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Fathers Made Responsible

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Already Oregon's new "fugitive fathers" law is proving its worth. Through action taken in Circuit Judge Donald E. Long's court in Portland the other day, a mother residing in Kansas was assured of assistance from her ex-husband here in support of their minor child. Similar action is contemplated to compel two fathers now in California to support their Portland children.

Thirty-seven states and two U. S. possessions—Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands—now have laws providing for reciprocal prosecution of fathers who have fled to other states to avoid paying support money for their offspring. Twenty-three states, including Oregon, adopted such measures this year. New York started the movement in 1948 and laws of the other states are modeled after the original.

Briefly, this is how the reciprocal laws work: Proceedings are instituted in a state court to compel support of dependents when the person responsible for their support lives in another state having a similar law. The court's findings are forwarded to the proper officials in the state where the father lives and the courts of that state fix the amount he must pay.

In the past a negligent father frequently was able to avoid his responsibility simply by moving to another state. There was no effective civil remedy and criminal prosecution often was impractical because of the high cost of extradition. When the 11 remaining states adopt similar laws, an ill that long has been a despair to abandoned wives and children and a costly burden to welfare agencies will be virtually eliminated.