



**Report to the Joint Committee on
Children, Youth and Families
on Programs and Initiatives in Maryland for
Children of Incarcerated Parents**

**Submitted by the Governor's Office for Children
and
The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services**

December 1, 2007



I don't care how bad whatever we were going through, I still wanted to be with my mom.
-Antonio, 23, who spent 11 years in foster care while his mother was in and out of jail and prison
San Francisco Partnership for Incarcerated Parents, 2003, p.27 (The San Francisco Partnership for Incarcerated Parents is a considered a national leader in addressing the concerns of children of incarcerated parents.)

Purpose

This report is in response to a request letter dated December 20, 2007, from the Chairs of the Joint Committee on Children, Youth and Families, for information on programs for children of incarcerated parents in the State of Maryland. Specifically, the report will highlight some of the interventions available in the state and initiatives currently underway to maintain and improve relationships between incarcerated parents and their children, as well as key recommendations for what measures the State and other partners can take to improve efforts to foster and enhance these relationships.

Background

In April 2007, there were 22,864 individuals incarcerated in the adult correctional system in Maryland, in the Division of Correction (DOC). The Division is the correctional institution end of the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS). The vast majority of the inmates were male (95%) and African-American (74%). The average age of the inmates was 35.7 years of age, and the average length of stay was 61 months in DOC.

It is important to note that although the majority of inmates are male, 65% of incarcerated women are mothers (Mumola, 2000). Ninety percent of children remain with their mother while their fathers are incarcerated, but more than half of the children live with their grandparents while their mother is incarcerated. Additionally, 10% of incarcerated mothers have their children placed in foster care, compared to 2% of incarcerated men (Travis, et al, 2003).

Using methodology provided by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) (see Appendix A for the methodology), it is estimated that approximately 12,600 inmates currently incarcerated in Maryland are parents. Using the same methodology, it is estimated that approximately 26,000 Maryland children are vulnerable to the negative effects of parental imprisonment. Some of the most serious impacts on children are:

- Increased dependency or maturational regression, impaired ability to cope with future stress or trauma, and intergenerational patterns of criminal behavior (Travis, McBride, & Solomon, 2005);
- Withdrawal, low self-esteem, depression, truancy, and alcohol and other drug use (Reed & Reed, 1997); and,
- Reactive behaviors including aggression, hypervigilance, anxiety and concentration problems (Waul, Travis & Solomon, 2002).

As such, it is critical that interventions be offered to both the parents and children to mediate the negative effects of incarceration on the child-parent relationship, to ensure positive development of the children and youth, and to promote strong emotional and monetary support by parents once released from incarceration.

Current Interventions, Initiatives & Strategies

Within Maryland, programs for children of incarcerated parents are most often offered at the community level, within a particular jurisdiction or institution, and are supported by a variety of funders and partners. While there is often some overlap, existing programs typically fall into one of three categories: (1) mentoring for children of incarcerated parents; (2) visitation, family support and/or outreach for children and parents; and, (3) initiatives to improve receipt of child support. This section highlights some of these key existing programs.

Mentoring Programs

The purpose of mentoring programs is to provide ongoing, individualized support to children and youth. According to the federal Family and Youth Services Bureau, mentoring programs for children of incarcerated parents are created “to ensure that mentors provide young people with safe and trusting relationships, healthy messages about life and social behavior, appropriate guidance from a positive adult role model, and opportunities for increased participation in education, civic service, and community activities” (Family and Youth Services Bureau, 2006b, n.p.). The following includes examples of some of the mentoring programs in Maryland.

Staying Connected. The Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) supports the Staying Connected Program in Baltimore City, which provides one-on-one mentorship opportunities for youth, as well as visitation assistance that enables youth members to visit their incarcerated parents. The program strives to work with schools and mental health organizations, in order to maximize the community-wide support systems for the youth and entire family.

Big Brothers Big Sisters. Big Brothers Big Sisters has several mentoring programs within Maryland. The Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Maryland and Frederick County Amachi programs were created specifically to support children of incarcerated parents and are based on a model that incorporates individual mentorship and partnerships with faith-based organizations. Although Big Brothers Big Sisters has been serving children of incarcerated parents for more than 50 years, targeted outreach, due to grant funding, began only four years ago. Since that time, the program has matched more than 700 youth with mentors (W. Bohdel, personal communication, September 10, 2007). In Anne Arundel County, Big Brothers and Big Sisters receives monetary support from the County and the Local Management Board for the Amachi Mentoring Program. In FY 2007, slightly more than 40 youth were connected with mentors in Anne Arundel County (A. Harris, personal communication, July 23, 2007).

