

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE  
**COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF MEN**

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Minutes for the Thirty-Sixth Commission Meeting

June 29, 2007 1-4 PM

Legislative Office Building Room 2006, Concord, NH

These minutes were taken by Scott Garman.

**Members Present:** Joe Mastromarino, Scott Garman, Mike Geanoulis, David Lauren.

**Members Absent:** Marshall Hickok, Gus Leraudeau.

**Also Present:** Neil Bouton, NH Division of Child Support Services.

Chair Joe Mastromarino opened the meeting with Commissioner introductions.

**Secretary's Report:**

Scott Garman distributed copies of the April minutes as well as copies of the unofficial May minutes. The May minutes are unofficial due to the lack of a quorum in May.

Mike Geanoulis motioned to approve the April minutes as presented. Scott Garman seconded, and the motion was approved 3-0 with David Lauren abstaining.

Scott Garman asked for any suggested changes to the unofficial May minutes. No changes were requested.

Both sets of minutes will be posted on the Commission's web site.

**Treasurer's Report:**

David Lauren agreed to confirm that our last two months' deposits, totaling \$1,700.00, were deposited in our treasury account.

**Neil Bouton, NH Division of Child Support Services:**

Neil Bouton was invited to speak to the Commission by Mike Geanoulis. Mr. Bouton is Manager of Parenthood Programs for the NH Division of Child Support Services (DCSS). Mr. Bouton detailed a number of programs that the DCSS offers related to the Commission's mission of bringing fathers and

children closer together. These included programs to help fathers become able to afford to pay their child support, programs to help keep incarcerated fathers in touch with their children, and to generally increase access of non-custodial parents (often fathers) with their children.

The federal government offers an access and visitation grant program which NH participates in, and receives approx. \$100k per year. These funds help defray the costs of mediation expenses when child custody and visitation disputes arise.

Mr. Bouton noted that a large majority of child support cases in NH do not involve the Division of Child Support Services. By his estimation, about 35% of NH cases involve DCSS. The only times DCSS gets involved is when the court orders it. This poses some problems in understanding issues surrounding child support because data on cases outside of DCSS are not available for statistical analysis. Mr. Bouton suggested that the Commission could advocate that the courts keep records on the child support cases which are not ordered to go through DCSS.

Within DCSS cases, about 40% of cases are from unmarried parents, about 30% are from separated parents, and about another 30% are from divorced parents.

The federal government has been pushing for mandatory wage assignments, and about 70% of DCSS cases involve wage assignment.

Mike Geanoulis mentioned that according to research done by Stanford Braver, when fathers are meaningfully involved with their children after a divorce or separation, their child support compliance rates are well above 90%.

Mr. Bouton noted that the goal of the federal access and visitation grants are intended to help keep parents connected with their children. He also stated that as a result of the program in NH, he has seen an increase in parental contact (e.g, and increase in days of visitation) in 70% of cases. He also noted that in many cases where an increase in parental contact did not occur, the quality of interactions improved (e.g, fewer problems during custody transfers, less acrimony between the parents). NH's success rate with this program is similar to its national average.

This program, unfortunately, is only active in four counties in NH. Hillsborough and Rockingham counties do not have this program, as mediators are not submitting bids to participate in the program.

Mr. Bouton distributed a number of materials distributed by his office on the theme of positive co-parenting, including

- Positive Co-parenting Mediation: Describes some of the benefits of mediation and contact information for the grant-funded mediation programs.
- Tips for Co-parenting Plans: Offers suggestions on how to create an effective co-parenting plan.

- It Takes Two: Discusses the importance of maintaining child contact with both parents, how to reduce conflict, and child support and visitation information.
- Video - How to modify your child support order: Primarily targeted toward incarcerated parents, but also of use to parents who have lost their job.
- Video - Positive Parenting: Shows examples of interactions between parents and discusses the importance of keeping both parents meaningfully involved with their children.

Mr. Bouton said that he makes an effort to distribute these materials so they get out to both men and women, custodial and non-custodial parents.

The Division of Child Support Services also offers seminars on how to apply to the courts for a reduction in child support during unemployment or incarceration. In the case of incarcerated parents, many are encouraged to apply for the minimum child support payment of \$50/month to help prevent unpayable arrearages to accrue during incarceration. The pamphlets and videos are also made available at NH employment security offices.

Mike Geanoulis expressed disagreement with the practice of compounding the problems of putative fathers who have little or no income by requiring a minimum child support payment. David Lauren did not oppose this practice and explained that regardless of whether a mother or father is in prison, they are still parents, and still have a financial responsibility of supporting their child(ren).

David Lauren asked if the employment security offices actively inform its clients about these resources, and offered to contact a colleague of his is - a manager at a NH employment security office - to ask if he is aware of these resources and encourage him to make sure they are properly advertised.

Joe Mastromarino asked about the possibility of making the DCSS videos available for download from the Commission's web site. Mr. Bouton agreed to check into possible copyright issues and get back to Joe.

### **Birth Certificates:**

Mr. Bouton discussed a voluntary in-hospital paternity acknowledgment program which is used in more than 25 hospitals throughout the state. He found that 90% of the time when children are born that the father is present, whether the parents are married or not. A nurse then explains to the parents the benefits of establishing paternity at that time and offers an affidavit for unmarried parents to confirm paternity and have the father's name listed on the birth certificate. NH is one of the top ten states in the country in establishing paternity.

Mike Geanoulis asked if he could obtain the percentage of birth certificates where the father is not named during the past few years. Mr. Bouton agreed to get back to Mike about that, but noted that in

the past 10 years, since this program was started, that this situation has become rare.

**Possible Requirements of Commissioners:**

Joe Mastromarino noted that it had been discussed last meeting to make a requirement or policy that members of the Commission miss no more than three meetings each year, and that further absences would result in a request from the Chair to resign from the Commission.

David Lauren noted that it is only the authority of the Governor to appoint or remove members from a state Commission, and that a policy of asking members to resign is possible but resignations could not be enforced.

David then explained that his reason for recent absences was due to his belief that the remainder of the Commission refused to support him when it voted against endorsing a resolution condemning personal attacks from the public on Commissioners. As the target of such a personal attack - which questioned his motives for serving on the Commission - David feels greatly disappointed and concerned about the implicit message this sent.

Scott Garman expressed regret that David felt this way, but noted regardless that it is the obligation of each Commission member to attend meetings in good faith. Scott also felt that the argument against endorsing the resolution was primarily that the personal attack did not constitute official business of the Commission.

**Birth Certificates, Revisited:**

Mike Geanoulis proposed that the Commission create a resolution to endorse including the father's name on the birth certificate. David Lauren agreed in general, but noted that there are some circumstances, for example rape or incest, where there can be a legitimate reason to exclude the father's name. After discussion, David Lauren moved that the Commission adopt the following resolution:

*The Commission on the Status of Men supports, in principle, the inclusion of the father's name on a child's birth certificate, while recognizing there are certain instances where public policy might dictate non-inclusion.*

Mike Geanoulis seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved.