

BENEFITS OF A HEALTHY MARRIAGE

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY
AND FAMILY POLICY
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
UNITED STATES SENATE
ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS
SECOND SESSION

MAY 5, 2004



Printed for the use of the Committee on Finance

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

95-266—PDF

WASHINGTON : 2004

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
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BENEFITS OF A HEALTHY MARRIAGE

WEDNESDAY, MAY 5, 2004

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY
AND FAMILY POLICY,
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE,
Washington, DC.

The hearing was convened, pursuant to notice, at 10:05 a.m., in room SD-215, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Rick Santorum (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Also present: Senator Bunning.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICK SANTORUM, A U.S. SENATOR FROM PENNSYLVANIA, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY AND FAMILY POLICY

Senator SANTORUM. Welcome, everybody. Let me open this hearing with my thanks to the staff, and in particular Senator Breaux and his staff, Senator Baucus, for putting together, I think, excellent panels of witnesses together to come and discuss a very important issue, a very timely issue, and that is the issue of healthy marriages.

In fact, is marriage a public good that government can just simply choose to continue to ignore, or is it something that is a public good that we should cease to be neutral on and try to, in fact, encourage support and enhance as something that is beneficial to children?

I think you will hear from witnesses today that will certainly provide lots of statistical support for that assertion, but also good for mothers, for fathers, and for communities, and thereby for this country.

This is a hearing to focus, in particular, on the President's proposal on healthy marriages, his idea that was debated here on this panel several weeks ago in the debate on welfare reform, and continues to be a topic of discussion as we hope to come back on the issue of welfare sometime later this year, and move forward on this initiative.

But also in the larger context, as we are having the debate on marriage itself, what marriage means, and what benefits, if any, there are to society of stable, two-parent families.

This is a hearing focused, in particular, on low-income individuals and the impact of marriage on them, on their children, and on the communities in which they live. We have an impressive list of speakers here to testify, which I will call up.

First, Ms. Julie Baumgardner. Julie, come on up. As well as Joe Jones, if you can come up. Bring the folks, the Grimeses, and Dominick Walker, and Charice, if she is here. Yes, I see Charice. We are going to keep Zion in the back. Okay.

Mr. JONES. Not as a hostage, though. Right?

Senator SANTORUM. What is that?

Mr. JONES. Not as a hostage.

Senator SANTORUM. Not as a hostage, no. Zion is asleep in the back. As the father of seven children, when they are asleep, that is a good thing.

So, we appreciate all of you being willing to come here and testify and share your experiences. One of the things that we wanted to have a discussion about was whether, in the communities the welfare bill has a particular impact in, is there a desire, is there a need, is there a want out there for some help in this area? What can government do, and what can organizations who are in support of traditional marriage do to make a positive impact on the community?

We want to see what those experiences are, whether they have been successful, and how they see government as potentially a partner, whether they see it as a potential partner and what government can do to assist them in their efforts in promoting marriage.

Our first witness is Julie Baumgardner. Julie is the executive director of First Things First, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to strengthening families located in Chattanooga, Tennessee. For those of you who are interested, you can look at the organization's website, which is www.firstthings.org.

In the year 2000, my notes say, Tennessee ranked second to Nevada in divorce rate. Most of her research focuses on building marital relationships and strategies to keep the marriage bond strong between mothers and fathers. In turn, that will benefit children.

Julie, we look forward to your testimony, and you can proceed.

STATEMENT OF JULIE BAUMGARDNER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FIRST THINGS FIRST, CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE

Ms. BAUMGARDNER. Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I am honored to appear before you today.

I know that you have heard about the benefits of marriage and the disadvantages of family breakdown. But what I want to address today is the skepticism that nothing can really be done about the breakdown of the family, and those people who think that marriage is an outmoded institution, and whether or not government should be involved.

I want to testify to you about my 7 years of firsthand experience as part of an experiment to see if we could actually stop the epidemic, reverse the trend, and change the divorce culture in our community.

In the mid-1990's, civic leaders of Chattanooga became interested in community revitalization. They rebuilt the riverfront. They spruced up the streets. They brought people back downtown. They built the largest fresh-water aquarium in the world.

However, they looked around and realized that one of the most important parts of the community, the family, was not being spruced up.

Like the rest of the country, these leaders did not know if anything could be done about this problem, but they decided to give it a try. They put up private money and they made the decision that we could not revitalize Chattanooga without revitalizing the family. They decided they were going to put first things first, so they started the organization First Things First.

What we knew when we started, was our divorce rate was 50 percent higher than the national average, than the rest of the country. Not only that, our out-of-wedlock pregnancies were off the charts: 50 percent of the babies born in the city were born out of wedlock.

But we knew we had great reason for hope, because the people of Chattanooga, on an early survey, told us they believed in marriage, they believed in two-parent families. And we figured, if they valued it, they wanted to learn how to do it.

You have all heard the saying, build it and they will come. Well, I am here to tell you, offer marriage education and information about building strong families, and they will come.

In 7 years, there is not anywhere that we have not offered these services, and everywhere we have gone, the response has been overwhelming, including working in the prison, places of faith, schools, divorce courts, government agencies, the media, businesses, birthing centers, housing projects, recreation centers, youth groups, juvenile detention, and even the biker community. At our last bike rally—and I am talking motorcycles—we had 500 bikers helping to raise money to strengthen marriages and families.

We did not know how classes would go over in the prison. They went great. In fact, one prisoner told us it was the best class he had ever had, and he learned more in 8 weeks than he had learned in his entire 50 years.

Parents who were required to take a 4-hour class about how divorce affects their children walked away asking, where was this information when we were getting married? Why was this not required of us then? If it had been, maybe we would not be here now.

I know in my heart of hearts that people are people, and this hunger is not unique to Chattanooga. Americans all across this country still believe strongly in marriage. Eighty-five percent marry at least once, and when their marriages fail, they run out and try again. Seventy-five percent marry again within 4 years. They want to be married. They want to raise their children. They just do not know how.

In seven short years, in the process of figuring out how to do this, our community has seen a 27-percent decrease in divorce filings and a 23-percent decrease in out-of-wedlock pregnancies.

Let me repeat that. We have seen a 27-percent decrease in divorce filings and a 23-percent decrease in teen out-of-wedlock pregnancies. The bottom line is that healthy marriage is good for children and adults.

Research shows that children who grow up in a home with their two married biological parents do better in school, find better jobs,

become taxpayers, are less likely to be involved in crime and risky behaviors. This, in turn, leads to a brighter future for our children.

One person at a time, one community at a time, we can educate, collaborate, mobilize and bring positive results to many. If that does not convince you that the government can, should, and must get this vital information out to the people, I do not know what would.

Prevention is significantly less expensive, less painful, and more effective than intervention. If we have information that we know can make a significant, positive difference in the lives of children and adults, we owe it to them to get the information to them. Is that not what government is supposed to do?

Thank you.

Senator SANTORUM. Thank you very much, Julie, for your passionate and persuasive, at least from my perspective, testimony.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Baumgardner appears in the appendix.]

Senator SANTORUM. Next, is Joseph Jones. Joe and I were together just recently with Senator Bayh, talking about an initiative that Senator Bayh and I have been working on fatherhood, on the Fatherhood initiative, which is also a part of the welfare bill.

Joe has extensive experience here locally in the Baltimore area in empowering low-income families, working with men in the community in their roles as husband and fathers, and trying to build healthy and stable relationships in nurturing children.

Joe is the president and CEO of the Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development in Baltimore, and has been up here on Capitol Hill and served on the Congressional Black Caucus annual legislative conference. He has also worked with U.S. AID in Jamaica and has a rather impressive biography, which I will put into the record.

Joe, thank you very much for being here. As part of your testimony, at the conclusion, if you want to introduce your guests and let them speak as part of your presentation, that would be fine.

STATEMENT OF JOSEPH T. JONES, FOUNDER, CENTER FOR FATHERS, FAMILIES, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

Mr. JONES. Great. Thank you, Senator Santorum. I particularly thank you for the opportunity to be here with you today, for the rest of the committee, for the audience, and for some of my colleagues, many of whom will be on the second panel, to present.

I am very pleased that we are now getting to the point where we are getting into the nitty-gritty of the work that has been discussed for the last several years.

I would like to provide an historical context to talk about the work that we did, and how we got to the point where we could even be here today to talk about the benefits of healthy marriage.

Approximately a little over 10 years ago, I began work in Baltimore as a substance abuse counselor, working with pregnant substance-abusing women. In that work of challenging them with getting into early and consistent prenatal care and into drug treatment, I began to encounter the partners of these women, or the fa-

thers of the babies to be born to these women. It was very, very clear.

I was very successful in getting these women into prenatal care and drug treatment. However, they were going back home to male partners who were not able to receive the same set of services, although they had the same and similar type problems.

We eventually convinced the people I reported to at the Baltimore City Health Department that we should include men in our strategies to reduce infant mortality and stabilize families. However, we had no resources to do that.

Fortunately, in 1992, Baltimore City was one of the first recipients of the federally-funded Healthy Start Infant Mortality Reduction Initiative.

Through that application, we were able to design a small pilot program to serve low-income, non-custodial fathers. This is simultaneous to the modern-day evolution of the field of responsible fatherhood.

I am very, very fortunate that I was able to come into this work at a time when the field was beginning to build somewhat of an infrastructure, mainly supported by the private foundation community.

Over the years, we learned that many of the men who we were working with had issue with child support, had been involved in the criminal justice system, had limited information about how to be a good parent, mainly because they were being reared in households that were headed by single females.

Not that single females do not have a role and cannot play a major part in raising young boys, but the problem is, they do not have the influence and the guidance of men to help shape their values and beliefs as they grow into adulthood. So, the fatherhood field began to grapple with these issues and help transform these men into good fathers, good partners.

Over the years, it became clear that that was not enough, that we had to find ways in which to create strategies to help men learn how to stick in there, even when the going gets rough. We were forced to think about the issue of marriage, not because we were strategically positioned to do so.

Let me tell you exactly how we got involved in this. On a Monday night during the football season, when Monday night football was about to come on, I got a call from Dwayne Grimes. Dwayne asked me, would I come over to his house and sit down with him and Brenda and talk with them. I said, sure. But to be honest with you, I was hoping this would be a short conversation so I could get home and watch Monday night football.

However, that conversation turned into rather a long conversation, because they told me they wanted to get married. In the back of my mind I am saying, all right, that is fine. But why are you telling me you want to get married? They said, we want to get married at your center, which was a whole different proposition, because we had never experienced it, never done it, never even considered it.

And the only thing I could think of, was to ask God to give me some kind of respectful response to this couple who had been a part

of our service delivery system that would make sense to them, and would also respect them.

I asked them if they would find a member of the faith community of their own choosing who would provide them with premarital counseling, and that faith leader would talk to me and say, I believe that this family can make it. Then we would consider hosting their wedding at our facility.

To be honest with you, I was kind of hoping they did not take me up on my word. But they pulled forward. They met with the faith leader. He called me and said, I believe this thing will work. Not only do I believe it will work, I will continue to work with them. I will perform the ceremony at your center.

I was stuck. So, we had to move forward and give them the opportunity to get married at our center. I am pleased to tell you that they got married at our center over 3 years ago. Today, they are still married, in a very strong, committed relationship.

I want to provide you a little context in terms of how difficult it was for them to work through those issues. Dwayne, at that time, had approximately \$30,000 in child support arrearage, in addition to the monthly payment that he was supposed to make. They were also living in public housing, where Dwayne was not necessarily supposed to be.

So, the child support that was accruing was the child support associated with the children from their union and the household where Dwayne was residing. That is how complex this situation was.

But they decided that they would deal with all the issues that they faced, and they would be committed to one another and their children. Approximately three years ago, they got married and were able to stick through this.

Now, I would like to tell you that the resources that it takes to work with a family like that are not necessarily that important, but they are extremely important because the fatherhood field does not necessarily have the infrastructure to work with the kind of families like Dwayne's, and others', in the communities where we serve to be able to absorb the number of families who can benefit from those services. So, we told them we would move forward.

I fast-forward to today, where I have with me, Dominick Walker and his fiancée, Charice. As you know, they have a 4-week-old son, Zion, in the back. Well, this young family just completed our 50/50 Parenting Program, a 10-week curriculum that provides information and education to young, struggling couples who are in that magic moment period, clearly, when they have some relationship and romanticism going on.

I think Julie articulated the kinds of struggles that these kinds of families face. They certainly do not have enough information to be able to stabilize their families.

Well, Charice could benefit from the resources of the State, but she refuses to get involved with the State, mainly because she does not want to take Dominick into the child support system. As a result, Dominick works two jobs. They both graduated from high school, from the same high school, and they are managing their young, fragile family.

As a fatherhood practitioner, we have been able to take the limited resources available that could greatly be enhanced with the passage of the bipartisan legislation and provisions in the welfare reauthorization bill submitted by you and Senator Bayh. We are looking forward, as time goes forward, to work through that.

However, I do not think that fatherhood and marriage are an either/or proposition. I think they are complementary to one another. But the challenge is, the fatherhood field and the field of the marriage community has not had an opportunity to really come together and identify issues of common ground where we can begin to work together. The analogy to that is similar to the responsible fatherhood field and the child support community.

Several years ago, those two communities did not talk with one another. Today, we have several intimate partnerships, where child support and responsible fatherhood are working together to deal with the issues similar to what Dwayne faced when he had \$30,000 worth of child support arrears, like we are doing in Baltimore with the child support program and our debt leveraging initiative.

Second, there are many partners in the domestic violence community where fatherhood and domestic violence providers did not come together. As a result of mentoring we received from folks like Dr. Oliver Williams, Ann Minard, and Jody Raphael from the domestic violence community, we were able to forge a partnership with the House of Ruth domestic violence program in Baltimore, where we now have an intimate relationship.

We do not agree on every issue, but what we have done, is said here are a set of common ground principles that we can work on to help serve families so that children do not have to plunge further into poverty, so that as families move forward to think and consider marriage, it becomes a viable option for them and we can provide those resources and the sets of supports.

One of the things I neglected to mention in my submitted testimony, is that the work of the National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families, which is a huge national membership organization for fatherhood practitioners, have begun to think about ways and strategies to partner with the folks in the marriage community to be able to create a seamless set of services so that as low-income dads come into the service delivery system, our systems are prepared to receive them where they are, provide them support, in addition to the education and information on family stabilization so that when they become the kind of people that the women would accept as partners in a committed married relationship, they will be prepared to walk down that aisle, even if it is in a nonprofit organization like the Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Jones appears in the appendix.]

Mr. JONES. With that, I would like to introduce and give an opportunity for the families with me to talk about their experiences. First, we have Dwayne and Brenda Grimes, and then Dominick Walker and Charice Diggs.

Senator SANTORUM. Thank you.

Mr. Grimes?

**STATEMENT OF DWAYNE GRIMES, CENTER FOR FATHERS,
FAMILIES, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
PARTICIPANT, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND, ACCOMPANIED BY
BRENDA GRIMES**

Mr. GRIMES. I am Dwayne Grimes, father of seven kids. Like Joe said, I was reluctant to get into the thing called marriage.

Let me step back for you. I was suffering from an addiction, heroin and cocaine addiction. I have been with my wife, before we got married, for 13 years, like Joe said, living in sin. Until 1 day, I stepped into the program that was called Healthy Start at First to try to get some help to better myself.

I went there, stepped away for a few, came back. I really did not want the thing called life, until 1 day I looked into the mirror and saw someone that was supposed to have been me, but it was not me.