The aggregate outcome data for Big Brothers Big Sisters Mentoring Children of Prisoners-Amachi Program shows positive results. Of the 286 youth on whom data was available, 89% of youth, matched with mentors, were not arrested, and of the 17 youth with prior offenses, 100% demonstrated a reduction in arrests and 88% showed no subsequent arrests (W. Bohdel, personal communication, September 10, 2007). Additionally, of the 203 youth who served for over one year, 85% showed an improvement in self-confidence, 93.5% showed improvement in avoidance of substance abuse, and 94% showed improvement in both trust toward others and respect of other cultures (Big Brothers Big Sisters, 2007).

Mentoring Children of Prisoners Program. Three programs in Maryland received \$529,000 in federal funding in FY 2006 for Mentoring Children of Prisoners Program grants. The grants were awarded for up to three years by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau. The grants were awarded to organizations to support the creation and maintenance of one-on-one, community-based mentoring programs for children ages four through eighteen in communities with substantial numbers of unserved children of incarcerated parents. The grant recipients were:

- Center for Children, Inc., Southern Maryland (\$55,000);
- Institute for Interactive Instruction, Laurel, Maryland (\$107,000); and,
- U.S. Dream Academy, Inc., Columbia, Maryland (\$367,000).

Family Support, Visitation & Outreach Programs

In addition to the mentoring programs in place through various public and private entities, there are a number of initiatives to maintain and improve family relationships and connectedness through visitation and other family support services. These initiatives occur at both the policy and service delivery levels. As with the discussion of mentoring programs, the information below should not be construed to represent all family support or visitation programs.

Family Contacts and Reintegration Committee, DPSCS. Critical work is being done to support families and children through the Family Contacts and Reintegration Committee of the Female Offender Work Group at DPSCS. This Committee has been able to affect change for children and families through policy review and modification. The work of this Committee is grounded in the belief, “supported in the research literature, that promoting and sustaining family bonds during incarceration, especially bonds between mothers and their children, is beneficial to institutional behavior of the inmate, the future of the child and is important to help inmates successfully transition from prison to the community” (Family Contacts Reintegration Committee, 2005, p.1).

In FY 2005, this committee studied other states’ best practices for family reintegration, reviewed visiting policies and procedures and their impact on visitation at women’s facilities, and developed a training module regarding the importance of family contacts. The Committee gained a new chair in FY 2006 and, during that year, made a number of additional achievements. Significant time was spent assessing gaps in the Department’s training regarding female offenders and new training modules were developed and implemented, titled *Managing Female Offenders and their Families* and *Offenders and their Families*. Additionally, revisions to the regulations in the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) regarding visitation practices were drafted and, where COMAR revisions were not necessary, the work group proceeded to implement changes in visitation policies.

Institutional Family Contact Committees were formed at various institutions to provide feedback to the workgroup on issues specific to those particular locations, including the utilization of volunteers and other specific needs. The Committee notes that initiatives such as promoting theme-based visitation days for children have been successful. The Committee has also explored the possibility of utilizing video conferencing to enhance visitation in addition to face-to-face visits. During FY 2007, the Committee had goals that included facilitating the transportation of

children to visit mothers, establishing an orientation and exit orientation for offenders' families, and expanding membership of the Committee.

Girl Scouts. In 1992, Girl Scouts of Central Maryland (GSCM) originated the *Girl Scouts Beyond Bars* program in collaboration with the National Institute of Justice. This program has since been replicated in at least 25 Girl Scouts Councils across the nation. Through this program, the girls, ranging in age from five through seventeen, have twice monthly troop meetings with their mothers at the Maryland Correctional Institute for Women in Jessup. These mothers are also required to join Girl Scouts. (GSCM, 2007)

GSCM has expanded its outreach to two programs in addition to the *Girl Scouts Beyond Bars* Program. *Bridges Beyond Bars* provides outreach to recently paroled mothers and their daughters, helping them to become positive role models in their lives. Finally, there is a Girl Scouts program at the Waxter Center for girls committed to that facility. Included in this program is the GSCM Young Mothers Program to support girls and young women residing at Waxter. (GSCM, 2007)

Project SIT serves children living in Wicomico County who have an incarcerated parent. Referrals are received from the Division of Correction, the Wicomico County Detention Center, social service agencies, area schools and the community at large. Based upon the Michigan Project S.E.E.K. model, these programs are funded by the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention through the Wicomico Partnership for Families and Children (the Local Management Board for Wicomico County). In operation since 2003, the long term goal of the program is to reduce intergenerational incarceration and recidivism. The projects seek to reduce the risk of negative outcomes for children of incarcerated parents by providing a variety of services targeted at the child, caregiver/s, and incarcerated parent. The services provided include home visits, academic support (child and adult-GED), parenting classes for caregivers and incarcerated parents, transportation, bi-weekly parent-child(ren) contact visitation for two hours per week at the Wicomico County Detention Center, twice a month contact visitation at Eastern Correctional Institution, and visitation as arranged at other Maryland facilities. Other ongoing programs include after school programming, skill building group meetings, mentoring, and child and family activities. In addition, other services such as post-release advocacy, family and community reintegration support for housing, employment, parenting issues, and continued education are provided as needed.

Chrysalis House Healthy Start. The Chrysalis House Healthy Start is a joint partnership between DPSCS, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and Baltimore Mental Health Systems to serve pregnant women with co-occurring disorders who were incarcerated and/or detained by DPSCS in an effort to divert them from the criminal justice system and to strengthen the family unit. Mental health, substance abuse, parenting, and case management services are offered to the women. The women are able to raise their children on-site with extensive supports, including day care assistants and a life skills counselor. This residential program uses individualized and intensive services to provide mothers with parenting skills and the tools that they need to resist substance abuse in the future. (DPSCS, 2007.; Skalka, 2007)

Fathers in Prison Working with Children. This program was developed by the Maryland Correctional Education Libraries to help inmates to encourage their children to do better in school. Inmates were trained to learn how to select and read appropriate material to different age groups and to become program event planners. One Saturday each month, the visiting room is decorated with child friendly posters and children's books. There is group and individual reading, quizzes on themes, and book sharing. The Enoch Pratt Free Library Children's Department provides a three-month deposit collection to allow the fathers to choose books and practice their reading. The children can borrow books to take home with them as well. (MSDE, 2007)

Child Support Enforcement Initiatives

According to the Child Support Enforcement Administration (CSEA) in the Department of Human Resources (DHR), "child support exists to raise the standard of living for children by enforcing their right to receive financial support from both of their parents. The child support program assists families with collecting much needed child support from parents who are not in the home" (CSEA, 2007, n.p.). CSEA supports the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement mission to prevent the build-up of unpaid child support through early intervention; ensure both parents are treated fairly, kept informed, and their concerns are recognized; and make certain that child support is a regular source of income for families. Additionally, Maryland works to avoid many of the adversarial enforcement measures that result from the accumulation of child support and to encourage family reunification by engaging fathers as partners in the well-being of their children. (Higginbotham, 2007)

The University of Maryland, School of Social Work (SSW) conducted a 10-year study (1994-2004) of non-custodial parents (NCP). SSW found that 13% of NCPs are now or have been incarcerated, 16% of cases involve a formerly or currently incarcerated NCP, and that incarcerated NCPs account for 25% of the total arrears owed (Higginbotham, 2007). Dana Reichart of the National Council of State Legislatures observes that as many as 70% of low-income fathers have contact with the criminal justice system and the majority of incarcerated men are fathers: "This presents an interesting dilemma because in most states, fathers continue to accrue arrearages while they are locked up, despite the obvious fact that they have no resources to pay support. When released, they may have satisfied their debt to society, but are met with a new debt because of child support arrears" (p.1).

CSEA partnered with the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) in 2003 to develop and deliver training for DPSCS case managers and social workers on the importance of seeking a review and modification of child support orders. Beginning in 2004, Policy Studies, Inc. has scheduled group and individual meetings with incarcerated parents in Baltimore City and has provided referrals for services needed to become employed and/or self-sufficient.

There have been a number of policy initiatives since 2005 to help support non-custodial parents in paying child support and becoming engaged with their children. Provisions were made for a Settlement of Arrearages for low income, non-custodial parents (including incarcerated parents), with the presumption that it is in the best interest of the State and the child. (The law requires the settlement of State-owed arrears for low income parents residing with the child 12 months

prior to requesting a settlement.) In 2006, an Affidavit of Support was created, which provides administrative authority to change the ordered amount of support. Finally, in 2007, *House Bill 263 – The Child Support Payment Incentive Program* was passed by the General Assembly. This program settles 50% of the State-owed arrears if the parent pays consistently for 12 months and settles the remaining 50% of State-owed arrears if the parent pays consistently for 24 months (Higginbotham, 2007).

