



## MEMORANDUM

**Nancy Barr**, Legislator, District 6  
Chair, Committee on Social Services, Disabilities & Human Rights & Families Taskforce  
**Jenn Puja**, Legislator, District 5  
Chair, Committee on Labor  
**Jewel Williams Johnson**, Legislator, District 8  
Chair, Committee on Health  
  
Michaelian Office Building

**To:** Sunday Vanderberg, Clerk to the Board of Legislators

**From:** Nancy Barr  
Jenn Puja  
Jewel Williams Johnson

**Date:** TBD

**Re.:** Local Law Proposal to Establish the Westchester County Office of Fatherhood and Family Engagement and the Advisory Council on Fatherhood and Family Engagement

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### **PURPOSE**

This legislation will establish the Westchester County Office of Fatherhood and Family Engagement and creates a permanent Advisory Council on Fatherhood and Family Engagement to strengthen families, improve outcomes for children, support responsible fatherhood, and coordinate fatherhood-related policies, services, programs, and partnerships throughout Westchester County.

### **JUSTIFICATION**

For decades, public policy discussions surrounding children and families have appropriately recognized the critical role mothers play in child development and family well-being. In 2012, Westchester County acknowledged that importance through the creation of the Office for Women.

Today, there is an equally compelling opportunity to recognize and strengthen another essential component of family success: engaged, supported, and responsible fathers. Research consistently demonstrates that positive father involvement contributes to improved educational achievement, stronger emotional development, reduced involvement with the juvenile justice system, greater economic mobility, healthier family relationships, improved mental health outcomes, and enhanced overall well-being for children.

At the same time, fathers today face increasingly complex challenges. Young fathers often struggle with workforce development, employment opportunities, housing instability, educational attainment, transportation barriers, co-parenting relationships, family court navigation, child support systems, mental health challenges, and limited access to parenting resources and support networks. Many fathers desire to be actively engaged in the lives of their children but encounter systemic barriers that hinder their participation and success.

The consequences of father disengagement are not borne solely by fathers themselves. They impact children, families, schools, neighborhoods, healthcare systems, and the broader community.

Strengthening father engagement is therefore not merely a family issue. It is a public health issue, an educational issue, an economic development issue, a workforce issue, a public safety issue, and a community well-being issue.

Recognizing this reality, Westchester County has already demonstrated leadership in fatherhood engagement. The County recently hosted New York State's **11th Annual Fathering Conference**, bringing together fathers, service providers, educators, faith leaders, advocates, and community stakeholders to explore strategies for strengthening families and supporting fathers.

Likewise, the City of White Plains Youth Bureau has established successful fatherhood initiatives in collaboration with **Grandpas United** and **Calvary Baptist Church**, demonstrating the value of community-driven partnerships that encourage positive father engagement, mentorship, and family stability.

The momentum extends beyond Westchester County. In June 2025, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services advanced fatherhood engagement as a statewide priority with the appointment of a **Statewide Fatherhood Engagement Family Policy Advisor**. That work continued with the June 3, 2026 launch of New York's first-ever **Statewide Fatherhood Steering Committee**, recognizing the essential role fathers and father figures play in strengthening children, families, and communities.

Westchester is already helping to shape this statewide conversation, with several outstanding County residents contributing their experience and leadership to this historic first-ever steering committee. Their involvement underscores that Westchester has both the community expertise and the civic leadership to be at the forefront of fatherhood engagement.

A statewide framework, however, does not replace the need for local implementation. Westchester County should position itself as a leader in this growing movement by creating a dedicated County Office of Fatherhood to coordinate services, support fathers and families, strengthen partnerships, and ensure that statewide priorities translate into meaningful local impact.

## **THE ADVISORY COUNCIL AS THE CENTERPIECE**

The centerpiece of this legislation is the creation of a permanent **Advisory Council on Fatherhood and Family Engagement**.

The Council is intended to serve as the County's primary forum for identifying challenges, developing solutions, coordinating initiatives, and advising policymakers on issues affecting fathers, children, and families. Rather than creating a top-down bureaucracy, this legislation establishes a collaborative framework that brings together those closest to the work and those most impacted by the issues.

The Council will convene fathers, fatherhood advocates, educators, healthcare providers, mental health professionals, workforce development leaders, family court stakeholders, nonprofit organizations, faith leaders, youth-serving agencies, researchers, employers, and community representatives to guide the County's efforts.

The Office will provide coordination and administrative support.

The Advisory Council will provide vision, expertise, accountability, community engagement, and policy direction.

Together, they will create a sustainable infrastructure capable of identifying emerging needs, elevating best practices, recommending policy reforms, fostering collaboration, and strengthening outcomes for children and families.