Also, I saw my kids in the background telling me, daddy, help me, help me. That is when I decided to go back into the program to get help with my addiction.

Today, I have 5 years of sobriety, by the grace of God. That is when I decided to go to Joe Jones. I really wanted to marry this woman. I said, she is the only one that has stuck beside me through the good, bad and ugly. My life is like a Clint Eastwood movie. It was. No matter what I did to her, or put her through, or put my kids through, this woman was on my side.

I asked her once to marry me. She told me no. I did not blame her. The next time, she asked me. I said, sure, why not? We decided to call Joe. This was two days after, if I am not mistaken. Joe thought I was joking, but I was dead serious. I wanted to marry this woman. She is the only one that I ever really cared for.

As far as marriage, it was a big step. I really did not understand that thing called responsibility, or being a responsible man. Today, I am a man. I can say that. I am taking care of what a man is supposed to take care of, a wife, kids, everything.

As far as my kids, I have seven beautiful kids. I wish I could have brought them with me. Being married, being with those seven kids in my household without anyone telling me I have got to get out, I cannot be there, is a wonderful feeling. Today, no one can tell me that, that those kids are not mine.

I am a little nervous.

Mr. JONES. That is all right. We will come back to you.

Dominick, do you want to chime in?

**STATEMENT OF DOMINICK WALKER, CENTER FOR FATHERS,
FAMILIES, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
PARTICIPANT, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND, ACCOMPANIED BY
CHARICE DIGGS**

Mr. WALKER. Yes. My experience with CFWD came when my fiancée got pregnant. When I was younger, I had not had the opportunity to get to know my father because he was not actively involved in my life. So, CFWD, they helped me build some kind of foundation, because being a parent does not come with a handbook.

I completed the 50/50 Parenting for my son and for my fiancée to better our relationship and to better the foundation, to fill in all the gaps, basically, that my father and I never had, to be there to

spend time with my son and be actively involved in his life, and do the things that my father did not do with me, to do with him. CFWD helped me build that foundation.

Mr. JONES. How hard is it for you with these two jobs?

Mr. WALKER. It kills me sometimes. I work seven days a week. I work one job Monday through Friday and I work the other job all day Saturday and Sunday. So, I am constantly going to sleep and waking back up. I do not really have time to myself. I do what I can, and that is all we can do. I am only one person. I just try to take things day by day, and just for the most part be there to support my family.

Mr. JONES. Charice and Brenda, as women who are, one younger than the other, but women in the Baltimore community, what is it like for you all to grapple with this issue of stabilizing your families, one in a marriage situation and one aspiring to get there, but dealing with all the struggles associated with that?

Mrs. GRIMES. Basically, it is kind of hard. But I just keep the faith and hold on, and just pray that He makes it better for us. Dealing with six kids, you just do not know. It is not easy. They are getting to be teenagers. They are not little babies any more.

I have a 15-year-old, a soon-to-be 13-year-old, two 11-year-olds, and 8- and a 7-year-old, and it's hard, especially when their father works the hours he works. Then I have to come home from my job, cook, clean. Basically, it's very hard.

Mr. JONES. How different, though, is it being a wife as opposed to a girlfriend?

Mrs. GRIMES. To me, it is the same. I mean, you might as well say we were married. We were together. We just did not have the paper or the ring. To me, it seems like it is the same.

Mr. JONES. Well, if that is the case, then why get married?

Mrs. GRIMES. Get married?

Mr. JONES. Why did you take the step, then?

Mrs. GRIMES. I guess because I wanted that last name.

Mr. JONES. All right.

Mrs. GRIMES. So it will not be, oh, wow, her name is different than all the children. I think it was the last name.

Mr. JONES. Charice?

Ms. DIGGS. Yes. The name is something that really stands for something. It is hard doing what I do, as me being engaged, and Nick never being there. He works a lot and I have to take care of the little boy. It is just, I want that fairytale life. I want to have my son and my husband, and our own home. That is what we are working for. That is what we are here for.

Mr. JONES. So, those are the things you think you need to have before you can make that final leap and say I do, or—

Ms. DIGGS. Oh, no. No. No. Because we have got basically what we need. We have got love and understanding. We understand each other and what we want, what we are out for. There was nothing out here for us. Once we found each other, we just said, hey, how about getting married? How about having a family? I mean, the family part came from partying after high school. I am not going to laugh, but it is—

Mr. JONES. That is the reality.

Ms. DIGGS. Yes. That is just the way it is.

Mr. JONES. Senator, we are very pleased and very willing to answer questions, as hard as they may be. I think for us to really create opportunities in the communities that we are talking about, just for context, Brenda and Dwayne live in East Baltimore, Dominick and Charice reside in West Baltimore, but they both live in the federally-designed empowerment zones, so it gives you some sense of the demographics associated with their day-to-day existence.

But they are here and are strong, committed partners to one another, one married for 3 years, and the other in that pipeline, if you will. They are very prepared to answer any questions, as difficult as they may be.

Senator SANTORUM. Thank you very much, Joe. Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Grimes, and Dominick and Charice. Thank you so much for your testimony, and Julie.

Let me, since we are talking here, focus a couple of questions to you. First, a comment. That is, what you related to me is the difficulty in relationships and marriage, and how it is a struggle. I want to assure you that I think most married couples will say that at points in time in every marriage there is struggle. The key, is how we resolve that struggle, how we get through it.

My question is, did you find—in your case, since you are working with Joe—Joe's organization helpful to you in getting you through some of the more difficult times that you have had to experience in those relationships?

Mrs. GRIMES. I do. I do, because I had lots of problems where I called him, and he talked to me and he let me know that everything was going to be all right. That is all I have to do. If I have any problem, I just call him or one of his employees, and they will talk to you.

Ms. DIGGS. As far as me, I had problems with speaking my feelings. I would rather give him the cold shoulder than to talk it out. During my 50/50 Parenting Program, it helped me to loosen up to the fact that he is not going to read my mind. He does not read minds. We talk now, so it was a lot of help.

Mr. WALKER. It also helped us out in a way with a lot of things. There are a lot of things going on today in the world. It is like, with all the things around us, we are prone to anything, like drugs, everything.

It is just something positive throughout the community, that we can go and we will not have to be affiliated with the street or caught up somewhere we do not want to be. So, being there, between there and work, it was like I wanted to be there. I felt as though I was making that step to change.

Like I said, I never had my father. Everything I basically know, I had to find out on my own. I did not have anybody there to really tell me right from wrong. My mother was there, but she cannot show me how to be a man. I needed my father there for some of the questions I needed answers to.

Senator SANTORUM. Thank you.

Go ahead.

Mr. GRIMES. Right now, my problems have been resolved. Like I said, my biggest problem was my addiction. But I still venture down there. Right now, like I said, I work 10 hours a day, 4 days

a week, 5:00 to 3:30 in the morning. So, I really do not have time to attend the program like I am supposed to.

But I still venture down there when I have problems, like when I have marital problems and I need to talk to a man. I might venture down there and holler at one of the fellows, get some input.

Senator SANTORUM. Can you tell me, if you did not have, in this case, Joe's program, do you think you would be sitting here today? Do you think you would be in a situation where you would either be married or you would be contemplating marriage?

Mr. GRIMES. No, I would not. I would not be sitting here today. I would not even be married, truthfully. I do not know where I would be. Like I said, my issue was my drug addiction. Thank God for them, they helped me out with that.

Senator SANTORUM. Can you say, as a result of you being married, that your children are better off and the two of you are better off?

Mr. GRIMES. Oh, most definitely. Yes, indeed. There is more structure in my house right now than there was back then.

Senator SANTORUM. Thank you.

Joe, I have a question for you with respect to a comment you made, which I thought was somewhat remarkable. You said that the fatherhood groups and the marriage groups are not together. Most people, when they think of fatherhood, they think of marriage. But you are really talking about organizations in the community that promote fatherhood, but do not necessarily promote marriage. Is that a truism? Is that what is happening?

Mr. JONES. I do not think it is necessarily that they do not have the belief that marriage has its place. I would not necessarily say they would actively go out and promote marriage. It is a part of the discussions that happen in the peer support and curriculum groups.

But the problem is, the infrastructure of the fatherhood movement is so fragile, that it is hard for the fatherhood field to take on additional strategic responsibilities and be able to engage external partners such as those in the marriage community. It is sort of like building a house. If you continue to add on to the house and you do not put pillars in to support the infrastructure, it will collapse.

There has been no real strategic efforts, with the exception of a very few, where people have brought the fatherhood community and the marriage community together to have dialogue, discourse and debate to figure out ways in which to merge the two. Like I said, I do not believe they are either/or propositions.

I think there is a firm place in our society where both of these social institutions have a place where they need to work together to get to the point where we can provide the kind of continuum of services that will take somebody from the street through a set of services, deal with any issues that they are dealing with, prepare them for the next step where it is either with our colleagues in the marriage community, the faith community, or in partnership with all three, that then prepares them. When Dwayne and Brenda came to me and asked if they could get married at our center, it was three-plus years ago. The debate and discourse around mar-

riage has gotten to the point now where we actually have this hearing today.

We did not have the same kinds of relationships with folks like Theodora Ooms and Scott Stanley, and others who are here representing the marriage community. We did not have those kinds of relationships then. We need to build on those relationships.

We need to find ways in which to pass legislation and provide resources for the fatherhood field to be able to become a legitimate field within the social sciences and partner with the marriage community to build that continuum of a set of services that will support these families.

Senator SANTORUM. My time is up.

Senator Bunning? Then I will come back with more questions.

Senator BUNNING. Mr. Chairman, I would like to put an opening statement into the record.

Senator SANTORUM. Without objection.

Senator BUNNING. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Senator Bunning appears in the appendix.]

Senator BUNNING. Let me ask both couples kind of a bottom-line question. Are you able to see some light at the end of the tunnel, now that you are either married or about to be, with your families? How did Mr. Jones help you to arrive at that decision?

Mr. WALKER. CFWD's Men's Services program. There were two programs I was attending at Healthy Start. I was attending Men's Services and I was attending 50/50. One thing about the program was, you had to open up. You had to want to make that change for yourself. So, issues of marriage and just different issues, they would all be discussed during the time of the programs.

Senator BUNNING. So you think Mr. Jones and his programs have put you in the position that you are in now, you are working many hours, that sometimes prevents you from some kind of a relationship with your wife, or your wife-to-be, and your kids.

I have been there, done that, so I understand how long and consuming work can be so you can make ends meet. But there is a relationship that has to be, obviously, built between you and your spouse or your wife-to-be and your family.

Mr. WALKER. Communication plays a big role. Communication is always there. We have to constantly communicate on a daily basis, whether it is by telephone when I am not there. She talks to me and tells me what is going on. I mean, lack of communication is basically a failure of a lot of relationships that go on today.

One person does not hear what the next person is trying to say, whereas, if they just talked, maybe they could come to some kind of understanding, even though they are not going to agree on all things. Maybe they can come to some kind of understanding about things and work through things.

Senator BUNNING. Mr. Grimes, can you give me a little insight? Since you are working at very difficult hours, your relationship with your kids would be strained a little bit because of your hours. You do have some time, on the 3 days that you are not working.

Mr. GRIMES. Yes.

Senator BUNNING. Do you catch up on your sleep, or do you—

Mr. GRIMES. Oh. Like my brother says, it is about communication. I would say, when she is coming in, I am leaving. Basically, we are just missing each other. But I know exactly what time she gets in. Once I know she is in there, I am on the phone. I am calling her. Are you there, and how is everything, letting her know that I made it to work safely.

I can say it is about communication. I mean, truly, we do not see each other that much, even on my days off. I am asleep. I really do not have much time to really spend with family. But I make that time on my days off, no matter how tired I am. I might not get out there and play with my kids, but I am there, letting them know the rights and wrongs of what not to do, and how to do, compared to back then.

Senator BUNNING. Did you get involved with Mr. Jones because of addiction? What, specifically, is the connection there?

Mr. GRIMES. I got involved with Mr. Jones because I needed help with my addiction.

Senator BUNNING. All right.

Mr. JONES. After he dumped us for a long time.

Senator BUNNING. Let me ask you, Mr. Jones. Fragile Families. For the last 10 years you have been working with them.

Mr. JONES. Correct.

Senator BUNNING. And what are the major changes, except the coordination between family and marriage? It just is amazing to me that for the last 10 years there has been an evolution of that. I thought that was kind of a normal procedure, but I obviously am in the dark.

How many changes have you seen in the case work between you and the family group?

Mr. JONES. Well, my work originally was in the Healthy Start Program. Again, they serve low-income pregnant women. As a result, we created a fatherhood program. In 1999, I created the Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development and transitioned the work I was responsible for, which included employment services, out into the nonprofit community. However, my fatherhood staff still are located in the two neighborhood Healthy Start centers located in East and West Baltimore.

So, that intimate partnership with a family service provider is critical, because we need the linkages that when women are in that magic moment state, that we are able to get the referrals from the case managers who work with those pregnant women to my program, where my staff can then go out in the community, go door to door, looking for the guys who are about to become fathers, similar to what we did with Dwayne.

Once we make that connection, then we try to identify the issues that prevent them from being the best fathers, the best men, the best partners, and the best citizens that they can be and develop a case management system and set of interventions to be able to deal with those issues, whether it is addictions, whether it is just simple under-employment or unemployment. A lot of these men—almost all of these men—want to do the right thing.

Some of them need intensive services, like Dwayne, but others just need a little bit of a push, a little opportunity to come together, get some peer support, get some information about the positive as-

pects of being a father, being a partner, being a good citizen, and being able to take that and transition them into mainstream behavior.

One of the common themes that runs through the men who run through our program, is more often than not, they have not been reared in households where men are present. You cannot have young boys and young girls growing up in our country, in our community, thinking what it is to be a good man.

Little girls are going to emulate what they see from other men. If they do not get it from their fathers, they are more likely to get it from some man on a street corner. Young boys do not learn how to manage their aggression. They do not learn how to respect women in the right kind of way, particularly with the social influences we have coming from the media and other places that really demean women today.

It is important that men come into interventions in social settings where families are treated and respected where they are, accept them where they are, but in some cases put an arm around their shoulder and say, look, I am going to help you get to the next step. Sometimes, really, it is a foot in the behind. But community-based organizations have that responsibility and they have that credibility, and I think we have built that credibility with the families that we serve.

Having a young man like Dominick to be able to come here to the U.S. Senate, as nervous as he is, to talk with you and say what it is he believes he needs to support his family, to get to the point where he can be married and be a role model not only for his children, but can you imagine the impact that this young man has on the other young men in his community when they see Dominick standing up saying, this is what we need to do to form our families and to right our neighborhood. His influence goes far beyond mine, far beyond that of the organization, and it represents young men across this country.

I think we have one heck of an opportunity, particularly when we have folks in the marriage community and the fatherhood community coming together, establishing areas of common ground, continuing to work on these tough issues, even we do not agree, and work on one issue at a time until we form a public social welfare strategy that supports these families and allows them to thrive, just like everybody else in our community.

Senator BUNNING. Thank you.

Ms. Baumgardner, the last question. How does First Things First get its funding?

Ms. BAUMGARDNER. We are a not-for-profit organization and we receive our funding from individuals, corporations, places of faith, grants, foundations.

Senator BUNNING. Just like any other nonprofit.

Ms. BAUMGARDNER. Yes.

Senator BUNNING. You do not have a Federal funding source?

