

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2024 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 4447

By Delegate Holstein

[Introduced January 10, 2024; Referred
to the Committee on Health and Human Resources
then Finance]

1 A BILL to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding thereto a new article,
 2 designated §49-10-1, §49-10-2, §49-10-3, §49-10-4, §49-10-5, and §49-10-6, relating to
 3 the creation of the Responsible Fatherhood Act; establishing purpose; requiring DHHR to
 4 contract with non-profit to create initiative to promote responsible fatherhood; provide
 5 certain services directed at fathers; establishing eligibility requirements for non-profits to
 6 be awarded contract; allowing DHHR to award grants to promote initiative's purposes;
 7 establishing reporting requirements; requiring Community-based-care (CBC) lead
 8 agencies to assess their fatherhood engagement services and report to DHHR; requiring
 9 DHHR to assess CBCs bi-annually regarding fatherhood engagement services; requiring
 10 the DHHR to integrate fatherhood engagement services into home visits; requiring the
 11 Bureau for Child Support Enforcement to provide certain information directed towards
 12 parents having difficulty making child support payments; and establishing Responsible
 13 Fatherhood Month.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 10. THE RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD ACT.

§49-10-1. Establishing purpose.

1 (a) The Responsible Fatherhood Act provides resources to promote responsible
 2 fatherhood, gives competitive grants to engage private sector partners in the effort to address the
 3 needs of fathers, increases fatherhood engagement services, increases child support services,
 4 creates a responsible fatherhood month, and addresses the low graduation rate of fatherless
 5 children.

6 (b) West Virginia recognizes the threat of government growth to prosperity, responsibility,
 7 and liberty, and thus embraces the important role that the private sector, including faith-based
 8 organizations, can often play in lieu of direct government involvement in addressing the
 9 fatherlessness crisis. This bill is not intended to increase government programs or spending but
 10 rather to reallocate funds towards effective and competitive grant programs, increase

11 transparency, and offer solutions to a growing crisis in the State of West Virginia.

§49-10-2. Promoting responsible fatherhood.

1 (a) The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) shall contract
2 with a not-for-profit for the development and implementation of an initiative to promote responsible
3 fatherhood by July 2025. The initiative must include a website, electronic resources for fathers,
4 regional public events, and social media campaigns.

5 (b) DHHR must contract with a not-for-profit organization with a history and substantial
6 experience in fatherhood that includes, but is not limited to, public awareness campaigns, online
7 resources, engaging with fathers in the community, engaging at school sponsored events to
8 promote fatherhood, and has the capacity to implement and maintain a state-wide campaign.

9 (c) The nonprofit chosen must be nonpolitical and nonpartisan.

10 (d) The choice of nonprofit must come after an open and transparent competitive selection
11 process that ensures the most effective partner organization is chosen.

§49-10-3. Grants to address the needs of fathers.

1 (a) Recognizing the benefit of private-public partnerships, the DHHR shall award
2 competitive grants to state and local nonprofit organizations, churches, or other private sector
3 partners to address unmet needs of fathers to increase their presence in their child’s life. Grants
4 will be to comprehensively address the needs of fathers, such as assisting them in finding
5 employment, establishing appropriate child support obligations, transitioning from incarceration,
6 and accessing health care. Services provided must be tailored to the needs of fathers being
7 served. These grants shall require case management services to be provided to fathers.

8 (b) After three years, the DHHR shall submit a report to the Governor on the effectiveness
9 of these grants including measurable data on number of fathers assisted. Programs will expire
10 unless explicitly reauthorized after a rigorous review.

§49-10-4. Increased fatherhood engagement services.

1 (a) Community-based-care lead agencies (CBCs) must assess their current engagement

2 with fathers, report on any gaps, and identify viable solutions by April 2025. Solutions to these
3 identified gaps must be implemented by October 2025.

4 (b) The DHHR will conduct bi-annual reviews of how CBCs are implementing plans to
5 address gaps in fatherhood engagement and will assess how well CBCs are meeting the needs of
6 fathers. These reports will be made public within 30 days of assessment.

7 (c) The DHHR alone, subcontractors alone, or both, shall integrate father engagement
8 activities into home visit programs. Engagement activities include, but are not limited to, increased
9 and individualized support to increase fathers' participation in services offered to strengthen the
10 family and increase child-wellbeing.

§49-10-5. The Responsible Fatherhood Act child support services for fathers.

1 (a) The West Virginia Bureau for Child Support Enforcement (BCSE) shall provide the
2 following information to those having trouble paying child support:

3 (1) BCSE shall establish a webpage on its existing website to provide information to
4 obligors that are having difficulty making their child support payments.

5 (2) Information on the webpage must be user-friendly, in plain language, and provide at a
6 minimum detailed information about how an obligor can modify a child support order, how to
7 access career services at Workforce West Virginia, and all organizations that have received grants
8 to assist noncustodial parents.

9 (b) Notifications of delinquent child support payments shall be provided to obligors in a
10 timely and efficient manner and must include information on how the obligor can access the career
11 services mentioned in §49-10-3 of this code, and information on how to access career services
12 and organizations awarded grants to assist noncustodial parents with child support payments.

§49-10-6. Establishing responsible fatherhood month.

1 (a) The month of June shall be designated as "Responsible Fatherhood Month" to honor
2 the important contribution of fathers to child well-being, safety, and stability.

3 (b) Throughout Responsible Fatherhood Month, DHHR shall actively, meaning at least on

4 a weekly basis, promote the direct link between fatherhood and the health and well-being of
5 children.

6 (c) Other agencies and local governments are encouraged to support Responsible
7 Fatherhood Month through community engagement events, social media posts, news media, and
8 other public support campaigns.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to establish the Responsible Fatherhood Act; establishing purpose; requiring DHHR to contract with non-profit to create initiative to promote responsible fatherhood; provide certain services directed at fathers; establishing eligibility requirements for non-profits to be awarded contract; allowing DHHR to award grants to promote initiative's purposes; establishing reporting requirements; requiring Community-based-care (CBC) lead agencies to assess their fatherhood engagement services and report to DHHR; requiring DHHR to assess CBCs bi-annually regarding fatherhood engagement services; requiring the DHHR to integrate fatherhood engagement services into home visits; requiring the Bureau for Child Support Enforcement to provide certain information directed towards parents having difficulty making child support payments; and establishing Responsible Fatherhood Month.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.