

# Children of Incarcerated Parents Initiative

## Interagency Working Group

### June 12, 2013

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2007, an estimated 1.7 million children under the age of 18 had a parent in prison, an increase of almost 80 percent since 1991. The negative consequences for children with an incarcerated parent can be substantial, including financial instability, changes in family structure, shame, and social stigma. However, research also shows that supporting healthy and positive relationships between these vulnerable children, who are the innocent bystanders of adult decisions, and their families has the potential to mitigate negative outcomes.

An interagency group that includes the Departments of Justice, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Education and Agriculture and the Social Security Administration has partnered with stakeholders both inside and outside of government to identify opportunities to support these children and their caregivers.

#### ***Sesame Street Campaign to Support Young Children of Incarcerated Parents***

**Sesame Street Bilingual, Multimedia Initiative.** Sesame Street is launching its “Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration” Initiative, which will include bilingual (English/Spanish) materials for young children of incarcerated parents, their families and caregivers, and the range of other professionals who touch these children. These free educational resources will include a Sesame Street DVD, live action film showcasing families and an animated short segment, a children’s story book, a guide for parents and caregivers, and a tip sheet for incarcerated parents. In addition, Sesame has created various digital resources, including a *Sesame Street: Incarceration* app for parents to use on tablets and phones and a toolkit on [sesamestreet.org/incarceration](http://sesamestreet.org/incarceration). Sesame Street will make these resources available to interested Federal agencies.

#### ***Enhanced Training to Improve Outcomes for Children of Incarcerated Parents***

**Toolkit for Child Welfare and Federal Corrections Professionals.** This toolkit, which can be found [here](#), provides resources to enhance the collaboration between child welfare agencies and Federal prisons and residential reentry centers, so incarcerated parents can stay engaged in their children’s lives and work towards reunification, where appropriate. The Bureau of Prisons and the Administration for Children and Families will join together to produce two training sessions on the toolkit for Bureau institution staff.

**Capacity-Building Training for Service Providers.** The Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will provide its signature capacity building/grant-writing training to community-oriented service providers working with children of incarcerated parents and their families. The training is principally tailored for emerging and intermediate organizations and will

strengthen local capacity to serve children impacted by a parent's incarceration. The initial trainings will take place in Camden, NJ, and Baltimore, MD.

**Webinar for Faith-Based Leaders.** The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the Department of Justice (DOJ) are hosting a webinar for faith leaders to discuss the potential impact on children who have an incarcerated parent, including the impacts on the health and safety of youth at risk of delinquency due to parent absenteeism, and how these leaders and their congregations can become change agents in their communities.

### ***Mitigating the Impact on Children at the Time of a Parent's Arrest and Detention***

**Model Arrest Protocol.** Research indicates that the arrest of a parent can have significant negative impacts on a child's wellness and perceptions of authority, especially when the parent is apprehended in the child's presence. The arrest of a parent also may present serious challenges for arresting officers who may be called on to meet both law enforcement and child protection goals. To address these challenges, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, with funding support from DOJ's Bureau of Justice Assistance, is developing a model protocol and training on protecting the physical and emotional well-being of children when their parents are arrested. Participating organizations will include the National Sheriffs' Association, Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Marshal Service, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Drug Enforcement Administration, and state and local law enforcements, as well as experts in the field of child protective services, including the Administration for Children and Families and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

**Promising Practices for Local and State Governments.** DOJ's National Institute of Corrections will provide funding to develop a framework to guide State and local governments interested in enacting policy changes that will mitigate the impact of a parent's incarceration on children. The framework will examine the potential impacts to children at the various stages of the criminal justice system, including arrest and detention, the pre-adjudication phase, trial, and re-entry. The project will highlight innovations and promising practices with proven records of success.

### ***Improving Facility-Based Programming and Policies***

**Improving Family Connections.** The President's FY14 budget seeks **\$5 million** for demonstration grants to enhance parental and family relationships for incarcerated parents as an offender reentry and recidivism-reduction strategy; and **\$2 million** for the Bureau of Prisons to support visitation and education programs to strengthen family and parental ties.