Ms. BAUMGARDNER. No, sir.

Senator BUNNING. In other words, you would apply for grants.

Ms. BAUMGARDNER. Yes.

Senator BUNNING. What was unique about Chattanooga that allowed the community to come together to form First Things First?

Ms. BAUMGARDNER. I think the community leaders really seeing that the family was suffering, was the first piece of it. Second, recognizing with the high divorce rate and with the high out-of-wedlock pregnancies and the fatherlessness that was happening, we were really falling apart at the seams in our community.

When we first came out with this in 1997 and started talking about, we were going to work to reduce divorce and out-of-wedlock pregnancies and increase father involvement in the lives of their children, the phone started ringing off the hook because people were hungry for it.

So, I think the hunger, people just jumping on the opportunity to get the education, to find out where the resources are, to know what you need to do to stay at the table as a parent and stay engaged with your children, talk to them about tough issues like sex, abstinence until marriage, and understanding realistic expectations of marriage before you walk down the aisle. People wanted that information, and I think that, as we have grown over 7 years, the classes have grown. People have continued to want more.

Senator BUNNING. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator SANTORUM. Thank you.

Did you base your program on another model?

Ms. BAUMGARDNER. No, Senator.

Senator SANTORUM. You just sort of created this.

Ms. BAUMGARDNER. We created it based on what the research showed. When we saw the high numbers, the coalition made the decision that we needed to focus in the three areas. And I do think that is what makes First Things First unique. You cannot look at marriage without, as Joe said, looking at fatherhood and looking at how we are going to reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies. They all go together.

Senator SANTORUM. So you did not have a situation such as Joe is talking about that maybe has happened in Baltimore where you had a separation of the fatherhood groups and marriage groups. It was not that.

Ms. BAUMGARDNER. We had a fatherhood group doing a small amount of work. We have a great group doing abstinence education, and we really had no one focusing on marriage. So when we came together and formed First Things First, we focused on all three and we partnered. Part of what we do is collaborate with lots of different groups in the community to do the work that we do.

Senator SANTORUM. Has anybody copied your model? Are there any other cities that are doing what you are doing?

Ms. BAUMGARDNER. We have worked with more than 200 cities across the country to train them in how to do this in their community. I do not think there is a cookie-cutter approach, but I think that there are a lot of lessons that we have learned that these communities can take and build upon and create something similar that would help people have healthy marriages, to help fathers be more involved, and reduce the out-of-wedlock pregnancy rates.

Senator SANTORUM. And there still is a demand in Chattanooga for your services?

Ms. BAUMGARDNER. Absolutely. No question.

Senator SANTORUM. I assume you could use more resources.

Ms. BAUMGARDNER. Most definitely.

Senator SANTORUM. And can you tell me about your cooperation? Joe mentioned the faith community. Do you have any coordination with the faith community?

Ms. BAUMGARDNER. Yes. We are a secular organization. We work with sacred and secular public and private entities. We work with many different places of faith to help them know the resources that are available to provide classes, to train folks within the place of faith so that they can do their own training and have their resources available all the time.

Senator SANTORUM. In reviewing your testimony last night, I was looking at all of the different things that you do. I mean, your organization does lots of things. You commented that you established your organization based on research. Have you contracted, or has anybody looked at your organization and done some research to find out what works, what does not work, what you need to do more of?

Ms. BAUMGARDNER. We are currently looking at that. We are so young, that it will take time to really know that. But we do work with Barna Research Group, and we also work with Wirthlin Worldwide to conduct research on an ongoing basis.

We started with Barna when we first began in 1997, and we continue to work with them every 3 years to look at the baseline data, how we are making progress, what is the community thinking about these issues, and how can we more effectively address them.

Senator SANTORUM. And you do evaluations on a program-by-program basis as to how you think things are going.

Ms. BAUMGARDNER. That is right. Yes. In fact, we have a marriage education program called Before You Say I Do. In our State, if couples participate in a minimum of four hours of marriage education before they marry, they get a significant discount on their marriage license.

We have people write all the time on the bottom of the evaluation, "we came for the discount, walked away with so much more, surprisingly so." They appreciate the information and feel like it is definitely going to make a difference in their marriage relationship.

Senator SANTORUM. So what would you tell the U.S. Senate, in contemplating the issue of supporting marriage, supporting traditional marriage and actually putting money out there for States and for community groups in support of marriage, what would you say to them, from your experience, as to whether government can play a role in helping to support or fund this kind of activity?

Ms. BAUMGARDNER. I think the bottom line is, this is about the people that you serve. They want to know how to do marriage right and they want to know how to be engaged parents. How can we turn our heads and say we are not going to do that?

I mean, we are talking about a huge issue that affects every community across this country. And if we are really out for the public good and we want to make a difference for people right where they live, then we are going to go to the community level, to the grass-roots level, and we are going to help them get it right. The way that you do that, is by funding it, supporting the efforts, educating people, giving them the opportunities.

Senator SANTORUM. And you can say that marriage, itself, that component itself, has made a huge difference in changing the dynamics in Chattanooga?

Ms. BAUMGARDNER. People tell us all the time. I can be walking down the street, and people will stop me and say, you have no earthly idea what a difference you are making in this community with your organization.

With the media messages that you get out, with the speaking engagements and the classes that you do, and the resources you provide, you are putting a consistent message out there and it is making a difference for people in all walks of life. It matters not where you live, who you are, how much money you make. This information is important, and we appreciate what you do.

Senator SANTORUM. All right. Thank you very much.

Thank you all very much. I appreciate, in particular, the families that came here today. I know these two folks are experts in testifying before committees, but for you to come up and tell your personal story, I thank you very, very much for your candor and for your courage in doing so. God bless you. Thank you.

Mr. JONES. Thank you, Senator.

Senator SANTORUM. For our next panel, we go from the practitioners to the scientists, social scientists, although I think you are going to have a hard time topping that first panel.

But let me thank you all for being here. I certainly appreciate the tremendous work that all of you have done in this area. You have 5 or 10 minutes to present your statements, then we will have a question period.

First, is Kathryn Edin. Kathryn is an associate professor of the Institute of Policy Research at Northwestern University, although I have been informed she is coming to Philadelphia, so maybe she will not be a professor at Northwestern University much longer.

She is a co-principal investigator for Couples Dynamics and Father Involvement, which is a quantitative study of 75 low-income married and unmarried couples with young children in Chicago, Milwaukee, and New York City. This is a project that is an offshoot of the Fragile Families study and is funded by the MacArthur Foundation. She is a graduate of North Park College and have a doctorate in sociology at Northwestern.

Dr. Edin, thank you for being here. Please.

STATEMENT OF KATHRYN EDIN, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY, EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

Dr. EDIN. In 1950, only 1 in 20 children was born to an unmarried mother. Today, that rate is 1 in 3, and usually to those least likely to be able to support a child on their own. This has led some to charge that the marriage norm is dead in poor communities.

We entered into the lives of 162 low-income single mothers living in eight destitute neighborhoods across Philadelphia. We spent 5 years chatting over kitchen tables and on front stoops.

We learned that in America's inner urban poor, romantic relationships often proceed at lightening speed, and conception often occurs within a year of when the pair begins their romantic relationship.

Though conception rarely stems from an explicit plan, the large majority say they were not doing anything to prevent a pregnancy at the time.

Many, though, say they wanted a child, though they were not sure it was the right time, or the right relationship, for one. Thus, many decided to let fate take a hand.

One mother told us, "I was confused. I wanted to have a baby, but just not at that time, you know. But I always loved kids. I mean, I would go through a time where I would try to get pregnant, but then I would figure, well, how am I going to raise this baby?"

Pregnancy puts many still-new couple relationships into overdrive, as the would-be mother begins to scrutinize her mate like never before, wondering whether he will find a job, settle down, and become a family man in time.

Some soon-to-be fathers do rise to the occasion, but others greet the news with threats, denials of paternity, and physical violence. Male infidelity is also quite common during pregnancy.

Frequently, though, the magic moment of the birth reunites the new parents, who then resolve to stay together for the sake of their child.

The well-known baseline results of the Fragile Family survey show that most new unmarried parents have marriage plans. We, too, have been following 50 Fragile Families couples over the last 4 years, visiting them in their homes and interviewing them repeatedly and in depth.

We, too, find very high marital aspirations. But though couples do hope to marry, few have made any concrete plans. In fact, most see marriage as 4, 5, or more years off.

Why? Like their middle class counterparts, poor young women and men now set a high financial bar for marriage. Marriage is an elusive, shimmering goal, one they feel ought to be reserved for those who can support what they call a "white picket fence" lifestyle: a mortgage on a modest home, a car and some furniture, some savings in the bank, and enough money left over to pay for a "decent" wedding. These are prerequisites for marriage.

Most importantly, though, mothers want to hold off on marriage until they can be sure they have found a partner they can trust, as do fathers. Their relationships are often fraught with violence, infidelity, drug and alcohol addiction, criminal activity, and the threat of imprisonment. On the street corners and front stoops of these poor urban neighborhoods, the social stigma of a failed marriage is worse than an out-of-wedlock birth.

One mother said, "When you take those vows up at the altar, I think the vows are very sacred. And if you're not going to abide by them, I don't think you should get married. You should not marry until you have been in a relationship for five or 6 years because by that time you know him, and he knows you."

Another told us, "I'd rather say, yes, I had my kids out-of-wedlock than say, I married this idiot. It is like a pride thing."

Ironically, most believe that bearing children while poor and unmarried is not the ideal way to do things. Yet, given their already limited economic prospects, they have little motivation to time their births as precisely as middle class women do.

When we asked these young mothers what their lives would be like if they had not had children, we thought they would express regret over foregone opportunities for schooling and careers.

But instead, most believe their children “saved” them. Many describe lives before conception that were spinning out of controls, struggles with parents and peers, wild, risky behavior, depression, and school failure. Their children, they say, offered an opportunity to make meaning and create relationship intimacy, when few emotional resources existed elsewhere.

In sum, the poor already believe in marriage, and profoundly so. Given the often perilously low quality of their romantic relationships, programs aimed at improving their relational skills with poor couples who aspire to marriage are a worthy goal. However, relationship skills training must address the very serious problems I have alluded to above.

But relationship skills alone are unlikely to move to many poor, unmarried parents into stable marriages. The poor marry, but they insist on marrying well. This, in their view, is the only way to avoid an almost-certain divorce.

The divorce rate in the U.S. rose until 1980, and has declined only slightly in the two decades since. However, the overall trend masks the fact that, during the 1980’s and 1990’s, the marriages of college-educated women became far more stable, while the marriages of those on the bottom actually became increasingly less stable over time. Some might charge that marriage standards of the poor are too high, but those ideals do correspond to the marital relationships most likely to last.

Until poor, young women and men have more access to jobs that lead to financial security, unless there is reason to hope for a rewarding life pathway outside of bearing and raising children, the poor will continue to have children far sooner than most Americans think they should, and in less than ideal circumstances. Meanwhile, they will probably continue to defer marriage.

An agenda aimed at enhancing relational skills and improving access to economic resources, on the other hand, might help more new, unmarried parents achieve their own stated goal: a healthy, lasting marital relationship.

Senator SANTORUM. Thank you, Dr. Edin.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Edin appears in the appendix.]

Senator SANTORUM. Our next witness is Ron Haskins. Ron is the senior fellow at the Economic Studies program at The Brookings Institution and a senior consultant at the Annie E. Casey Foundation in Baltimore, and, truth be told, probably the principal architect of the 1996 welfare bill.

He did outstanding work as the director of the Human Resources Subcommittee of the Ways and Means Committee, and someone, to the consternation of many, who taught me everything I know about the issue of welfare when I was Ranking Member on that subcommittee when I was in the House in 1993 and 1994.

Dr. Haskins, it is an honor to have you here.

STATEMENT OF RON HASKINS, SENIOR FELLOW OF ECONOMIC STUDIES, THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION, WASHINGTON, DC

Dr. HASKINS. Thank you, Senator. Thank you for that fine introduction. Clay Shaw wrote the Welfare Reform bill, with help from you, and I just watched. Thank you.

We are here today because our culture is denying far too many children the benefits of life in a two-parent, married couple family and we are making very little progress.

I regard the debate we are having over marriage as just an extension of the debate that we started in 1995 and 1996. As you will recall, within the Republican party and between Republicans and Democrats, and eventually involving just about all of the interest groups and so forth, we had a huge debate over nonmarital births. The issue was, how many different provisions, and how strong would those provisions be?

Many of the issues were not resolved until the bill came to the Senate floor and some of what people on the left regarded as "extreme measures" were taken out of a bill as a result of votes on the Senate floor.

So, this is not a new debate. This is something that we have been talking about within the Congress at least since 1995–1996, and in many cases before that. I have to mention that Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a former colleague of yours and a chairman of this committee, in 1965, drew attention to part of this problem. So, it is not a new problem. We should begin with, how did we get here?

The answer is, we got here through almost every way that you could. First of all, we had huge increases in nonmarital births. When Moynihan wrote that famous paper in 1965, the nonmarital birth rate among blacks was 25 percent, and he was alarmed by that.

Today, the nonmarital birth rate among blacks is close to 70 percent. The overall nonmarital birth rate, as Kathy said in her testimony, is about 1 out of 3 children, about 33 percent. So, a huge increase in nonmarital births resulting in kids in single-parent families.

Second, we have had very substantial declines in marriage rates. Again, the worst problems are among low-income families and minority families, again, as Kathryn said in her testimony. So, we have had a major decline in marriage rates, which also contributes to having more kids in single-parent families.

Third, we had a very substantial increase in divorce rates through the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's, and early 1980's. In the last 20 years it has been more or less stable, but, nonetheless, we send about a million, or somewhere between 1 million and 1.2 million kids into single-parent families every year in the United States through divorce, and somewhere around 45 percent or so of all marriages formed today will end in divorce.

So, all three of these problems have gotten us into a situation where we have more than doubled the number of children in female-headed families over the last 30 years. So, that is the problem.

So what? The first answer, is that there is a huge difference in poverty rates. It is especially interesting to reflect on that in this

room, where the Federal Government has allocated billions and billions of dollars in programs to attack poverty and to help people who are in poverty.

We now see, and it is very clear in every piece of research that I am familiar with, that kids in female-headed families have five, six, or seven times the poverty rate, depending on the year, of children in married couple families. Children in never-married parent families have even higher poverty rates than children with all female-headed families.

So, poverty, which is a problem that the Congress has been focused on for decades, is—a major contributing factor to poverty is single parent families.

Second, we now have growing literature that there are substantial impacts on children's growth and development of being reared in single parent families. I have no brief against single parent families. I was a single parent family myself at one point in my life. Many single parents make heroic efforts.

But the facts are the facts. The data continues to pour in that there are major differences between the health and well-being of children in female-headed families and children in two-parent married couple families.

So, logically, if more of those children could be in two-parent married couple families, their growth and development would improve in health, in school performance, in the probability of going to college, the probability of having a job, and in several other things that, again, this committee has focused on as important social issues that the Congress should deal with.

Third, we now know that marriage is good for adults—and if I could add to this—especially men. [Laughter.] Men are, in many ways, lost outside marriage. Problems of alcoholism, accidents, even heart disease is greater for men, and for women, to some extent, outside marriage. So, marriage is even good for adults.

So with all these advantages of marriage, what can we do to solve the problem? I would like to recommend three things, but I would like to preface it by pointing out—and I think it is wonderfully reflected by the testimony on this panel—we have a lot of agreement. There is way more disagreement and consternation and sound and fury over this issue in this building, and in the Senate and the House than there seems to be in the countryside.

