noncustodial parent or to take it from the state’s general fund. Parents who receive TANF benefits are exempt from the fee.

**Federal Abstinence Education Program Is Found to Have No Impact on Abstinence**
A recent multi-state evaluation of Title V, Section 510 abstinence education programs was completed by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Title V abstinence education programs were first implemented as part of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PROWRA, or welfare reform) of 1996, and received $50 million annually to teach abstinence from sexual activity outside of marriage. The research design compared more than 2,000 youth who either participated in a Title V abstinence education program or were randomly assigned to a control group and received “services as usual” in elementary and middle schools in four cities. Four to six years after receiving the intervention, follow-up was conducted. The study found that:

• Youth who were assigned to the Title V abstinence education “program group” were no more likely than the control group to have abstained from sex.
• Those who reported having sex, whether they were from the program or control group, had similar numbers of sexual partners and had initiated sex at the same mean age.
• Both program and control group youth had a good understanding of the risks of pregnancy but a less clear understanding of STDs and their health consequences.
• Program group youth were less likely than control group youth to report that condoms are usually effective at preventing STDs; and they were more likely to report that condoms are never effective at preventing STDs. For example, 21 percent of program group youth reported that condoms never prevent HIV, compared to 17 percent of control group youth. For herpes and HPV, 23 percent of program group youth reported that condoms are never effective, compared to 15 percent of control group youth.
The study, *Impacts of Four Title V, Section 510 Abstinence Education Programs*, is available at
http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/abstinence07/.