AN ACT

1 Establishing the Pennsylvania Advisory Commission on Greater
2 Father Family Involvement within the Department of Human
3 Services and providing for its powers and duties.
4 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
5 hereby enacts as follows:
6 Section 1. Short title.
7 This act shall be known and may be cited as the Greater
8 Father Family Involvement Act.
9 Section 2. Definitions.
10 The following words and phrases when used in this act shall
11 have the meanings given to them in this section unless the
12 context clearly indicates otherwise:
13 "Commission." The Pennsylvania Advisory Commission on
14 Greater Father Family Involvement.
15 "Department." The Department of Human Services of the
16 Commonwealth.
17 Section 3. Findings and declaration of policy.
18 The General Assembly finds and declares as follows:
(1) In the absence of public policy that promotes greater father involvement and sustainability in the life of their children, too many children will likely not have full parental support to achieve economic stability and wealth acquisition, and thus are unlikely to be able to maintain themselves and enhance their family's well-being.

(2) Research shows that father involvement is associated with better outcomes for child well-being.

(3) Fathers are role models, caretakers, providers and advocates.

(4) When a child has the benefit of access to both a mother and father, the child is more likely to exhibit healthy behaviors, excel in school and achieve emotional well-being.

(5) Approximately 24 million or 35% of the nation's children are being raised in single-parent households, often without access to their fathers and their emotional and financial support.

(6) Systemic barriers are impediments to greater father involvement in the lives of children and families in this Commonwealth, including the following:

   (i) Stigma linked to seeking behavioral health services and the lack of prioritization among behavioral health entities and staff.

   (ii) Child support orders that often overlook circumstances and obstacles to fathers' engagement with families.

   (iii) Housing, supervised independent living and homelessness systems fail to prioritize fathers with children.
(iv) The educational and support services system fails to prioritize the involvement of fathers as equal co-parents.

(7) A father's absence or noninvolvement can have a negative impact on a child's well-being from birth forward, including economic deprivation, higher odds of incarceration, twice the odds of becoming a high school dropout, higher odds of smoking, drinking and using drugs and a higher risk of physical, emotional or economic neglect.

(8) Fathers should be fully present and engaged in providing the emotional, social, physical, intellectual, spiritual and financial contributions that their children need to ensure safety, permanency and well-being.

(9) Father involvement is a protective factor for children that aids in the development of resilience and mitigates certain psychological and social risks in the adulthood of children.

(10) The public policy of the Commonwealth is to end systemic barriers that impede fathers in fostering supportive connections with their children, establishing support mechanisms to enhance the ability of fathers to assume a beneficial parenting role with their children and assisting men in preparing for the legal, financial and emotional responsibilities of fatherhood.

Section 4. Pennsylvania Advisory Commission on Greater Father Family Involvement.

(a) Establishment.--The Pennsylvania Advisory Commission on Greater Father Family Involvement is established as an advisory commission within the department.

(b) Membership.--The commission shall consist of
commissioners who shall be appointed as follows:

(1) Twelve commissioners shall be appointed by the Governor, not more than six of whom must be registered in the same political party.

(2) Eight commissioners shall be appointed from the General Assembly as follows:

(i) Two commissioners selected by the President pro tempore of the Senate.

(ii) Two commissioners selected by the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

(iii) Two commissioners selected by the Minority Leader of the Senate.

(iv) Two commissioners selected by the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives.

(3) One commissioner shall be appointed by the Chief Justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

(c) Initial terms.—The initial terms of the commissioners shall be as follows:

(1) The commissioners appointed by the Governor shall be staggered as follows:

(i) Four commissioners shall be appointed for an initial term of one year, and then to a term of three years, until their successor is appointed.

(ii) Four commissioners shall be appointed for an initial term of two years, and then to a term of three years, until their successor is appointed.

(iii) Four commissioners shall be appointed for a term of three years, and then to a term of three years, until their successor is appointed.

(2) The commissioners selected by the General Assembly
shall serve for a term coterminous with the term of the appointing authority.

(3) The commissioner appointed by the Chief Justice shall serve for a term of five years and until the successor commissioner is appointed.

(d) Reimbursement.--The commissioners shall be reimbursed by the department for all necessary and reasonable expenses incurred in connection with the performance of their duties as members of the commission.

(e) Vacancies.--A vacancy that occurs in an office of a commissioner prior to the expiration of a term caused by death, resignation, removal or for any other reasons shall be filled in the manner prescribed in subsection (b).

(f) Forfeiture for nonattendance.--A commissioner who fails to attend two consecutive meetings of the commission shall forfeit the seat, unless the chairperson of the commission receives written notification from the commissioner that the absence was due to personal illness or the death or illness of an immediate family member.

(g) Chairperson.--The Governor shall designate one of the commissioners to be chairperson, who shall preside at all meetings of the commission and perform all the duties and functions of the chairperson. The commission may designate one of the members to be the acting chairperson during the absence or incapacity of the chairperson and, when so acting, the acting chairperson shall have and perform all the powers and duties of the chairperson.

(h) Other officers.--The commission may select other officers as necessary to carry out the powers and duties of the commission prescribed in section 5.
Meetings.--The commission shall meet at least four times per year in the City of Harrisburg, but may convene meetings at other locations deemed convenient and appropriate for the purposes of the commission.

Quorum.--Eleven members of the commission shall constitute a quorum, and a majority of those present shall be sufficient for any official action taken by the commission.

Open meetings.--The meetings of the commission shall be conducted in accordance with the provisions of 65 Pa.C.S. Ch. 7 (relating to open meetings).

Annual report.--The commission shall issue an annual report to the Governor and to the General Assembly regarding responsible fatherhood programs and issues within this Commonwealth.

Section 5. Powers and duties of the commission.

(a) General rule.--The commission shall:

(1) Work with State and local government and other entities through collaboration, coordination, research and consultation to recognize and promote the contributions that fathers make to improving societal outcomes for children and families.

(2) Subject to subsection (b):

(i) Evaluate governmental programs and initiatives that impact fatherhood and make recommendations regarding impediments, needed improvements and successful implementation of those programs and initiatives.

(ii) Develop a comprehensive State plan that will support early connection of fathers to their children beginning in the gestational stage of child development throughout the life of the child.
(iii) Promote and continue to support programs and entities that foster the following:

(A) Parenting programs that assist fathers in preparing for, finding and securing employment.

(B) Parenting through skill-based educational programs.

(C) Development of conflict resolution skills training.

(iv) Propose changes to statutes, administrative rules and regulations and policy that impede the development or implementation of greater father involvement measures, or that will enhance the prospect of success of those measures.

(b) Staff and grants.--Subject to available resources, the commission may employ such staff and award grants as necessary to perform its duties and functions prescribed in this act.

(c) Reports.--The commission may issue reports regarding responsible fatherhood programs and issues that the commission deems will aid in understanding, evaluating or improving the successful implementation of such programs and issues.

Section 6. Effective date.

This act shall take effect in 60 days.