Again, I would point to the witnesses on this panel, not all of whom are Republicans, as evidence for my point. Julie Baumgardner shows that there is a grassroots movement. It is small, but it is growing. It is becoming more and more influential. More and more people are committed to the issue of forming healthy marriages. So, that is the first thing that we have in common.

Second, we now know from every piece of research that most people, including poor people and minority people, want to be married. It is still the standard and the ideal, again, as Kathy just pointed out.

Third, there is now widespread agreement that marriage does, in fact, confer the advantages on people that I just described, on children, on adults, and especially, and very clearly, on reducing poverty, which is probably related to the other two factors.

We also had a surprising degree of agreement, as you will find out in a minute from Scott Stanley, of what a good marriage is, what a healthy marriage is. It basically has to do with safety, both physical and emotional safety, which I hope Scott will talk about during his testimony.

And we also have agreement that we do not know much about how to promote healthy marriages. This is the greatest problem that we face. I believe it is the reason why we need a strategy that I would like to describe to you now, just briefly.

The first thing that we need to do, I refer to as jaw-boning. We need to talk about this. We need to have the leadership of the country, and Baumgardner made this especially clear in her testimony, that the leadership in Chattanooga was very clear about the crucial importance of marriage to the well-being of children, families, and to the community.

We need to have as much of that as we can, hearings like this with national leadership, State and local leadership, making it very clear, our religious leaders, marriage is the foundation of our society.

Second, we need to continue reducing nonmarital births. It will be good for the people involved in and of itself. But a very important statistic is that a young lady who has a nonmarital birth, her probability of ever getting married declines quite substantially.

So, the focus on nonmarital births that we started in 1995 and 1996, and the many policies, should also contribute to promoting marriage and to helping prepare people better for marriage. It is better to wait until you marry to have children, as everybody knows.

Third, we need an explosion of community-based programs throughout the country like the one described by Ms. Baumgardner that will focus on helping couples become married.

This is a market that we are talking about here. There will be so many different programs all over the country. This is a version of "build it and they will come." Make the money available, set the broad goals, and there will be brilliant people throughout the country who will organize and conduct these programs.

I would like to especially draw attention to the fact that we know from research as well that many of the couples that do have nonmarital births are closely associated. They are in loving relationships. Half of them co-reside. About 80 percent say that they are in love and exclusively dating each other. They are committed to the child.

There are many reasons why we should believe that, at the moment they give birth to that child, that if we could help them with services of the kind that Joe Jones was describing, that we can move them toward marriage, if they choose that for themselves, of course.

So, these are three strategies that I think that this committee should pursue. The most important right now, the one that is on the table, is money for various activities that would support communities, faith-based organizations, to conduct pro-marriage activities and to try to increase the rate of healthy marriages, both by saving marriages that are already formed and by promoting new marriages among people who want to be married.

I hope that we can pass this as soon as possible. I would like to conclude with this. We must carefully evaluate these programs. The reason is, we do not know what works. The world is full of advocates. Any person who runs a program immediately becomes an advocate.

We are not going to find out from them, reliably, what works. We need scientific studies with random assignment to find out what really works. This is an extremely important public issue and it is too bad that we have waited 2 years already to pass this legislation.

I hope that this committee, under your leadership and under the leadership of Chairman Grassley and the Minority members of the committee, will find their way through to cut a deal and to pass this legislation so we can get started on this extremely important project.

Thank you, Senator.

Senator SANTORUM. Thank you very much, Ron.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Haskins appears in the appendix.]

Senator SANTORUM. Our next witness is Ms. Theodora Ooms. She is a senior policy analyst at The Center for Law and Social Policy, CLASP, where she works on couples' and marriage policy, with a special focus on low-income families.

Ms. Ooms, thank you very much for being here.

**STATEMENT OF THEODORA OOMS, SENIOR POLICY ANALYST,
THE CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY, WASHINGTON, DC**

Ms. OOMS. Thank you very much for inviting me to testify today. I will just add to that introduction that independently I am a senior advisor to the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative, and I have also consulted with various other State and community marriage initiatives.

Until recently, marriage was considered a very private issue and not the business of government, especially the Federal Government. This has changed. A new report that we just released last week, *Beyond Marriage Licenses: Efforts in States to Strengthen Marriage and Two-Parent Families*, shows that there is quite a bit of marriage-related activity going on around the country. The report also, I should say, includes fatherhood programs that are doing co-parenting and marriage activities.

At the Federal level, the administration has already committed over \$90 million to funding healthy marriage research, evaluation, and demonstration projects, and they are described in our report.

Now, the Senate has been debating the provisions in the Welfare Reauthorization bill, and there are three Senate subcommittees holding hearings on healthy marriage this month. So, clearly, marriage is no longer the "M" word that it was until quite recently.

I agree with many of the points that have been made, and will be made by the other panelists, most of whom, incidentally, we work together with on a variety of projects, even though we may come from different political perspectives.

In my view, strengthening marriage and two-parent families has the potential of being a genuinely nonpartisan issue, so long as we keep child well-being as the central goal. But marriage is a very

new issue and it is more complex than some of the marriage advocates suggest. There are certainly promising program ideas out there, but there is so much that we still do not know.

What is more, while I agree with Ron Haskins and others there is now a very broad agreement that healthy marriage is good for children, adults, and society, the healthy marriage agenda—and here I disagree with Ron—remains very controversial, not only in the Congress, but outside in the country, particularly for people who are just hearing about it.

For example, there was a spate of editorials after a New York Times front page article on the President's new marriage initiative all around the country, and most of them were very negative about the agenda because they just discovered it. (At least, I think that is part of the reason).

I want to inject a note of caution and highlight some concerns and questions that many of us have about this evolving agenda, based in part on what is being learned in States and communities and what might be called the “marriage-plus” perspective.

First, there is the issue of domestic violence, which I know you have heard a lot about in this committee. Now, we can all agree that marriage programs and policies should not force or pressure women, especially young, poor and vulnerable women, to enter or remain in bad or abusive marriages, or even perhaps encourage them with incentives.

The assurances, that the Administration has given that the marriage services will be voluntary and the protections that the Senate put in place in the reauthorization bill that you are considering are very welcome, and we need to underscore that, but my point is to say they are not enough.

The proposal review process for these grants—if the reauthorization bill is enacted—the regulations, the administrative guidance, and ongoing technical assistance are all vehicles that can be used and should be used to ensure that marriage programs and the domestic violence community work together, as indeed is happening in Oklahoma, Florida, and Arizona.

I could make the same statement that Joe Jones made about the need for the fatherhood community and the marriage programs to work together and to have resources to do so.

The second point, is that relationship and marriage education should not be the only strategy being employed to strengthen marriage, especially not in low-income populations.

As the work of Kathy Edin and other researchers in the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being study point out, economic factors such as coping with the multiple stresses of poverty, unemployment, ill health, bad housing, all seriously strain and damage couple relationships and they are often a key reason for the failure of so many low-income parents to marry or stay married.

Likewise, however, failures in relationships can often derail an individual mother or father's progress towards gaining greater economic stability and well-being.

This suggests, I think, that relationships and marriage education programs need to go hand in hand with efforts to improve both parents, mothers' and fathers', income, work skills, housing, and in-

crease their access to substance abuse, mental health, and other services.

These are not competing strategies. We need to do both, and they reinforce each other. I think we have heard that from several panelists today.

Third, the goals of healthy marriage initiatives should be broadened to include promoting better relationships and co-parenting for couples for whom marriage to each other is not feasible, or perhaps even desirable, such as if the relationship is already irretrievably broken down, and the couple may have moved on to new partners.

First, co-parenting is really important for children, because it helps the father stay involved in their lives. Also, these people may go on to marry someone else. So, I think the targets of these “healthy marriage” programs need to include unmarried parents who do not necessarily contemplate marriage to each other.

Now, this is happening already in several State and community initiatives. I will just cite in Louisiana, for example, there is a marriage and co-parenting curriculum that is being developed for non-custodial fathers and parents—Joe Jones was instrumental in helping with this—called Exploring Relationships and Marriage in Fragile Families.

They also developed a reader-friendly publication called “Raising Your Child Together: A Guide for Unmarried Parents,” which addresses issues of co-parenting, and then for those who are thinking about marriage, it talks about marriage. So we are saying these two can go together.

We are learning additional lessons from the current State and community initiatives that suggest a number of other questions for policy makers, including members of this committee, that should be considered carefully, I think, as you pursue government-funded marriage activities:

Will public officials, community leaders, and program administrators be able to use grant funds to invite a wide range of individuals, including the potential skeptics and critics such as the domestic violence community, to help plan their marriage activities? This can take a lot of time, as we found out in Oklahoma and other places. This broad consultation is really essential to obtain buy-in and support for these efforts.

A second question is, as States seek to expand marriage programs to new populations, how do we need to adapt existing programs and curricula to meet the needs of a more economically, racially, and culturally diverse group of participants? These programs were largely developed for, and offered to, middle class, committed couples.

The third question is, will the funds be available to be used to build capacity to implement these healthy marriage services? There are really very few people out there who are trained to do this kind of work. We need to train trainers to deliver the marriage programs, train administrators, supervisors, and front-line workers, and members of the community to discuss these relationship issues, the way Joe Jones did, with the clients and refer them to these services.

The last question is, will public officials and marriage advocates be given the resources to help them design programs and policies

based on the best theory and research available, rather than the program that they happen to know and like, and carefully document how public funds are being spent and invest in—as you said, Ron—research and evaluation.

If these concerns and other questions are addressed, I really believe we will be more likely to create effective, healthy marriage programs and policies that will gain broad support and will also avoid causing harm. And if this happens, we can expect and hope that the well-being of both present and future generations of children will be improved. Thank you.

Senator SANTORUM. Thank you very much, Ms. Ooms.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Ooms appears in the appendix.]

Senator SANTORUM. Our final panelists is Scott Stanley. Dr. Stanley is the co-director of the Center for Marital and Family Studies and an Adjunct Professor of Psychology at the University of Denver. He has authored several articles on the issue of relationships and is an expert on marriage and marriage commitment.

Dr. Stanley, thank you for being here.

STATEMENT OF SCOTT STANLEY, CO-DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR MARITAL AND FAMILY STUDIES AND ADJUNCT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF DENVER, DENVER, COLORADO

Dr. STANLEY. Thank you very much, Senator. I appreciate this opportunity to testify about healthy marriage and marriage education.

As you noted, my name is Scott Stanley. I am the co-director of the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver, where my colleague Dr. Howard Markman and I have worked for over two decades to better understand the factors that put couples at risk for distress, breakup and divorce, and what steps can be taken to help couples achieve healthy marriages. This research program has been supported by the National Institute of Mental Health since 1980.

I am also one of two senior advisors, sitting close to the other, of the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative, which is an ambitious and strategic effort that is yielding much useful knowledge for other States.

There are several questions I raise in these remarks.

Question one: Why marriage, and why not? As has been said, this is a time where there is a rich and sustained discussion about marriage among policy experts and social scientists from very diverse philosophical and political backgrounds, liberal and conservative.

This discussion has moved well beyond ideological differences, to a serious focus by many with historically disparate views on real problems that couples and families face.

I believe that this convergence may be the single most important and helpful trend related to marriage in the past 10 years. This is a group discussion going on at this level. It is based, in very large part, on growing evidence of the beneficial effects of healthy marriages for children and adults.

Question two: What is healthy marriage? Healthy marriages become a language of common ground because it clarifies the nature of reasonable public policy goals about marriage.

In our work, we have been expanding the theory that underlies our prevention approach by focusing on three fundamental types of safety that will exist in a healthy marriage.

One, safety in interaction. This type of safety pertains to being able to talk openly, ideally with emotional safety and support. In contrast, relationships that are characterized by chronic negative interaction are clearly damaging to adults and the children living with them.

Number two, personal safety. This type of safety pertains to a freedom from fear of physical or emotional harm. Interventions to foster healthy marriage could be expected to help reduce domestic violence by any of several means.

For example:

(1) educating young people about how to avoid physical aggression;

(2) reducing the likelihood of violence in relationships where conflict has spilled over to physical contact in the past, but where the pattern is not the type of domestic violence that is most dangerous or least likely to change; and

(3) helping women realize the need to leave or avoid relationships with dangerous men.

The third kind of safety that we emphasize now is safety in commitment. This type of safety pertains to the security that comes from mutual support, teamwork, and a clear commitment to the future. People need a sense of security about the future in order to fully invest in the present. Of course, this does not mean that it makes sense for all couples to have a future.

Based on a wide range of research, as well as experience working with people from various cultures around the world, it appears to us that these themes of safety are basic and universal, and they are also very measurable.

Question three: What is marriage education? As part of our work, Howard Markman and I, and numerous colleagues, have spent considerable energy developing an empirically based educational model for couples called PREP, which stands for the Prevention in Relationship Enhancement Program.

PREP fits in the context of a broad range of efforts designed to help people develop attitudes and behaviors associated with marital success. While our work in research has historically focused on committed couples, we have been developing an expanded view of the possibilities for preventive education.

Unfortunately, most discussions about marriage education assume a very narrow definition of it, imaging couples sitting in a room learning, which is certainly a key focus.

In contrast, all of the following can be viewed as forms of marriage education that could plausibly lead to an increase in the percentage of healthy marriages and the number of children being raised in those contexts in our society: for example, helping high school students or young adults develop realistic expectations about marriage; helping someone understand key risk factors for marital and relationship distress in general, or in their relationship in par-

ticular; and working with individuals who need help recognizing unhealthy or dangerous relationships and how to exit them, or never enter them in the first place.

Question four: Does marriage education work, and for whom does it work? That gauge of development, practice and research lay a strong foundation for optimism that marriage education can help people succeed.

Three decades of studies demonstrate promising findings from a wide range of marriage and relationship education efforts. There is evidence of gains in communication, improvements in relationship satisfaction, and in some studies, a lower likelihood of relationship dissolution.

Yet, not all variations of what is possible have been attempted on a broad basis or fully empirically tested. For example, there is a clear need for more program implementation, refinement, and evaluation among those in poverty, likewise, for those from diverse racial and cultural groups.

However, there are some studies showing encouraging findings with groups not typically studied, such as our recent evaluations of PREP with the U.S. Army, where we find just as strong effects, at least in the short run, among those who have lower incomes or who are racial minorities.

Question five: what are best practices in healthy marriage education? The defining elements of research-based approaches for helping people achieve healthy marriages are three: (1) that they be empirically informed, meaning that core strategies are based on the best available sound science; (2) that they be empirically tested, or at least testable; and (3) that they are regularly refined based on ongoing research in the field of marriage and family.

We live in a time when much is being discovered, much is known, and much more will be known 10 years from now. We can revise our approaches as we learn more and as we go.

Such uses of empiricism provide a strong basis for optimism in our efforts to help couples and families. We do not know everything we would like to know, but we can build on the confidence of present approaches while refining strategies over time.

Thank you.

Senator SANTORUM. Thank you very much, Dr. Stanley.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Stanley appears in the appendix.]

Senator SANTORUM. Let me go back to Dr. Edin, first. In the people that you looked at, you said they had marital aspirations. But they have sort of a view of marriage that would not be considered, at least in this committee, as what we would sort of see as our view of marriage.

That definition of marriage. Where does it come from? Do you have any information as to, how are they influenced in determining what marriage is, and what does marriage mean? Did you ask them, what does marriage mean?

