



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**LOCAL DADS SUPPORT FATHERHOOD RESOURCES IN MINNESOTA  
SENATE TESTIMONY**

*The FATHER Project program promotes economic stability and supportive parenting with dads statewide, leading to happier, healthier kids*

PARK RAPIDS, MN (March 27, 2017) –Representatives from the CHI St. Joseph’s Health FATHER (Fostering Actions to Help Earnings and Responsibility) Project recently appeared in front of the Minnesota Senate Jobs and Economic Growth Finance and Policy Committee. They testified in support of a bill funding FATHER Project programs throughout Minnesota.

“This program really helps fathers to try and re-establish their relationships with their family,” said Senator Mark Koran (R – District 32), who introduced the testifiers. “Senate File 1504 builds on the established and successful model for supporting dads and their kids across the state of Minnesota.”

“In 2010, a community needs assessment was done, and help for fathers and fatherhood resources were at the top of the list in Hubbard County,” explained Joe Johnson, FATHER Project coordinator. After receiving training and guidance from Goodwill-Easter Seals’ FATHER Project, they implemented the same service model in Park Rapids, featuring parent groups, leadership groups, employment services, legal services and collaborations with other agencies. It has since expanded to Cass County

and Becker County. “We’ve enrolled 357 fathers since opening our doors [five years ago] who have come from all walks of life. Most are low income, many are not custodial, many have addiction problems, most have no idea how the court system works. Of all the fathers we’ve helped fill out child custody and parenting time orders that actually made the full commitment of filing with the courts and proceeding with the custody hearings, 80 percent of them were unified with their children in a multitude of ways — a positive outcome that brings so much hope to fathers.”

“I grew up in a two-parent, loving and supporting home. Not everyone has that,” testified Matt Zimmerman, a past FATHER Project participant and current lead facilitator in the Cass County extension program. “Many fathers who did not have that opportunity — or became divorced or separated — believe that the system or life is against them. This program helps give all of us fathers confidence in parenting. It goes beyond that, though. It makes us better spouses, partners, employees and members of our community.”

After their testimonies, Senate File 1504 was laid over for possible inclusion in the omnibus budget bill. Senator Paul Utke (R – District 2) sits on the Senate Jobs Committee and greeted his constituents, Johnson and Zimmerman, after their testimony.

To learn more about the FATHER Project or to sign up, please contact Joe Johnson at 218.255.2063 or [JosephJohnson@catholichealth.net](mailto:JosephJohnson@catholichealth.net). To make a donation, please contact CHI St. Joseph’s Health Foundation at 218.616.3383.

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**(L-R) Guy Bowling**, Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota FATHER Project Workforce Development Manager; **Matt Zimmerman**, FATHER Project Lead Facilitator, Cass County; **Joe Johnson**, FATHER Project Coordinator, Park Rapids; **Michael Wirth-Davis**, Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota President and CEO; and **Andrew Freeberg**, Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota Director of Community Programs.



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Joe Johnson, CHI St. Joseph's Health Community Health Father Project Coordinator during testimony (L-R: Wirth-Davis, Koran, Johnson, Zimmerman).

**About CHI St. Joseph's Health**

*CHI St. Joseph's Health is a 25-bed critical access hospital serving communities in Hubbard, Becker, Cass and Wadena Counties since 1946. In recent years, CHI St. Joseph's Health's award-winning teams received several national honors including: The Joint Commission Top Performer on Key Quality Measures in surgery; Top 100 Critical Access Hospital, HealthStrong; WomenCertified's America's Best Hospitals Women's Choice Award in obstetrics; and the Studer Group Fire Starter Healthcare Organization of the Month among other national, regional and state recognitions.*

**About CHI**

*St. Joseph Hospital is part of Catholic Health Initiatives (CHI), a national nonprofit health system based in Englewood, Colorado. The faith-based system operates in 18 states and includes 103 hospitals, as well as long-term care, assisted- and residential living communities; community health services organizations; home health agencies and outpatient facilities and services. In fiscal year 2016, CHI provided more than \$1.1 billion in financial assistance and community benefit. CHI generated operating revenues of \$15.9 billion and has total assets of approximately \$22.7 billion.*

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