## **FINDINGS**

1. Children benefit from positive, healthy, and consistent engagement with fathers and father figures.
2. Father involvement contributes to improved educational, social, emotional, behavioral, health, and economic outcomes.
3. Many fathers face barriers related to employment, workforce development, housing, transportation, family court navigation, child support systems, mental health, parenting resources, and access to supportive services.
4. Strengthening father engagement promotes family stability, public health, educational success, violence prevention, and economic mobility.
5. Westchester County has demonstrated a commitment to supporting families through conferences, programs, initiatives, and partnerships focused on fatherhood and family engagement.
6. The County's recent 11th Annual Fathering Conference highlights the ongoing community interest in and need for fatherhood-focused initiatives.
7. Successful local models already exist, including fatherhood programming offered through the White Plains Youth Bureau in partnership with Grandpas United and Calvary Baptist Church.
8. New York State has elevated fatherhood engagement through the appointment of a Statewide Fatherhood Engagement Family Policy Advisor and the creation of the Statewide Fatherhood Steering Committee.

9. Greater coordination among government agencies, nonprofits, schools, healthcare systems, faith-based organizations, and community stakeholders is needed to maximize the effectiveness of fatherhood initiatives.
10. Establishing a permanent Office and Advisory Council will strengthen family outcomes and improve quality of life throughout Westchester County.

#### **FUNCTIONS OF THE OFFICE**

The Office of Fatherhood and Family Engagement shall:

- Serve as a clearinghouse for fatherhood resources and services.
- Coordinate fatherhood-related initiatives across County government.
- Support and facilitate the work of the Advisory Council.
- Identify gaps in services and opportunities for improvement.
- Promote responsible fatherhood and healthy co-parenting.
- Support workforce development and economic mobility initiatives.
- Promote father-focused mental health and wellness programs.
- Facilitate public awareness campaigns.
- Coordinate annual conferences, summits, and educational events.
- Pursue grant opportunities and external funding sources.
- Issue annual reports and recommendations.

#### **ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP**

The Advisory Council shall consist of representatives from:

- Fatherhood organizations
- Community-based organizations
- Faith-based institutions
- Public health agencies
- Mental health providers
- Educational institutions
- Workforce development organizations
- Family Court stakeholders
- Child welfare professionals
- Youth-serving organizations
- Housing organizations
- Fathers with lived experience
- Grandparents and father figures serving caregiving roles
- Representatives of fatherhood mentoring programs
- Representatives of organizations serving young fathers

The Council shall reflect the geographic, racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity of Westchester County.

#### **RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ADVISORY COUNCIL**

The Advisory Council shall:

- Advise the Office, County Executive, and Board of Legislators.
- Identify barriers affecting fathers and families.

- Recommend policies and programs to strengthen father engagement.
- Promote cross-sector collaboration.
- Assist in planning countywide fatherhood initiatives.
- Review emerging trends and research.
- Recommend legislative, budgetary, and administrative initiatives.
- Develop strategies to improve outcomes for children through greater father engagement.

### **ANNUAL REPORT**

The Office and Advisory Council shall jointly submit an annual report to the County Executive and Board of Legislators outlining:

- Trends affecting fathers and families.
- Program outcomes and performance measures.
- Policy recommendations.
- Legislative priorities.
- Best practices from New York State and across the nation.
- Opportunities for collaboration and investment.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

The establishment of the Office of Fatherhood and Family Engagement and the Advisory Council on Fatherhood and Family Engagement shall not require an immediate dedicated appropriation.

Initial implementation may be accomplished through existing County resources, interdepartmental collaboration, partnerships with community-based organizations, faith-based institutions, educational partners, grant funding opportunities, philanthropic support, and volunteer service through the Advisory Council.

Any future staffing, programmatic funding, or operational appropriations shall be subject to the annual County budget process.

Within one year of its formation, the Advisory Council shall submit recommendations regarding the staffing, resource, and budgetary needs necessary to support the long-term success of the Office.

### **CONCLUSION**

In 2012, Westchester County recognized the importance of creating a dedicated Office for Women to elevate issues affecting women and families. Today, we have the opportunity to build upon that commitment by creating a permanent structure dedicated to supporting fathers and strengthening families.

This legislation recognizes a simple but powerful truth:

**When fathers thrive, children thrive.  
When children thrive, families thrive.  
And when families thrive, communities prosper.**

The establishment of the Office of Fatherhood and Family Engagement and its Advisory Council will create a lasting framework to support fathers, strengthen families, improve outcomes for children, and build a stronger Westchester County for generations to come.

cc: James Silverberg, Legislative Director  
Dylan Tragni, Chief of Staff