Dr. EDIN. It is really interesting. In doing this research, that was probably the most surprising thing we found, are these high aspirations or standards for marriage. They really do have two components. One, is a financial component.

A couple believes that they have to have, in some sense, arrived financial already, or accumulated a set of assets that shows to the

rest of the community that they are serious, that they are stable, that they have some sense, some purchase on a piece of the pie of the American dream before they feel that they ought to be married.

And this is put in very moral terms. It is not right to marry, according to this moral code, unless you are financially set. The second aspect is relational, and this really—

Senator SANTORUM. Before you do that, where does that come from?

Dr. EDIN. I think where that comes from is, number one, the middle class, who has also been delaying marriage until careers are set, and all of that. Second, it probably comes from the fact that if you ask the poor, in national surveys, whether there are a lot of good and stable marriages around them, they will say no.

Indeed, the divorce rate has continued to grow among the poor. So, the poor are now taking their cue from the marriages that are lasting, which are these kind of middle class super-marriages that people in my generation are entering into.

But the second aspect to this standard for marriage is a relational one, and that is where I think relationship skills training, if done correctly, is so important. Mistrust is pervasive in these communities, and that is partly because of the often perilously low quality of the couple relationship.

We have to hit head on, in particular, the problems of domestic violence, but also infidelity, and in particular, male infidelity. We are often not talking here about a one night's stand, we are talking about a chronic and persistent pattern of infidelity. This infidelity is not limited to one racial or ethnic group. We find it across low-income whites, Hispanics, and African Americans.

Senator SANTORUM. Can you talk about the cultural influences on that, the popular culture? Have you looked at the influence of the popular culture on that?

Dr. EDIN. We have not. But one thing that is really interesting about these couple relationships is that the state of cohabitation, although it is seen as a cue that the parental couple is heading toward marriage, is a very ambiguous state, and couples really do not know what it means.

It is still not normative in the American context to co-parent while cohabiting. So, in some ways they borrow expectations from dating relationships, which are very low commitment.

But in other ways, they are borrowing expectations from marital relationships, which are very high commitment. So, in some ways they see themselves still in the partner market, but in other ways they insist on honesty, trust, and sexual fidelity.

It is this ambiguity, I think, that leads to such a high rate of infidelity in the cohabitational state. National surveys have shown that infidelity is much higher within cohabitation than in marriage.

Senator SANTORUM. The other question I had, when you were talking about these 50 families, the 50 couples that you were following, how many of those 100 people came from stable, married, intact families?

Dr. EDIN. Not very many. About a third came from two-parent families. In some of those cases, the marital models they saw were not necessarily ones that they wanted to pattern their own rela-

tionships after. Mostly, these couples, when they have seen marriages, have seen the negative models of marriage.

So, in my view we need to work to improve the marital quality of all marriages, not just the marriages among those at the bottom of the income distribution. I know that there is a lot of support for that and a lot of innovation going on in that area in many States, and that is encouraging.

Senator SANTORUM. You said we need to improve them. How would you suggest—and anybody can pitch in on this—that we better model marriage for those who, at least in two-thirds of the cases, have no personal experience with marriage, and at least in a third, I would assume that a fair number of the third probably come from divorced households, or probably at least half of those third, maybe even more. How do we model?

Dr. EDIN. That is a really good question. I think you have to start with the marriages that are most proximate to those groups. Seventy-one percent of women who ever have a nonmarital birth will eventually marry, if current demographic trends hold. So, it is not that they are never marrying, it is that they are maybe not marrying the father of their first child, or the father of any of their children.

These couples do want to marry and, if demographic trends hold, will marry. So, we need to focus on strengthening the marriages that are occurring, as well as encouraging people who are not yet married. So, increasing marital stability in the bottom of the distribution, I think, should also be a key policy goal.

Dr. HASKINS. Senator, one of the interventions that have been tried was by Charles Ballard, whom you may know. I believe he has testified before this committee in the past.

The basis of his strategy is to take married couples and house them in the same community with low income, unmarried couples, and to have them serve as mentors and role models for the couples that they are working with, the unmarried couples that they are working with, trying to show them, through their own example, how it is possible to move towards marriage and to sustain a marriage within a low-income community.

The second variant of this is mentoring, that many churches now are doing, where older, experienced married couples who have been married for many years work with younger couples and give them guidance and advice about financial matters, resolving conflicts, and all that sort of thing.

So, there are attempts that are already under way to model good marriages and to teach young, either unmarried or newly married couples about how people who have a lot of experience with marriage work through their problems and get it done.

Senator SANTORUM. The groups that you were working with, did any of those individuals get support in talking about marriage, or fatherhood?

Dr. EDIN. No. One thing that was interesting, we have been following these couples now for 4 years. Their children have just turned four. They get so excited when we come back to talk to them every year, even though the interviews are really long and grueling.

And part of the reason for their enthusiasm, is they really do not—especially the men—get a chance to talk about this anywhere else. I cannot think of a single couple that really has that kind of supportive infrastructure.

Senator SANTORUM. So it goes back to Julie and Joe's thing, that there is a real need out there for programs to help mentor or educate, or just listen, to the problems that are going on in that community.

Dr. EDIN. I agree.

Senator SANTORUM. Let me, Ron, move on to you for a couple of questions.

First, you have the chart over here and I want to work on that chart and some comments you made. In the 1996 welfare bill, we worked on work as being sort of the central focus and we tried to sort of touch on the issue of, at the time, we referred to it as illegitimacy and were hammered down repeatedly for using that term.

It is interesting that the social stigma, as Julie said, of having a child out-of-wedlock—or maybe, Dr. Edin, you said that—is less than being divorced. So, stigmas do have an influence and terminology has meaning. So, I would just throw that out as food or thought.

We did focus on work and we did focus on trying to at least create a connection between fathers for paternity establishment, but we sort of stopped there and were hesitant to go into “controversial” areas like marriage.

Can you talk about work as reducing poverty versus other factors that you studied and tell us your findings?

Dr. HASKINS. I apologize. I did not realize the chart was there, so I adjusted my testimony as I was going on. I could not see it.

This is a very interesting study. It was done by Belle Sawhill and Adam Thomas at Brookings. The thing that is so impressive about the study, to me, is it is based on the actual characteristics of actual people based on Census Bureau surveys. So, of all the people the Census Bureau surveys, they have a representative sample of poor people.

So, let us look right at that sample and let us vary some of the characteristics of the poor to see what impact that would have on their poverty rate. That is what this analysis does. It is a simulation.

The first one, is work. The work simulation simply says, look, for everybody that does not work full-time, let us have them work full-time. So, everybody who is poor who does not work full-time. About 40 percent of the poor work full-time, about 80 percent of non-poor work full-time.

So if you make them work full-time at whatever wage they make, or whatever wage they would make under their education, just by doing that, no additional government expenditures or anything, you would reduce poverty by 42 percent.

Similarly, if we just achieve the marriage rate that we had in 1970—so this is not some pie-in-the-sky, you can never get there sort of thing—this is the actual marriage rate that prevailed in the United States in 1970.

If you select people that the Census Bureau interviewed, matched on age, race, and on education, and married them, so

these are kind of like virtual marriages, that would reduce the poverty rate by 27 percent. So, that is the second most effective way to reduce poverty without any kind of additional government expenditures.

Now, this is extremely interesting in comparison to other simulations. One, is if we increase their education, so we assume everybody had a high school degree, attribute the wages to them that the typical high school graduate would make, that would only have an impact on poverty of 15 percent. So, much less than work, and about half of what marriage would do, to increase education. You know how focused committees like this one and the Education and Labor Committee are on increasing education. Yet, marriage, under this simulation, is much more effective.

Similarly, if you double the cash welfare rate in the United States, which would probably cost you now about \$8 billion a year, that would have the most modest effect of all on poverty.

So, both work and marriage are much more effective tools for reducing poverty in this simulation. From that, I would conclude that all of our policies should focus as much as possible on promoting both work, and on marriage.

Senator SANTORUM. So the idea that we are going to spend billions and billions of dollars on remedial education, and all the other work that we are doing on trying to focus on improving the quality of education, and we are going to spend \$150 million on the Federal Government on marriage, and we look at those numbers, what would you say, of the allocation of resources, based on what these findings are in the Federal Government for all the other things that are on that chart versus marriage?

Dr. HASKINS. Zip. We have very, very few. Now, this has changed quite a bit. In fact, this is an amazing story that goes largely untold, is the focus that the Bush administration and HHS has put on marriage. They really have done a lot. So, we have a lot of activity, some of it very good, random assignment evaluation studies that are just now getting started.

But, even so, that is way more than we have ever had in the past. I would say it is easily under 1 percent of welfare expenditures are on anything having in any way to do with marriage.

Senator SANTORUM. Ms. Ooms talked about, there still is a controversy out there (about the healthy marriage agenda). But I think you did say the controversy was from those who did not have all the information.

Ms. OOMS. In part.

Senator SANTORUM. In part. I mean, from the perspective of all of you in this field, is there still a controversy out there, and what is the basis of the controversy?

Dr. EDIN. I think the most common comment is, they think marriage will solve everything. So, the complexity of the approach the administration is taking and the emphasis on healthy marriage is lost in that discussion.

Dr. HASKINS. I would make two points. First of all, unfortunately, it is the old cited editorial page writers as an example of it being controversial. Well, that is their job. Plus, they do not reflect the American public.

Senator SANTORUM. I certainly hope not. [Laughter.]

Dr. HASKINS. I know. I know. If you do random sample surveys of the American public, there is overwhelming support for marriage. If you can do things like Ms. Baumgardner described in Chattanooga, you will find throughout the community, in the churches, YMCAs, in youth groups, in the schools, to some extent, it is very similar to abstinence. It was huge controversial. We had all kinds of nasty arguments here in Washington.

Now there are abstinence programs all over the country, and surveys show that 95 percent of parents—and get this—almost 95 percent of young people say the most important message they should get is abstinence. That is what I mean by not controversial.

There certainly are groups out there that are griping and complaining. I think, in many respects, it is because of what Kathy said, and they are right about this. This is going to be a very difficult thing. We have clue one-half about how to promote marriage, and it is sitting right down at that end of the table.

But there are 20 other things that we should be doing and we do not know what those are yet. That is why we have to put this money out there, to get communities going, to get the leaders in the communities going, and to carefully study what they do, and in, Senator, 10 years, or 15, or 20, we will know something.

Ms. OOMS. Can I expand a tiny bit on the controversies?

Senator SANTORUM. Sure.

Ms. OOMS. I cited the editorial criticisms of the marriage agenda and, I agree with you they were not well informed. But that is what people read, and they are influential. I have been talking with a lot of people in States, and particularly in the public agencies where they are trying to think about doing a marriage initiative, and they work with low-income families.

Their first reaction is that they are very concerned and troubled because they are afraid of stigmatizing the single parents. Indeed they, themselves, might be a single parent.

They ask if you hold up marriage as an ideal, does that not mean that you are somehow blaming people who are single parents? I mean, these are thoughtful people. These are not knee-jerk people. But they are worried about this. They are also worried about the domestic violence issue. They are worried about this phrase, 'promoting marriage' because of who the messenger is. They think this may be a message coming from the religious right wing who want to put women back in the kitchen, and quite honestly, who often believe in patriarchy. I mean, they do not understand what this project is about and what marriage education programs are about.

Once you get into extended conversations attitudes change. It took us, in Oklahoma, a couple of years before, really, a lot of people there started saying, "we can do this. We think this makes sense for our clients, and let us plan it together." So what I am saying is, when people first hear about it, the marriage agenda is controversial, there is no doubt about it.

Senator SANTORUM. Can we address the issue of domestic violence? That has been brought up a few times. Do we have any research on marriage and domestic violence versus unmarried? What are the facts surrounding domestic violence and marriage, and marriage programs? Do we have any information?

Dr. EDIN. I do not know about marriage, but in our study of the Philadelphia women, when we calculated causes of relationship breakup, domestic violence was spontaneously talked about as a major cause of breakup in 45 percent of the cases. It is a very big problem. It is oftentimes combined with drug or alcohol abuse, however. So, drug and alcohol treatments can also be helpful.

Senator SANTORUM. And how many of those couples were married?

Dr. EDIN. None of those couples were married.

Senator SANTORUM. None of them.

Dr. STANLEY. In general, the research shows that marriage is less associated with domestic violence than in cohabiting relationships, dating relationships, other kinds of relationships.

Dr. HASKINS. And could I add, especially for the children.

Dr. STANLEY. Yes. I mean, those data are pretty clear. But as Theo would say, and say rapidly, these dimensions are very complex. But, nevertheless, one of the things that I think is a very exciting opportunity about marriage education, broadly defined—and this comes out of the work we are doing in Oklahoma—is you have an opportunity for all kinds of important messages when you can get in front of people, or when people can get into the door and have these discussions. So, you can have people learn more about what is acceptable behavior and what is not in relationships. Some of that behavior, for some people, is changeable.

For other people, it is not changeable. In those situations, you would really want, especially the women and the women with children, to learn about the factors that make it more likely that it is not changeable and when you should move on, and when you really need to seek safety in a whole different way and a whole different level.

So, I think it is very reasonable to believe that that is one of the probable outcomes. In some research, even in couples where there is domestic violence, some of the latest research on couple approaches, with couples where one or both members have difficulties with substance abuse, working within the couple in a marriage-based, couple-based strategy is being shown now to be by far the most effective treatment in reducing the ongoing substance abuse and the likelihood of future domestic violence.

That research has become so compelling recently that NIDA is actually now generally rejecting proposals that do not have a couple component in the treatment that people are proposing to study.

I think this is a general theme. I will make this point and then be quiet for a little bit. But a lot of times, things do not work the way people think they are going to work when you really dig in and look at what is going on. You are hearing a lot of that among various panel members today.

I will go back to what I said, and I think has been said by virtually everybody today. One of the most exciting things going on is the quality of the discussion between people from very, very different backgrounds.

As Theo mentioned, I think very clearly, back to your other question, a lot of times people who have the most difficulty with the possibilities are people that are new to the discussions.

Senator SANTORUM. I assume all of you agree that the initiative that is in the welfare bill is appropriate and we should follow through and pass that?

Dr. EDIN. I think the only caution I would have, is that there is no attention paid to sort of the economic part of the picture. I think a lot of us believe that the two-tiered strategy of economic support and relationship skills is really going to be the most successful one.

Dr. HASKINS. On the other hand, the model that HHS has developed with Mathematica for the programs that they are going to evaluate, the second component of that model clearly includes everything that Kathy is worried about in her testimony, the domestic violence, the alcoholism, drug treatment, employment and training programs.

So, I do not think it is the case that the administration ignores this problem or this set of problems and that they think that you are going to put someone in a classroom with Scott Stanley and everybody is going to live happily ever after.

There are serious problems here that have to be solved. As long as I am on this point, I would add, our interventions for solving these problems are not all that great.

So the idea that we can stick in a domestic violence component and put in an alcoholism component, and everything is going to be fine, those programs also are not overly successful.

Senator SANTORUM. And we have a lot more experience with those programs, I assume, than we do with marriage programs.

Dr. HASKINS. A lot more.

Ms. OOMS. Can I answer the question?

Senator SANTORUM. Go ahead.

Ms. OOMS. As I suggested, I think the answer is going to be a lot in how the program, the grants programs, are administered and implemented. But I do have to say that there are some of us, in my organization in particular, that thought it was too much money to put into these marriage programs.