In 2006, Maryland received a federal grant for *Project Fresh Start*. This grant assists formerly and currently incarcerated non-custodial parents with child support order modifications and re-entry assistance, including gainful employment and family reunification services. The two-year grant totaling \$690,000 is operating in Prince George’s County and reflects a collaborative effort by DHR/CSEA, DPSCS, local governments, and correctional facilities. Pre-release services include assistance with requests for reviews and modifications of orders. Post-release services include access to an intensive case manager. This case manager identifies participants for enrollment, tracks and coordinates the participation of formerly incarcerated non-custodial parents in the employment and family reunification programs, and implements the work plan that targets existing barriers to success. One of the focus areas of the work plan is with the Department of Social Services to address employment services. The other focus is on *Adam’s House* to provide more intensive services for challenges such as substance abuse, illiteracy, and mental health issues. (Higginbotham, 2007)

Best Practices and Recommendations

It is clear from the information presented that services for children of incarcerated parents and their families are a patchwork with community organizations, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, and other federal, state, and local agencies and organizations. All agencies and organizations are implementing programs, services, and policy changes in response to the changing dynamics of the inmate population.

The Child’s Perspective. When working with these families, it is vital to consider the impact of actions by individuals and the system, as a whole, on each individual member of the family. As the San Francisco Partnership for Incarcerated Parents (2005, n.p.) notes, “we understand that children’s rights and needs may sometimes conflict with, and must be balanced against, institutional concerns and requirements, but believe it is essential to start from the child’s perspective and work on what is possible from there.” The San Francisco Partnership for Incarcerated Parents is a considered a national leader in addressing the concerns of children of incarcerated parents.

As the many stakeholders in Maryland continue to work to promote continuity of relationships for children and families where parents are incarcerated, attention must also be paid to the quality of care and services received by the children themselves. Ultimately, the State must stay consistent with its systems of care values to ensure that children and families are supported in a child-focused and family-driven, strengths-based, culturally and linguistically competent and individualized manner. Children of incarcerated parents have many needs that cannot be addressed solely by family support initiatives such as those discussed above and a focus should be placed on ensuring that the many needs of these children do not go unnoticed.

Some of the recommendations provided by the San Francisco Partnership include: (1) provide access to child-friendly environments for visitation; (2) support for subsidized guardianship for caretakers while parents are incarcerated; (3) put children in contact with mental health professionals with experience working with children of incarcerated parents; (4) protect and respect children's privacy; and (5) focus on rehabilitation and reunification. These recommendations focus on the theme of how children and families can be better supported, preserved, and strengthened.

Relationship between the Child Welfare and Criminal Justice Systems. Additionally, new research has begun to document the complex relationship between children involved with the child welfare system and children of incarcerated parents or parents who have involvement with the criminal justice system. A recent study using data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW) reveals that as many as one in every eight children reported as victims of maltreatment has a parent who was arrested within the previous six months; in 90% of these cases, it is the mother who was arrested (Phillips & Gleeson, 2007). The study's authors discuss the many different dynamics at work in these families and the need to respond to these children and families within the context of their experiences, resources, and needs.

Phillips & Gleeson (2007) also note the importance of recognizing the impact of probation on a family, given that approximately one in ten children in in-home settings in the child welfare system has lived with someone who was on probation. The authors observe that families where a family member is on probation or is otherwise in contact with the criminal justice system, are some of the most complex families within the child welfare system overall (Phillips & Gleeson, 2007). This complexity impacts the ability of the system to support the safety, permanency and well-being of children in accordance with the best practices and the federal *Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997*.

Female Offenders. The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) has a Female Offender Work Group. Having recognized that existing public safety and correctional services were designed for men and have been applied to men without considerable attention paid to gender-responsive programming, the Female Offender Work Group has been working on issues relating to the female offender population (Van Voorhis, 2007). Although women represent only five percent of the incarcerated population, that translates to 1,131 females incarcerated at one point in time. By focusing on gender responsive programming, the Committee hopes that female offenders will be more appropriately matched with treatment and that the problems of substance abuse, trauma and mental health issues can be addressed through comprehensive, integrated and culturally relevant services and appropriate supervision. This, in turn, has been found to impact a woman's experience of community supervision, incarceration, and successful reentry into the community. (Van Voorhis, 2007)

The following general recommendations are made to the Joint Committee on Children, Youth and Families in their endeavors to support children of incarcerated parents:

- Develop, in collaboration with DPSCS and the Female Offender Work Group, a work plan to support the bill of rights, modeled on the San Francisco Partnership for Incarcerated Parents "Rights to Realities" initiative;

- Support and enhance family visitation activities when parents are incarcerated, including theme days and opportunities for physical contact and genuine bonding and engagement; and,
- Partner with the faith-based and non-profit community, institutions, and the private sector to ensure that all children of incarcerated parents have transportation to be able to regularly visit their parents.

