



April 28, 2008

Mr.
Vice President,
Fox Broadcasting Company

RE: "Bad Dad" TV show pilot.

I am writing you on behalf of the California Alliance for Families and Children ("CAFC") to express serious concerns regarding your reported plans to air a reality TV show entitled "Bad Dads", produced by 3Ball Productions. CAFC is a statewide organization made up of attorneys, economic/financial experts, mental health & medical practitioners, and parents dedicated to fair and balanced policies effecting families and children.

Let me first state that while many "men's groups" are already upset and organizing around the country because of this pilot there is no question there are some "bad dads" who have the financial means and legal obligation to support their children. They should pay, period – no excuses. These men however are very small minorities compared to most fathers who struggle to meet their obligations, often even supporting a second family.

I hope the following perspective and research information will give your network greater insight before you risk alienating a significant percentage of your male viewing audience and prospective program advertisers.

The Premise of the Program is Factually Inaccurate –

This show like many others ignores an "inconvenient truth" - the unknown FACT is that women fail to comply with child support orders at substantially higher rates than men. Research proves that non-custodial mothers default on their court ordered child support payments at a much higher rate, 46.9%, compared to the 29.9% rate of non-custodial fathers. Significantly, women are responsible for 15% of all child support orders. There is no moral high ground here for either group. *Source: Sanford Braver, Arizona State University; Divorced Dads: Shattering the Myths, (Tarcher/Putnam: 1998), (This is the largest federally, funded research study ever conducted on the issue), and Garansky and Meyer, DHHS Technical Analysis Paper No. 42, 1991.*

You Insult All Male Viewers -

Let's start with the program title – "Bad Dads". It is a broad brush that will insult all "Good Dads", those married and those divorced who support their children. Given the high divorce rate in this country we are talking about a significant portion of your male viewers. Also consider what message this title sends to young children. Most men meet their obligations and resent being labeled as "bad" or "deadbeats" because of the actions of a minority. This program will merely perpetuate old myths and distorts the facts regarding child support in this country. The truth is well documented. The Braver study cited above found that:

- Fathers with joint custody pay 90.2% of all child support orders.
- Fathers with visitation rights pay 79.1%.
- Much of this data was also substantiated in a *Census Bureau report, Series P-23, No. 173.*

While I understand the program will go after men with significant resources it will continue the myth that most men have the financial resources but still do not pay their support obligations. The reality is otherwise. The Urban Institute and the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) have both studied this problem and found that:

- 80 percent of unpaid child support debt is owed by parents with less than \$15,000 net income. Over half of the arrears are owed by debtors with less than \$10,000 income but more than \$20,000 in debt.
- Only 1 percent of child support debtors have net incomes over \$50,000.
- 70 percent of the arrears are owed to the government—to repay welfare costs—rather than to families.
- 27 percent of the debt is unpaid interest.
(See footnote below for citation source)

Private Child Support Collection Agencies Are Also a Problem

Ignoring the obvious conflict of interest and business this program will generate for the National Child Support Center you should be aware that the predatory practices of many private child support collection agencies were so objectionable that the California Legislature in 2006 enacted consumer protections against such companies. (AB 2781 (Leno). See http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/05-06/bill/asm/ab_2751-800/ab_2781_cfa_20060629_133157_sen_comm.html)

If you are really interested in a heart grabbing “reality family” show based on facts let me suggest a few ideas:

- More than 100,000 men are paying child support for kids that are not theirs due to paternity fraud by woman. National studies report that nearly one in three paternity blood tests prove negative. Ask Maury Povich.
- Hundreds if not thousands of military reservists come home from Iraq and Afghanistan and are treated as “Bad Deadbeat Dads” (some even arrested getting off the plane) because they defaulted on their support orders when the orders could not be modified prior to deployment. These heroes were treated as criminals when in fact nearly two thirds were entitled to a downward modification of their support order because they were actually making less in the military than their civilian jobs.
- Other military came home to find they lost custody to their children while fighting for our freedom.

In closing, I hope the above information will encourage you to seriously reconsider producing this program. Reality “entertainment” that fails to accurately represent the true facts of an issue can cause more harm than good. Thank you for your consideration of this information.

Sincerely,

Michael Robinson
Executive Director
Cell (916)

(See, The Urban Institute studies on child support can be found at: <http://www.urban.org/expert.cfm?ID=ElaineSorensen> and specifically in the report titled: *Strategies for Preventing the Accumulation of Child Support Arrears and Managing Existing Arrears: An Update*, by Paula Roberts, Center for Law and Social Policy and Elaine Sorensen The Urban Institute, October 6, 2005, http://www.clasp.org/publications/strategies_for_child_support_arrears.pdf. Much of the same data was also reported again in the recent *CLASP Policy Brief, Child Support Series, March 2007, Brief No. 2*, http://www.clasp.org/publications/cs_brief_2.pdf.