I would just say a couple of words about this issue. But note I am not saying marriage is not very important. I totally agree with the goals here. It is a question of, are we ready to use that amount of money at this stage now? It is a question of whether we can use that money wisely before we really know what works.

In a time when a lot of state programs are being cut that people really value because States are in such a fiscal crisis, a lot of people are having trouble accepting this amount of money (dedicated to healthy marriage programs) at this time.

Once we know what works and once we have people geared up to run these programs, it is a bit like the Welfare to Work demonstrations where it may take us 15, 20 years, and then maybe we can put a lot of money into it. So, that is the way I think about the money issue. But what you are trying to do, my sense is, it is in the right direction.

Dr. STANLEY. And I would like to address the money issue in a different kind of way. This is something I think that is very hard to know the actual answer to, this point that I will make.

But I think one of the difficulties that is linked with the money issue, and I think Ron and Theo have both alluded to this and it has come up several times today, it is very hard to evaluate things

at a sufficient level until there is a lot of infrastructure in terms of programmatic changes, getting all the right people trained, getting a lot of capacity in the community.

The other side of the coin that Theo is raising there is that, while you always like to know more about just how best to spend a certain amount of money, this is an area, like many areas of social intervention, where you are not going to have really good answers until you have spent enough money to get a lot of infrastructure going. You do not get a lot of answers without getting big numbers, and you do not get big numbers without infrastructure.

Despite the trends and the quality of the discussion and a lot of movement toward marriage and about marriage in this country at this time, there is very little solid infrastructure going around the country at this point.

Senator SANTORUM. Because there is very little money.

Dr. STANLEY. There is very little money. So, infrastructure is linked to money, and good evaluations, I think, are linked to infrastructure.

Senator SANTORUM. All right. I am out of time. I would love to continue the discussion. I have three articles I would like to put in the record.

[The articles appear in the appendix.]

Senator SANTORUM. Let me thank you all very, very much for your excellent testimony. If there is anything else that you would like to submit for the record, the record will be open for another 2 weeks. We would certainly appreciate any additional information.

We are adjourned. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Senator Grassley appears in the appendix.]

[Whereupon, at 11:58 a.m., the hearing was concluded.]

A P P E N D I X

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JULIE BAUMGARDNER

Mr. Chairman, Senator Santorum and members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today. My name is Julie Baumgardner. I am the President and Executive Director of First Things First, a community based nonprofit initiative dedicated to strengthening marriages and families based in Chattanooga, Tennessee. I have been asked to talk today about our community initiative and the work we are doing to build strong marriages and families.

I will share with you why and how we launched this initiative, our progress and lessons learned.

Why was First Things First Started?

While Chattanooga has prospered economically the health and well being of our families has not kept pace. Divorce and out-of-wedlock births are compromising the future prosperity of Chattanooga's children. Clearly, a city and its families do not thrive on economic factors alone.

Chattanooga was a city looking for leadership to help anchor its most basic beliefs. Our situation is a bit of a mystery. Not only do we have economic growth we have great values. Illustrative of this point is that while 95 percent of Hamilton county residents agree that the family is the main building block of a healthy society, 33 percent of the population have been divorced. The national average is 22 percent. Divorce affects 21,000 households in Hamilton County. According to a survey conducted by the Barna Research Group in March 1997, 84 percent of the Hamilton County residents surveyed agree that sex outside marriage is not a good idea. However, 50.4 percent of all births in 1994 in Chattanooga were to unwed mothers – the 5th highest unwed birth rate of 128 cities in the nation. Moreover, 44 percent of the community surveyed did not find out of wedlock births troubling. (21.4 percent is the Anglo-American rate and 74.6 percent is the African-American unwed birth rate.)

The basic non-economic problems in the Chattanooga area orbit around one concern: the family.

Chattanooga was looking for leadership and a way to help its citizens live according to what they believe is important.

Currently, there are 124,444 households in Hamilton County. 40,305 households (32 percent) have children under 18; 11,012 households (27.3 percent) are female-headed; 2,386 (5.9 percent) are male-headed; and 26,494 (65.7 percent) are two-parent households.

Social scientists have demonstrated conclusively that divorce, out of wedlock births, and lack of fathering contribute to poverty, poor achievement in school and throughout life, greater crime, greater drug abuse, lower mortality, poorer health, and a litany of social ills. According to research:

- four out of five children will not grow up with an intact family by the year 2010.
- typically, the household income of a divorced family declines 37 percent.
- divorce and unwed childbearing create higher costs for taxpayers due to higher rates of crime, drug abuse, education failure, chronic illness, child abuse, domestic violence and poverty¹
- the likelihood that a young male will engage in criminal activity doubles if he is raised without a father and triples if he lives in a neighborhood with a high concentration of single parent families²
- children whose parents remain married experience better health, fewer developmental problems and are less likely to be depressed.³
- overall, 77 percent of all children suffering from long-term poverty come from broken or never-married families. Only 22 percent of children experiencing long-term poverty come from intact married families.⁴
- approximately 65 percent of second marriages end in divorce⁵

¹ The Marriage Movement, Institute for American Values, 2000

² Underclass Behaviors in the United States 1993

³ "The Positive Effects of Marriage" Patrick F. Fagan, Robert E. Rector, Kirk A. Johnson, and America Peterson

⁴ National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979-2000

⁵ National Association of Stepfamilies

What is First Things First ?

A group of concerned community leaders realized in April of 1997, that in order to change the culture it would take more than just economic development but an effort to strengthen the true infrastructure of our community, the family. First Things First was created in recognition of family breakup and its impact on our community. It was designed as an experiment to see if it was possible to change attitudes and behaviors, to reverse the spiraling divorce and out-of-wedlock pregnancy rates, and to re-engage fathers in the lives of their children. The new initiative was unveiled at a news conference in August 1997.

First Things First is a community based, grassroots initiative dedicated to strengthening marriages and families through education, collaboration and mobilization.

FTF uses credible research to identify and understand significant issues facing Chattanooga's families; identifies values-based solutions and evaluates the impact of these solutions in our community; and builds broad public support for these solutions through strategic use of media, educating community leaders and concerned citizens, training and effective partnerships.

In an effort to reverse the trends of destructive relationships and strengthen the infrastructure of our community, First Things First advocates for strong, healthy, lifelong marriage; promotes the activity of both a father and mother in the lives of their children and works to prevent out of wedlock pregnancies. FTF and its supporters strive to positively change attitudes and behaviors about marriage and divorce, out-of-wedlock pregnancy and fathering. We are a secular organization based on Judeo-Christian values that works with sacred and secular, public and private entities. We utilize a prevention approach.

FTF has three goals: to reduce divorce and out of wedlock pregnancies by 30 percent and to increase father involvement in the lives of their children by 30 percent.

What Can be Done at the Community Level to Strengthen Marriage?

Research commissioned by First Things First indicated that:

- people wanted to have strong marriages and be engaged parents, but felt ill equipped to do so.
- 69 percent of Hamilton Countians agree that, in most cases, children who are raised in a home with their married, natural parents will grow up to be more stable emotionally than will children raised by one parent.
- Nine out of 10 Hamilton County residents disagree with the statement: "Marriage is an old-fashioned, outmoded institution."
- The message from the vast majority of Hamilton Countians is that marriage is worth preserving, even when it takes some work. More than four out of every five people say that a couple unhappy in their marriage should "remain together and work to re-establish the love they once felt," while only 15 percent said that the same unhappy couple should "get a divorce."
- When asked which of these points of view came closest to their own point of view, more than two-thirds of Hamilton County adults said marriage should be considered a promise "til death do us part," while nearly one-fourth said marriage should be considered a promise "as long as love shall last."
- Those who participated in premarital counseling are more likely to see divorce as bringing its own set of problems, while those who did not participate in counseling are more likely to see divorce as a positive step to a better life.⁶

National research shows that 85 percent of Americans say they plan to marry at some point and time. The bottomline is that people in our community were telling us that marriage mattered to them and they wanted to know how to make it work. This being the case, First Things First strategically set out to change the culture in our community through a multifaceted approach. We have worked diligently to provide couples, individuals, families, professionals, and community agencies with quality educational resources to build stable, healthy, long lasting marriages and families.

- Professional training helped us build capacity among professionals in our community including clergy, mental health workers, educators, caseworkers, etc.

⁶ Wirthlin Worldwide, 2002

- Community wide trainings provided opportunities for individuals to be equipped with the skills necessary to forge a long lasting, healthy marriage.
- Public service announcements with thought provoking messages were aired to keep the message in front of people that marriage does matter, fathers are important, and waiting to have sex until you are married is best.
- Staff began educating the masses about the affects of divorce, out of wedlock births and fatherlessness on our community through speaking engagements, classes at places of faith, civic organizations, PTA meetings, neighborhood association meetings, high schools, colleges, etc.

Since 1997, literally thousands have benefited from trainings we have held. Here is a listing of some of the trainings in which community professionals and citizens have participated:

- Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program – training for professionals and couples.
- Marriage for a Lifetime – Gary Smalley – Training for couples and churches.
- Keeping Love Alive – Michele Weiner Davis – training for professionals and couples.
- Strengthening Stepfamilies – Elizabeth Einstein – training for professionals and families.
- Pre-marital education classes, secular and faith-based, for couples preparing for marriage or re-marriage.
- Community mobilization training – education for the masses about how divorce, out of wedlock births and fatherlessness impact our community and what they can do in their own sphere of influence to affect change.
- Smart Stepfamilies – Ron Deal – training for stepcouples.
- Taking Back Your Kids – training for educators and parents.
- Conducted trainings for approximately 200 communities across the country interested in creating healthy marriage initiatives.
- Presented keynotes and workshops at the international Smart Marriages conference for the past four years about community healthy marriage initiatives.

- Stepfamily Support Group Facilitator Training – Dick Dunn – training for churches interested in starting stepfamily support groups.
- Marriage Savers mentor training – Mike McManus – training for churches and mentor couples.
- Hamilton County Divorce Education and Mediation Program – our program ended up going statewide – training for parents who have filed for divorce.
- Instrumental in the development of the national *Marriage Movement: A Statement of Principles*.
- Exhibited at Bridal Fairs to reach 1,000 brides to be with information they should consider before they marry.
- Sponsored marriage teleconference with Gary Smalley, Kevin Leman, Dennis Swanberg, Les and Leslie Parrott and Chuck Swindoll – marriage enrichment for couples.
- Facilitated the organization of the African American Marriage Initiative to assist African American churches with marriage education opportunities. There are currently 23 churches participating in this initiative.
- Sponsored the African American Marriage Initiative Couples Conference – training for married and single African Americans.
- Sponsored Adult Children of Divorced Parents seminar.
- Provided numerous marriage enrichment opportunities for area churches.

Impact on the Community

Many people believed that First Things First would fail because people were not interested in hearing about efforts to strengthen their marriage. The response was totally opposite. Since our launch in 1997, the phones have not stopped ringing and people continue to come to our trainings.

The latest local research shows that since 1997 we have seen a 27.2 percent decrease in divorce filings and a 22.6 percent decrease in teen out of wedlock pregnancies. We have experienced a slight decrease in out of wedlock pregnancies in women age

20-44. We have seen a significant increase in father involvement in the lives of their children.⁷

I have seen first hand the impact that First Things First has had on this community. Last year we presented a seminar on Adult Children of Divorced Parents. It was almost overwhelming to see the response from attendees. This is what one couple shared with us on their evaluation:

"We planned to file for divorce last week, but decided to wait until after the seminar. After attending, we really feel like we gained insight into why things are off track in our marriage. We have decided not to file for divorce and are going to focus on making our marriage work."

We teach a fathering/relationship class in the Hamilton County Jail. Initially, we planned to focus on fathering with these men. However, we were surprised to find that many of them were married and openly talked about struggling with this relationship. Instead of giving them a lot of theoretical information we teach them skills. This eight-week class currently has a waiting list. Men say that it is the best class they have ever had. No one had ever taught them this information. They have told us that this class has given them a second chance with new tools to strengthen their relationship with their wives and children.

More couples preparing for marriage are attending our premarital education classes. One couple wrote this on their evaluation:

"We came to get a discount on our marriage license, but came away with excellent information. I plan on using the info on a daily basis."

Nearly 500 people turned out for the African American Marriage Initiative couples conference. Here is one of numerous testimonials we received after one of the conferences:

⁷ US Census 2000, Hamilton County Clerks Office, Hamilton County Health Department and Tennessee Department of Health.

"My husband John and I have attended lots of Marriage Retreats over our 34 years but, this was absolutely the largest. We invited our son and his wife from Atlanta.. They have had some trials this year and the retreat was quite helpful. My husband thinks it was the best marriage retreat ever because the speaker was down to earth and didn't use a lot of psychological jargon in his presentation. I think it was the best ever because it allowed the couples time together by ending at 9:00 p.m. and not starting before 9:00 a.m. Also, the conflict resolution stood out with me because that is very much a part of my job as counselor. I am going to ask my pastor to become a church affiliate."

These are just a few examples of the feedback we get from people all the time.

What is the community response?

Based on the response we have seen since 1997, people are hungry for information about how to have a healthy, strong, long-lasting marriage. Knowing where to go to find this information is critical. If we are going to make a lasting impact in our community, then citizens, businesses, places of worship, schools, agencies, government, media, and others have to make it their business to help people find the resources to achieve their goal of building a strong marriage and family.

Lessons Learned

I think the most important lessons we have learned are:

- Changing culture takes time and commitment.
- Strategic partnerships are critical. First Things First partners with more than 100 groups both locally and nationally. Government agencies in Hamilton County partner with us on a regular basis.
- When a couple divorces, their children are at significantly higher risk for divorce. This one divorce has the potential to negatively impact generations. If we can help one couple keep their marriage on track, we are potentially affecting generations to come in a positive manner.

How Can Government Help Strengthen Marriage?

I think the real question is how can government not be involved in helping to strengthen marriage when research shows that high rates of family fragmentation generate substantial taxpayer costs. *The Marriage Movement: a Statement of Principles* report released in 2000, states that divorce and unwed childbearing create substantial public costs paid by taxpayers. Higher rates of crime, drug abuse, education failure, chronic illness, child abuse, domestic violence and poverty among both adults and children bring with them higher taxpayer costs in diverse forms: more welfare expenditure, increased remedial and special education expenses, higher day care subsidies, additional child-support collection costs, a range of increased direct court administration costs incurred in regulating post-divorce or unwed families, higher foster care and child protection service costs, increased Medicaid and Medicare costs, increasingly expensive and harsh crime-control measures to compensate for formerly private regulation of adolescent and young-adult behaviors and many similar costs.

Learning how to navigate the road of marriage is every bit as important as learning how to drive. I can think of four things government could do right away to help strengthen marriage.

- Encourage couples who want to be married to take premarital education classes. Many caseworkers have long-term relationships with their clients. They should be an excellent resource for community classes and activities that will help their clients be better parents and marriage partners.
- Be willing to invest significant funding to emphasize the importance of healthy marriage and provide marriage education and enrichment opportunities through agencies such as Head Start, TANF, Children's Bureau, Community Services, Refugee resettlement, etc.
- Do away with the marriage penalty and other disincentives to marry.
- Sponsor major media campaigns to promote marriage.