The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services' Female Offender Work Group has taken a decisive leadership role in Maryland to improve the quality of services received by inmates and to support and enhance the parent-child relationship while parents are incarcerated and once they are released. Any initiatives embarked upon by the State should be done in concert with this work group, as they have taken the time to learn about the existing services and infrastructure, develop relationships with the institutions and organizations serving the inmates and their families, and obtain information from national experts on best practices.

What would have helped me the most is compassion for my mom.

-Ahmad, 21, who was born while his mother was incarcerated; when he was five his mother's parental rights were terminated and he was adopted. At 16, Ahmad was reunited with his birth family and is currently attending college.

San Francisco Partnership for Incarcerated Parents, 2003, p.15

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Appendix A

Methodology for calculating the number of children affected by incarceration of a parent (personal communication received from BJS Policy Analyst):

As part of [BJS'] 1997 Surveys of State and Federal Prisoners, BJS was able to produce national-level estimates of the number of parents in State and Federal prisons and the number of minor children these parents had. In August 2000, BJS published a detailed analysis of this population of incarcerated parents, entitled "Incarcerated Parents and Their Children." To view a copy of the report, please see the following link to the BJS website:

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/iptc.htm>

Unfortunately, our nationally-representative samples of State and Federal prison inmates only allow for national-level estimates, and do not provide representative data for each State, much less specific counties. As a result, BJS has not produced State-level estimates for the population of incarcerated parents and their children. In the course of doing our own research, it also became apparent that State or county-level counts of incarcerated parents and affected children are rarely, if ever, maintained by individual State correctional, educational or child welfare authorities.

Given the difficulty in locating State-level data on these populations, and the relative stability of our national findings on this issue (the percentage of inmates reporting having a minor child changed only 1% in the 6 years between our most recent national surveys), I have employed the following formula for generating rough estimates of parents incarcerated in each State:

1) First, obtain a male and female prisoner count for the State in question. The most recent prison population counts put out by BJS can be found in the BJS website at: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/p02.htm>).

(Example: Connecticut is listed in table 6 as having a female prisoner count of 1,694 in 2002. Subtracting 1,694 from the total Connecticut prisoner count of 20,720 in table 3 yields a male prisoner count of 19,026.)

2) Next, apply the national State prisoner percentages of parents to these State-specific populations of male and female prisoners. Nationally, 54.7% of men, and 65.3% of women, in State prison reported having a minor child in our 1997 prisoner surveys.

(Example: Using the Connecticut prisoner counts calculated above, we can produce the following estimates:

incarcerated fathers=19,026 X .547= 10,407

incarcerated mothers=1,694 X .653 = 1,106

Given that these are only rough estimates, these figures should probably be generously rounded to the nearest hundred.)

3) To generate rough estimates of the numbers of children these parents had, use the national State prisoner data. Nationally, fathers in State prison had an average of 2.04 minor children, while mothers in State prison had an average of 2.38 minor children.

(Example: Given the estimates of parents held in Connecticut prisons we calculated above, you can generate the following estimates of affected minor children:

children of fathers incarcerated in Connecticut = $10,407 \times 2.04 = 21,230$

children of mothers incarcerated in Connecticut = $1,106 \times 2.38 = 2,632$

It is important to note that this will only give an estimate of how many children have a parent incarcerated in a given State. Because BJS lacks geographical residency data on the children of incarcerated parents, these estimates will NOT tell you how many children in a given State have an incarcerated parent (i.e., of the estimated 21,230 children with a father held in Connecticut state prison, it cannot be estimated how many live in Connecticut themselves). Fewer than half of all parents in State prison reported living with any, much less all of their minor children prior to admission to prison, so there is little grounds for assuming that most children of an incarcerated parent reside in the State where the parent is held in custody.)

While hard State counts of incarcerated parents may not be available, I feel that these rough estimates provide a useful sense of the scale of these populations in specific States, given the size and gender composition of their prison population. I hope they are useful for your research on this issue.

Sincerely,
Christopher Mumola
BJS Policy Analyst