FACT SHEET FOR UNMARRIED MOMS
QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ABOUT ACKNOWLEDGING PATERNITY

Tennessee Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity (TN VAoP) Program

Below are some common misconceptions that parents may have about acknowledging paternity…

Question: **"If I don't have the father of my child sign this form, will I be refused public assistance?"**
Answer: Your case worker will decide the best way to proceed to benefit both you and your child.

Question: **"What if I'm not sure he's the father?"**
Answer: If either of you are unsure, do not sign the *VAoP* form. Instead, you may contact your local child support agency and request genetic testing.

Question: "**We know he's not the biological father, but he really wants to be a father to this child."**
Answer: It is wonderful that he wants to be involved in the child's life. However, this is a legal document in which you are swearing to the fact that he is the biological and legal father of the child. If the biological father is unable or unwilling to provide for his child there are other options such as adoption.

Question: "**The father and I are minors. Can we sign this form?"**
Answer: Yes. In Tennessee, minors can sign the *VAoP* to acknowledge paternity if your parent or guardian is willing to sign consent and be present when you sign the form.

Question: **"If I sign this can the father take the child away from me?"**
Answer: No. Tennessee law states the mother is the legal custodial parent of the child, unless a court says otherwise. However, by signing the *VAoP*, the father will have the right to pursue formal custody or visitation through the courts.

Question: "**Will the State come after the father for child support if he signs this form?"**
Answer: Signing the *VAoP* form does not mean that the father will automatically be made to pay support. Though, if the mother is receiving public assistance through the Tennessee Department of Human Services or does so in the future, support may be set for the father.

Question: **"If I don't need him to pay child support, why should we sign?"**
Answer: Acknowledging paternity does a lot more than allow for child support. For example:

- It allows the child to know his/her father
- It allows the father to add the child to his insurance
- It gives the child rights to veteran and Social Security benefits
- It gives the father legal rights to custody or visitation and to be involved in the child's life.

Question: **"What if the father is not available to sign because he's in jail [or in the military]?"**
Answer: You can contact your local health department or child support office to make an appointment to complete the *VAoP* form. They have a process in place to assist you.