I continue to be amazed at the number of people who tell us we are making a difference in the community. I believe that a huge part of this is because we are dealing with the

root of the problem instead of consistently putting band-aids on the symptoms. While we still need to address intervention issues with those who find themselves in the midst of distress, First Things First is committed to educating and equipping our community in an effort to change the culture for the benefit of future generations.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. JIM BUNNING

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Cultivating a healthy marriage is not easy, and couples from all walks of life face many of the same problems money concerns, time constraints, and the pressures of raising children.

However, the benefits of marriage and having an active father in a child's life cannot be ignored.

For example, Ms. Baumgardner states in her testimony that divorce, out of wedlock births, and lack of fathering contribute to several problems, including poverty, underachievement in school, and higher crime and drug abuse rates.

Also, Ms. Ooms points out in her testimony that adults benefit from marriage as well including living healthier lives, living longer and accumulating more wealth.

However, it certainly isn't easy and it takes a lot of work. There is also a fairly clear line between what a healthy marriage is and what an unhealthy marriage is. I don't think anyone would argue that women or men should be encouraged to stay in unhealthy situations.

The President has several "healthy marriage" proposals, which we incorporated in the welfare reauthorization bill the finance committee passed recently.

Part of this money will go to programs and part of the money will go to research and demonstration projects.

It seems that one area we need to do more work in is finding out what are the best marriage promotion and responsible fatherhood programs out there.

Finally, I want to commend the two couples who are on our first panel.

You have taken commendable steps to build a better life for yourself and your children. Congratulations.

I look forward to hearing from all of our witnesses today, and gaining their perspective on this important issue.

Thank you.

May 5, 2004
 Testimony of Dr. Kathryn J. Edin
 Northwestern University

In 1950, only one in 20 children was born to an unmarried mother. Today, that rate is one in three—usually to those least likely to be able to support a child on their own. This has led some to charge that the marriage norm is dead in poor communities. We entered into the lives of 162 low-income single mothers living in eight destitute neighborhoods across Philadelphia and its poorest industrial suburb, Camden. We spent five years chatting over kitchen tables and on front stoops. In doing so, we gave these mothers the opportunity to speak to the question so many affluent Americans ask about them: Why do they have children outside of marriage when they face such an uphill struggle in supporting them?

We learned that in America's inner urban core, romantic relationships often proceed at lightning speed and conception often occurs within a year of when the pair begins "kicking it." Though conception rarely stems from an explicit plan, the large majority say they were doing nothing to prevent a pregnancy at the time. This is not usually due to a lack of information about birth control; most use birth control in the early days of their relationship with their child's father, though most also soon let these practices lapse. Many say they wanted a child, though they were not sure it was the right time—or the right relationship—for a child. Thus, many let fate take a hand.¹ One 17-year-old white mother of a two year old, said,

I was confused. I wanted to have a baby, but just not at that time, you know. [But] I always loved kids.... I mean, I would [go through a time where I would] try [to get pregnant]. But then...I would figure, 'Well how am I gonna raise this baby [I want]?' I was confused. I didn't know whether this week I wanted to try or next week I didn't. ...I was always thinking about it. Always.

Pregnancy puts many still-new couple relationships into overdrive, as the would-be mother begins to scrutinize her mate like never before, wondering whether he will "get himself together"—find a job, settle down and become a family man—in time. Some soon-to-be fathers do rise to the occasion, but others greet the news with threats, denials, and physical violence. Male infidelity is also quite common. Take the case of one 19-year-old white mother of two:

[My boyfriend and I] decided together [to have a baby, but when I told him I was pregnant] he totally denied [our twins]. The first words that came out of his mouth when I told him I was pregnant [were,] "It's not mine." So I said, "All right, well, I guess it's the Pope's, right?"

Frequently, though, the magic moment of birth reunites the new parents, who then resolve to stay together, at least in part for the sake of their child. Most even have plans to marry. As a 20-year-old African-American mother of one recalled,

[After months of calling me a cheater and a whore] he was happy, and it was [his] child then, and he said "Put my [last] name on the birth certificate!"

Another, a white 22-year-old mother of three, recounted of her first birth, [Shortly after my daughter was born] he started changing...he started coming around. Now you can't take them two apart. Her dad's her favorite. (Of the beatings she received during pregnancy, she says) It's a man thing. They're scared of the responsibility.

The well-known baseline results of the Fragile Families Survey show that most unmarried new parents have marriage plans when interviewed just hours after the birth of their child.² Some have claimed the timing of the survey produced unduly optimistic responses. We have been following 50 new unmarried

¹ Regardless of whether the conception is result of an explicit plan, the vast majority of the mothers we spoke to believe the "responsible" way to respond to such a pregnancy is to bring it to term. Mothers almost universally believe it is unfair to, as one mother put it, "to punish a child for a mother's mistake." A 30-year-old African American mother of three explained, "I don't believe in having abortions. If I didn't want it to happen, I would have protected myself better. It's here. I have to deal with it. So that's what I did. I dealt with it. Because if I didn't want to get pregnant, then I should have done something to prevent it."

² McLanahan, Sara, Irwin Garfinkel, Nancy E. Reichman, Julien Teitler, Marcia Carlson, and Christina Norland Audigier. 2001 (Revised 2003). *The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study Baseline National Report*. Princeton, NJ: Center for the Study of Child Wellbeing, Princeton University.

parents in three cities over the last four years, visiting them in their homes and interviewing them repeatedly, in some depth.³ When we talked with them two to three months after the birth, we too found very high marital aspirations, particularly among cohabiters. But we also learned that though couples do hope to marry, few have made any concrete plans. In fact, most see marriage as four, five, or more years off.⁴

Despite the high marital aspirations around the time of their child's birth, few of these new unmarried parents actually marry each other.⁵ Like their middle class counterparts, poor young women and men now set a high financial bar for marriage. Marriage is an elusive, shimmering goal—one they feel ought to be reserved for those who can support a “white picket fence” lifestyle; a mortgage on a modest row home, a car and some furniture, some savings in the bank, and enough money left over to pay for a “decent” wedding.⁶ Yet the women are not merely content to rely on a man's earnings. Rather, they insist on being economically “set” in their own right before taking marriage vows. This is partly because they want a partnership of equals, and they believe money buys say-so in a relationship. But means of one's own is also insurance against a marriage gone bad.⁷ One white 21-year-old with one child told us,

I'm gonna make sure I have my own stability [before I marry]. I mean, 'cause they're my kids [and I have to be ready] to take care of them with or without their fathers.

Most importantly, though, poor women want partners they can trust. Their relationships with their children's fathers are often fraught with violence and infidelity, drug and alcohol abuse, criminal activity and the threat of imprisonment. On the street corners and front stoops of these poor urban neighborhoods, the social stigma of a failed marriage is far worse than an out-of-wedlock birth, so women feel they must wait several years after the birth of their child to insure the marriage will last.⁸ A white, 30-year-old, mother of five explained,

When you take those vows, up at that altar, I think the vows are very sacred. And if you are not going to abide by them, I don't think that you should get married. [You shouldn't marry] until you've been in a relationship 5 or 6 years. Because by that time you know him and he knows you.

Another, a 24-year old white mother of two, told us,

I'd rather say, “Yes, I had my kids out of wedlock” than say, “I married this idiot.” It's like a pride thing.

Ironically, most of the mothers and fathers we spoke to believe that bearing children while poor and unmarried is not the ideal way to do things. Yet given their already limited economic prospects, the poor have little motivation to time their births as precisely as middle class women often do. While well-heeled suburban youth envision the professional kudos and chic lifestyles that await them, to the poor, these aspirations are little more than pipe dreams. So the dreams of poor youth often center instead on children. Girls coming of age in inner-city slums value children highly, anticipate them eagerly, and believe strongly that they are up to the job of mothering—even in circumstances far from ideal.⁹

When we asked these young mothers what their lives would be like if they hadn't had children, we thought they'd express regret over forgone opportunities for schooling and careers. But instead, most believe their children “saved” them. Many describe lives before conception that were spinning out of

³ These couples are a stratified random subsample of respondents to the Fragile Families survey in Chicago, Milwaukee, and New York.

⁴ Gibson, Christina, Kathryn Edin, and Sara McLanahan. 2004. “High Hopes but Even Higher Expectations: The Retreat from Marriage Among Low-Income Couples with Children.” Working Paper 2003-06-FF. Princeton, NJ: Center for the Study of Child Wellbeing, Princeton University.

⁵ Center for Research and Child Wellbeing. 2003. “The Retreat from Marriage among Low-Income Families.” Fragile Families Research Brief No. 17. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University.

⁶ Edin, Kathryn and Maria Kefalas. 2005 (in press). *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women put Motherhood before Marriage*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. See also Gibson et al., 2004.

⁷ Edin and Kefalas, 2005.

⁸ Edin and Kefalas, 2005; Gibson et al., 2004; Reed, Joanna. 2004. “The Meanings of Marriage and Cohabitation for Unmarried Couples With Children.” Northwestern University.

⁹ One national survey found that high school drop outs were *five times* as likely as the college educated to agree with the statement “childless people lead empty lives,” controlling for race, parental status, and other characteristics. See Sayer, Liana C., Nathan Wright and Kathryn Edin. 2003. “Class Differences in Family Attitudes.” The Ohio State University.

control—struggles with parents and peers, “wild” risky behavior, depression, and school failure. Their children, they say, offer an opportunity to make meaning and create relational intimacy when few emotional resources exist elsewhere. One 25-year-old Puerto Rican mother expresses this sentiment as follows:

[My son is] my heart.... Even if I get that rock on my finger, that white picket fence, and that deed that says the house is mine, [I'll still have my son] just in case anything goes sour. I'll say to my husband, “You leave! This boy is mine!”

In sum, the poor already believe in marriage—profoundly so. Given the often perilously low quality of their romantic relationships, it is hard to argue that programs aimed at improving the relational skills of poor couples who aspire to marriage is not a worthy goal. Better relationship skills might even prove useful in the aftermath of the breakup, as a mother and father attempt to forge a positive co-parenting relationship. However, relationship skills training must address the very serious relationship problems alluded to above. For when these couples break up, it is usually due to one of the following: domestic violence, chronic infidelity, criminal behavior and incarceration, or severe drug and alcohol abuse.¹⁰

But relationship skills alone are unlikely to move many poor unmarried parents into stable marriages. We live in an America where the gap between the rich and poor continues to grow. This economic reality has infused poor youth with the sense that they have nothing to lose by an early or ill-timed birth. Nationally, four in ten mothers who ever give birth while unmarried begin bearing children while still in their teens.¹¹ A recent study shows that the number of American children living with two parents increased quite significantly over the course of the 1990s, and the decline in teen pregnancy during those years was responsible for 80 percent of the change.¹² Teen romances, even between those who share a child, are notoriously unstable. Thus, reducing the teen childbearing rate further should remain a key policy goal.

Marital standards have risen for all Americans, and the standards the poor hold are no different from what everyone wants out of marriage. The poor want to marry, but they insist on marrying well. This, in their view, is the only way to avoid an almost certain divorce. The divorce rate in the U.S. rose until 1980, and has declined only slightly in the two decades since. However, overall trend masks the fact that during the 1980s and 1990s, the marriages of college-educated women became far more stable than they had been in the 1970s, while marriages among those at the bottom of the educational distribution actually became less stable over time.¹³ Some might charge that the marriage standards of the poor are too high, but those ideals correspond to the marital relationships most likely to last.

Until poor young women and men have more access to jobs that lead to financial security—until there is reason to hope for a rewarding life pathway outside of bearing and raising children—the poor will continue to have children far sooner than most Americans think they should, and in far less than ideal circumstances. Meanwhile, they will probably continue to defer marriage. An agenda aimed at enhancing relationship skills and improving access to economic resources, on the other hand, might help more new unmarried parents achieve their own stated goal; a healthy, lasting marital relationship.

¹⁰ Edin and Kefalas, 2005.

¹¹ Unpublished figures calculated by Stephanie J. Ventura. National Center for Health Statistics are cited in Terry-Humen, Manlove and Moore (2001). Terry-Humen, Elizabeth, Jennifer Manlove and Kristen Moore. 2001. “Births Outside of Marriage: Perceptions versus Reality.” ChildTrends Research Brief.

¹² Committee on Ways and Means Democrats. 2004. “Steep Decline in Teen Birth Rate Significantly Responsible for Reducing Child Poverty and Single-Parent Families.” Issue Brief, April 23rd.

¹³ Unpublished calculations by Steve Martin, University of Maryland.



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

<http://finance.senate.gov>

Statement of Senator Chuck Grassley
 Finance Committee Subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy Hearing
 "The Benefits of Healthy Marriage"
 Wednesday, May 5, 2004

I am pleased to participate in this subcommittee hearing on "The Benefits of Healthy Marriage." I am looking forward to hearing from our excellent witnesses. I want to thank the witnesses for taking the time to be heard today to present your testimonies to the committee.

The case for strengthening healthy marriage is overwhelming and two facts related to marriage are indisputable. The first is that the number of single parent households are increasing. In 1960, less than 12 percent of children lived in single parent families. By 2000, that figure had more than doubled, rising to 27.6 percent. The second is that children in single families are poorer than children in two parent families. The poverty rate for all children in married couple families is 8.2 percent. The poverty rate for all children in single parent families is nearly four times higher at 35.2 percent.

As my colleagues know, last year the Senate Finance Committee favorably reported the welfare reauthorization bill, the Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone – which I call the PRIDE bill. There are several provisions in the PRIDE bill which would give states incentives to develop programs that promote healthy marriages and strengthen families as well as provide the funds for research and technical advice for states on how to run successful family formation programs.

Now, let me be clear – the marriage promotion provisions in the PRIDE bill are not the Senate Finance Committee's primary anti-poverty program. The increases in the work requirement and the state's work participation rate are the PRIDE bill's anti-poverty provisions. Work is the key to moving families out of poverty. If two married adults are both not working, the family's income is still zero.

However, the effects of marriage on child poverty are compelling. A number of scholars have provided simulations of the effects on child poverty if marriage levels were raised to 1971 or 1960 levels. The results vary depending on the models and assumptions used, but generally speaking estimates range in a reduction of child poverty from 20 percent to 30 percent. If that is not an overwhelming reason to make marriage promotion a priority in a program that seeks to address child poverty, I don't know what is.

The effects of marriage on a child's physical, emotional and academic well-being are also dramatic. A child living alone with a single mother is 14 times more likely to suffer serious physical abuse than is a child living with both biological parents who are married.

Children raised in single or broken families are more likely to become incarcerated as adults, compared to children raised in intact, married families. A child raised in a single household is more likely to be depressed, get expelled from school, repeat a grade in school and have developmental and behavior problems than a child in an intact married family.

There is also evidence indicating that there is higher likelihood of drug use among children in single households than there is among children in two-parent, married households. Now, does this mean that getting married is the answer for every single mother on welfare? Of course not.

Do marriage promotion programs effectively reduce dependence and foster a family's well-being? We don't know. There is a great deal of uncertainty around the effectiveness of marriage promotion programs. Is this a good reason to continue to do very little to encourage states to experiment with these programs? I do not think so.

When I drafted the PRIDE bill, I was not trying to create a "one size fits all" approach. What works for one family may not work for another. But just because one provision is not the best fit for every family doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to reach as many families as we can. There are families who could benefit from the activities authorized under Healthy Marriage Promotion provisions in PRIDE. We should encourage states to take a creative, innovative approach toward encouraging healthy marriages and family formation.

Marriage promotion is a key feature of welfare reform. I strongly believe that the provisions in the PRIDE bill will lead to increased understanding of the effectiveness of marriage promotion as well as contributing to improved child well being. I look forward to hearing from our panels of witnesses.