**Enhanced Parenting Programs.** Approximately 58 percent of offenders in the Federal prison system have children under the age of 21. To assist these incarcerated parents, the Bureau of Prisons provides reentry programs designed to build positive parenting skills and foster family ties, where appropriate. Information about new model parents programs

is available in the Bureau's new model programs catalog available to staff at all federal prisons.

**Guidance from the Bureau of Prisons.** Bureau of Prisons Director Charles Samuels will issue a message to the inmate population underscoring the importance of inmates' role as parents. The Director is encouraging inmates to cultivate meaningful relationships with their children, family and communities through visitation, telephone calls, electronic messaging, and written correspondence. Inmate parents also will be encouraged to participate in parenting and other reentry programming (e.g., substance abuse, education) to strengthen their role as a parent, both while behind bars and upon release.

### *Incentivizing Stronger Research and Data Collection*

**Research Workshop on Children of Incarcerated Parents.** The National Science Foundation is sponsoring a workshop on the effects of a parent's incarceration on children. The workshop will convene researchers and policy makers to review what is known about the life-course effects of the incarceration of parents on the well-being of children, and develop an agenda for further study and integration of future research and policy formation on the topic.

**Improved Data Collection.** The Bureau of Justice Statistics Survey of Prison Inmates (SPI) generates nationally-representative estimates of the characteristics of prisoners, including the number of incarcerated parents and their minor children. The SPI now will go a step further and also measure, among other relevant data, the involvement of incarcerated parents in the lives of their minor children prior to the parent's incarceration and the extent to which children maintain connections with their incarcerated parents after the parent's incarceration. The SPI also will identify who is taking care of the minor children of incarcerated parents during the parent's incarceration, including the rate at which minor children are placed in foster care. Following a pilot test, the new and improved SPI will be released in 2014.

**Video Visitation Research.** Through a National Institute of Justice grant, the Vera Institute will research the impact of video visitation on incarcerated parents and their families. The study will analyze the State of Washington's deployment of video visitation technology and the potential impact on the frequency and nature of visits to incarcerated individuals, these individuals' compliance while in custody, and reductions in recidivism.

**Support for Evidence-Based COIP Mentoring Programs.** OJJDP will host a Mentoring for Children of Incarcerated Parents Listening Session, to explore the dimensions of existing mentoring programs and evidence-based models to ensure successful and constructive mentoring relationships. OJJDP will use the information to adjust existing programs, where possible, and develop future opportunities to assist children of incarcerated parents.

**Innovative and Promising Practices for Public Housing Authorities.** HUD is surveying eight model Public Housing Authorities to identify proven and promising reentry housing models, including those that focus on family reunification, parental supportive services, and permanent supportive housing to help end chronic homelessness. Promotion of these

model reentry housing programs, which incorporate support for children of incarcerated parents, will enable collaboration among local stakeholders and housing providers and better leveraging of local, state and federal resources.

### ***Amplifying Public Awareness and Outreach***

**Children of Incarcerated Parents Web Portal.** This website, found [here](#), will consolidate, in a single online location, information regarding Federal resources, grant opportunities, best and promising practices, and ongoing government initiatives that support children of incarcerated parents and their caregivers. The portal provides user-friendly information for stakeholders, including local and state governments, which wish to initiate their own collaborative processes to improve support for these children. For example, visit the portal to view the Children of Incarcerated Parents Framing Paper, which outlines the challenges children of incarcerated parents and their families face and provides strategies for service providers on how to enhance these children’s social and emotional well-being.

**COIP Myth Buster Series.** These one-page fact sheets correct common misperceptions and raise awareness to help service providers better care for and meet the needs of children of incarcerated parents and their families. The Children of Incarcerated Parents Myth Busters, found [here](#), are part of a larger series designed by the Federal Interagency Reentry Council led by the Attorney General.

**“Mommies and Daddies In Prison” Booklet.** The Bureau of Prisons has collaborated with authors of an existing publication, “Mommies and Daddies in Jail,” to create a Bureau-based version entitled “Mommies and Daddies in Prison.” The booklet will provide children who have a parent in Federal prison with information about their parents’ daily experience, as well as details regarding visitation, correspondence, and other topics. The goal is to help allay children’s fears about their parents’ situation, help them understand what to expect when visiting and corresponding, and, where appropriate, nurture the parent-child bond.