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## **FAMILY COURT AND ATTORNEY GENERAL SINGER'S OFFICE PARTNER TO LAUNCH NEW FATHERING COURT**

### ***-- INNOVATIVE PROGRAM SUPPORTS EX-OFFENDERS IN PARENTING --***

Washington, D.C. -- With one in four D.C. prisoners owing court-ordered child support, Family Court Presiding Judge Anita Josey-Herring, D.C. Attorney General Linda Singer and Magistrate Judge Milton Lee joined together today to unveil the new Fathering Court program.

The Fathering Court will provide parents, with an initial focus on those who have recently been incarcerated, with the tools to become emotionally and financially responsible for their children. The Fathering Court will combine needs-assessment, case management, and community resources -- with an emphasis on employment -- to give non-custodial parents the ability to meet the needs of their children.

Judge Anita Josey-Herring, Attorney General Linda Singer, and Magistrate Judge Miton Lee joined together at a press conference outside of the Superior Court's Family Court entrance to the courthouse to unveil the new Fathering Court program. The program will provide parents, with an initial focus on those who have recently been incarcerated, with the tools to become emotionally and financially responsible for their children. The Fathering Court will combine needs-assessment, case management, and community resources -- with an emphasis on employment -- to give non-custodial parents the ability to meet the needs of their children.

"The Fathering Court is a unique effort to help fathers returning from prison become better parents - financially and emotionally - to their children. Through a partnership with the District's Office of Attorney General and Department of Employment Services, along with many other governmental and private sector partners, we will be able to help them find gainful employment, slowly increase the amount of child support they owe, and to develop meaningful relationships with their children. Custodial parents will get the child support they are due, fathers will have a chance to meet their support requirements, and the relationship between parent and child will be about more than just money," Judge Josey-Herring said. "We are thrilled to have two strong D.C. agency partners join with us to improve the lives of the District's children."

“Parents coming out of prison have many strikes against them and this program is designed to give them a fighting chance to be a parent to their child or children,” Attorney General Singer said. “This program helps dispel the notion that Deadbeat Dads are Deadbeat Dads because they want to be. Many times, it’s because they don’t have the resources they need or the help to turn themselves around. We are going to give them some help. While most parents who will be in this program are fathers, it’s also open to mothers. It will help parents connect with their children and break the cycle of children failing to connect with their parents”

“I look forward to this new challenge. Judges who hear child support cases can grow weary of excuses, just as those returning from prison can grow weary of job application rejections, and custodial parents can grow weary of not receiving court-ordered child support. And the children living without the benefit of appropriate financial and emotional support from both parents are the ones who suffer most,” said Magistrate Judge Milton Lee, who will preside over Fathering Court cases. “This program will reverse that cycle, helping previously-incarcerated fathers have a meaningful role in their children’s lives. We know that children benefit from having both parents involved in their lives. Moreover, offenders are less likely to re-offend when they are appropriately connected to their families. In the end the community benefits when those returning from a period of incarceration have a meaningful opportunity to be productive parents.”

Critical components of the program include an initial comprehensive needs assessment, followed by skill development opportunities, case management through D.C. Superior Court, peer support and completion of a mandatory curriculum. Other services will include housing assistance and referrals, substance abuse treatment and counseling, mediation services, referrals for legal assistance and any other assistance necessary.

Non-custodial parents must participate in employment training, complete fathering classes, family and parent educational classes and maintain sobriety, which will be monitored through mandatory drug testing. Each participant’s progress will be closely supervised, monitored and tracked both by an individual case manager and the Fathering Court Program Manager. The Fathering Court Judge and the Project Manager will work with a team of key stakeholders, including the D.C. Office of the Attorney General, Child Support Services Division, the Court Offender and Supervision Agency, the Bureau of Prisons, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and the Department of Human Services, Fatherhood Initiative, among others.