**Testimony of Dwayne Grimes on behalf of Dwayne and Brenda Grimes,
Center for Fathers, Families and Workforce Development (CFWD)
Participants**

*Testimony before the Senate Finance Committee/Subcommittee on Social Security
and Family Policy Hearing on "The Benefits of a Healthy Marriage"
Wednesday, May 5, 2004*

Marriage was something I wanted to do once I got clean. After I had been clean for a while I started thinking about marriage. We had been together for thirteen or fourteen years. I knew she was the one for me. I knew that I was not going to find anyone like her. It was time.

Drug use was the main challenge to us getting married. When I was using I did not have time for any relationship. All of my time was the addiction. When I got clean I started seeing things as they really were. When I first got clean CFWD staff talked to me about marriage. Then I relapsed. After I was clean for a while again I came to my senses.

I really did not get support from family or friends. My family was happy about us getting married but they really did not offer any support. CFWD really supported us. They helped us plan our wedding and even let us hold it at their building.

I would tell people that have been together and are not married to look at the status of their relationship. What is the status now? They have to have understanding. I took my wife through a lot. They have to know each other – physically, spiritually

and mentally. She knows me like a book. Better than I know myself. Couples have to have forgiveness. Leave the past behind and don't keep bringing it up. Kids need their fathers. They need to see them in the home all the time. My kids say I am strict but that is not true. I'm just telling what I know and have been through.

Today my wife and I have been married for three years. We both work. Still struggling but we are still together.

Testimony of Ron Haskins
 Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution and
 Senior Consultant, Annie E. Casey Foundation
 Before the Social Security and Family Policy Subcommittee
 of the Committee on Finance
 U.S. Senate
 May 5, 2004

Chairman Santorum, Ranking Member Breaux, and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Ron Haskins. I am a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution and a Senior Consultant at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. I am honored to be invited to talk with your committee about the case for federal programs to promote marriage. My major goal is to briefly summarize the evidence from social science research about the impact of marriage on poverty, on children's development, and on adults. My conclusion is that there is widespread agreement among social scientists that marriage reduces poverty and helps make both children and adults happier and healthier. It is reasonable to project from these studies that if marital rates could be increased, especially among poor and minority Americans, many of the social problems that are the target of social programs under the jurisdiction of the Finance Committee would be reduced.

What's the Problem

America is engaged in a great experiment to test whether our children can be properly reared without providing them with a stable, two-parent environment during childhood. The experiment consists of three major trends. First, as long ago as 1965, the great Senator and former chairman of this subcommittee Daniel Patrick Moynihan, in one of the most important and controversial papers in the history of social science, declared that the black family was in the process of disintegrating because of rapidly increasing rates of nonmarital births. Further, he argued that family dissolution was the major reason black Americans were not making more social and economic progress. At that time, the nonmarital birth rate for blacks was around 25 percent. Today the percentage for blacks is 70. Now both Hispanics, at about 45 percent, and whites, at about 25 percent, equal or exceed the level of nonmarital births that Moynihan saw as alarming. Indeed, over 33 percent of all our nation's children are now born outside marriage. Thus, the problem of nonmarital births has skyrocketed among all ethnic groups (Figure 1).

Second, if love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage, so do nonmarriage and nonmarital births. Specifically, a major cause of nonmarital births is that the marriage rates have declined so precipitously in recent decades. When marriage rates decline, more and more women have more and more years during which they are at risk of becoming pregnant and giving birth outside marriage. Figure 2 shows the marriage rate for black and white Americans since 1950. Clearly, the rates for both groups have plummeted. If marriage confers benefits on the adults and children involved, and if reducing marriage reduces these benefits, the decline of marriage could be having broad impacts that affect all of society.

Figure 1
Percent of Births to Unmarried Women

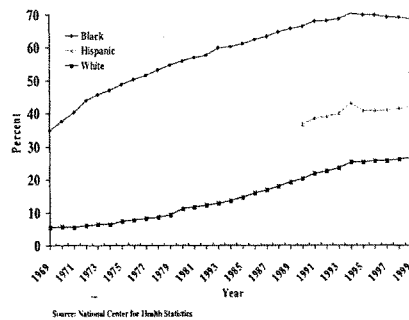
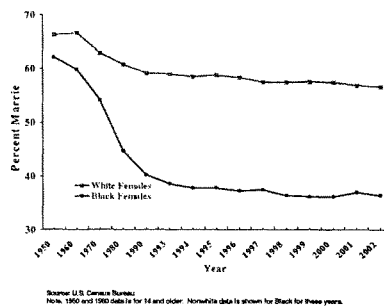


Figure 2
Marriage Rates for White and Black Females 15 Years and Older, 1950-2002



Third, the divorce rate contributes greatly to the decline of marriage in our society. By 1975, about 20 percent all women over age 15 had experienced a divorce, about twice the rate of divorce that prevailed as late as the mid-1960s. Divorce rates rose only modestly after 1975 and have actually declined slightly over the last two decades. Even so, demographers estimate that a little less than half of the marriages formed today will end in divorce. Though no longer increasing, the divorce rate is high by historical standards and now exposes well over one million children per year to the difficulties of adapting to a new way of life and to the vagaries of life in a single-parent family.

Taken together, nonmarriage, nonmarital births, and divorce have caused a rapidly increasing percentage of the nation's children to live in single-parent families. As shown in Figure 3, between 1970 and 2002 the percentage of children living with just one parent more than doubled, increasing from 12 percent to over 27 percent. Of course, these numbers provide the number of children living in single-parent families at a given moment. Over time, the percentage of children who have ever experienced life outside a two-parent family is much greater than the percentage on a given day. The percentage of children who spend some portion of their childhood in a single parent family has probably increased to nearly 60 percent and has reached the shocking level of 85 percent for black children.

Most of the nation's single parents make heroic efforts to establish a good rearing environment for their children. But they are up against many obstacles and challenges. Not the least of these is poverty. Figure 4 shows the poverty rate of female-headed families with children as compared with married-couple families with children between 1974 and 2002. In most years, children living with a single mother suffer from poverty rates that are five or six times the rates of children living with married parents. Children living with never-married single mothers have even higher poverty rates.

Figure 3
Percent of Children Living in
Single-Parent Families, 1970-2002

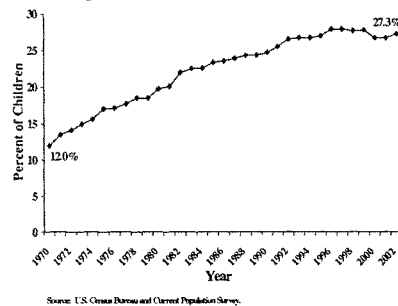
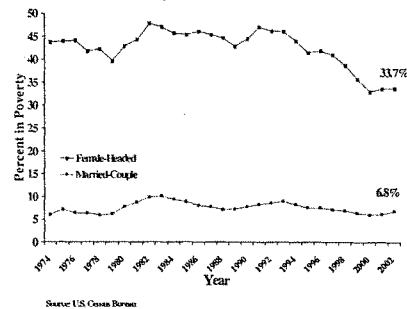


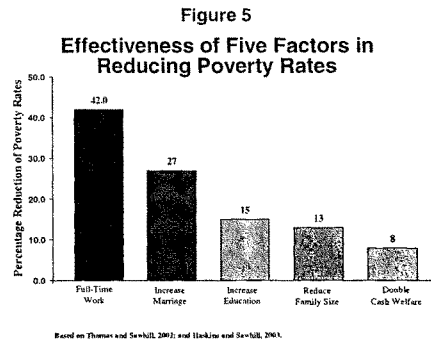
Figure 4
Poverty in Female-Headed Households and
Married-Couple Households, 1974-2002



Although this difference in poverty rates between single-parent and married-couple families is impressive, social scientists know that marital status is not the only difference between parents in single-parent and parents in married-couple families. On the contrary, there are many differences between the two groups of parents. For example, single parents are more likely to have had a baby outside marriage, are more likely to have had poor parents and parents with little education, and are more likely to be black or Hispanic. All of these background characteristics contribute to the difference in poverty rates between married and single parents and raise some doubt about whether marital status itself causes the difference in poverty rates.

This is a vital issue for members of Congress trying to decide whether a marriage initiative would be worthwhile. One of the major claims of those who support a marriage initiative is that increasing marriage rates would reduce poverty rates. Fortunately, there have now been a large number of studies, some quite sophisticated, of whether marriage itself, independent of all the other differences between married and single parents, is a cause of the lower poverty rates enjoyed by married parents and their children. Taken together, these studies provide strong evidence that increasing marriage rates would indeed reduce poverty.

A closer look at two of these studies will illustrate the power of marriage as a means of reducing poverty. Research at the Brookings Institution by Adam Thomas, Isabel Sawhill, and Ron Haskins examined the impact of various changes in family composition and parent characteristics on poverty rates. Specifically, Thomas and his colleagues used Census Bureau data from 2001 to determine the degree to which child poverty would be reduced by full-time work, marriage, increased education, reduced family size, and doubling welfare benefits. By far the greatest impacts on poverty are increasing work effort and increasing marriage rates (Figure 5).



The relationship between work and poverty reduction is especially impressive. According to the Census Bureau, poor parents work about half as many hours as nonpoor parents. The Brookings analysis shows that if poor parents were to work full time at the wages they currently earn (for those who work) or could earn (based on their education for those who don't work), the poverty rate would plummet from 13 percent to 7.5 percent, a reduction of nearly 45 percent. It is interesting to note that this statistical simulation has now received a test in the real world. By requiring mothers on welfare to work and imposing a time limit on their cash welfare benefit, the 1996 welfare reform law and the state welfare-to-work demonstrations that preceded it – along with a strong economy and other policy changes such as increases in the Earned Income Tax Credit – were associated with a substantial increase in work effort by previously poor single mothers on welfare. Between 1993 and 2000, employment among single mothers, many of whom had previously been on welfare or who could have qualified for welfare, increased from 58 percent to nearly 74 percent, an increase of nearly 30 percent. An increase in employment of this magnitude by any demographic group over such a short period is unprecedented. The burst in employment among all female heads of families led directly to a decline in their children's poverty rate from 46 percent to 33 percent, another reduction of nearly 30 percent. Thus, a substantial increase in work by single mothers led to a robust reduction in poverty, exactly as predicted by the Brookings simulation.

If the single most potent antidote to poverty is work, marriage is not far behind. The likelihood of being married is a striking difference between the poor and the nonpoor. Indeed, again according to the Census Bureau, the poor are only half as likely to be married as the nonpoor -- 40 percent for the poor as compared with 80 percent for the nonpoor. Of course, as we have seen, the adults in these families differ in other ways as well, so the huge difference in poverty rates between married couples and single parents cannot be attributed solely to marital status. The Brookings simulation examined the poverty impact of an increase in marriage rates among the poor without changing any of their other characteristics. Specifically, the simulation increased the marriage rate to the rate that prevailed in 1970. Between 1970 and 2001, the overall marriage rate declined by 17 percent while the marriage rate for blacks declined by over 34 percent. The

simulation works by matching single mothers and unmarried men who are similar in age, education, and race. In other words, these virtual marriages take place between real single males and single mothers with children who report their status to the Census Bureau. Thus, the actual incomes of real single men, who are paired with real single mothers, are used in the analysis. All that changes is marital status.

The effect of the increase in marriages to the rates that prevailed in 1970 is to reduce the poverty rate from 13.0 percent to 9.5 percent, a reduction of 27 percent (Figure 5). Although not as great as the impact of full-time work, increasing the marriage rate nonetheless has a very substantial impact on poverty.

To judge the magnitude of this impact it is useful to consider one more finding from the Brookings analysis. A great deal is made of the importance of education for achieving economic stability. Members of this subcommittee will recall that both during the 1995-96 welfare reform debate and during the current welfare reform reauthorization debate, there was sharp conflict over whether the goal of welfare reform should be to help mothers get jobs or increase their education and training. We now have very good evidence from scientific research – much of which was funded with money Congress provided to the Department of Health and Human Services in the 1996 welfare reform law – that work first is a more effective strategy for helping poor mothers leave welfare and for saving public dollars that otherwise would be used for paying welfare benefits.

The Brookings simulation is consistent with this research. In particular, the simulation tested the impact on poverty of providing all heads of poor families with a high school education. The simulation assumed that all heads of poor families had a high school diploma and earned as much as the typical high school graduate. Under these assumptions, increased education reduces the poverty rate from 13 percent to 11.1 percent, a reduction of not quite 15 percent. Thus, whereas increasing work reduces poverty by 45 percent and increasing marriage reduces poverty by 27 percent, increasing education reduces poverty by only 15 percent. After reviewing these results, those who strongly support policies that would improve the education of poor parents because they believe additional education promotes work and reduces poverty might decide that they also favor policies designed to increase marriage rates because these policies could have an even greater impact on poverty than improved education.

A second example of the impact of marriage on poverty is provided by a superb series of studies – again supported by research dollars from the Department of Health and Human Services – conducted by Robert Lerman of the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C. In separate studies, Lerman used three national data sets that capture information on representative samples of the U.S. population. According to a summary prepared by Kelleen Kaye of the Department, Lerman's studies show that:

- Married families with two biological parents have lower rates of poverty and material hardship, even after controlling for other factors such as education and race, than any other type of family including single parents and cohabiting parents. Even in the case of families with lower levels of education, those headed

by married biological parents are better off than either single parents or cohabiting parents.

- Married biological parents provide a more stable rearing environment for their children and are able to weather hard times better than single or cohabiting couples in part because they receive more assistance from friends, family, and community.
- Marriage itself makes actions that limit hardship – better budgeting, planning, pulling together in a crisis – more common, even among people with similarly low income and education.

As illustrated by the Brookings study and the Lerman research, most studies find that marriage reduces poverty and material hardship even when other differences between single and married parents are controlled and even when the analysis is confined to low-income families. But another benefit of marriage may be of even greater interest to the members of the Finance Committee. Since 1994, with publication of a seminal volume on children in single-parent families by Sara McLanahan of Princeton and Gary Sandefur of the University of Wisconsin, there has been growing agreement among researchers that children do best in married, two-parent families. On balance, the evidence now indicates that children who grow up in married two-parent families achieve higher levels of education, are less likely to become teen parents, and are less likely to have behavioral or health problems. As with studies of family economic well-being, many factors other than family composition contribute to these outcomes. Even so, when social scientists use statistical techniques to control for these other differences, children from single-parent families still show these educational, social, and health problems to a greater degree than children reared by married biological parents.

Nor are children the only members of families whose well-being is affected by marriage. As shown in a recent book by Linda Waite of the University of Chicago and Maggie Gallagher of the Institute for American Values in New York, marriage confers a wide range of benefits on adults. Based largely on their review of the empirical literature, Waite and Gallagher find that people who get and stay married live longer, have better health, have higher earnings and accumulate more assets, rate themselves as happier and more satisfied with their sex lives, and have happier and healthier children than people who don't marry or people who divorce their spouses.

Taken together, empirical studies provide a strong case for the benefits of marriage. If marriage rates could be increased, it can be predicted with some confidence that poverty rates would decline; that children would improve their school achievement, have fewer teen pregnancies, and have better health and mental health; and that adults would live longer, be happier, be more productive, be wealthier, and be more effective parents.

What To Do

But how can healthy marriages be promoted? I believe it is a good thing that this question is now a leading issue of public policy at both the federal and state level. If as a nation we can figure out the answer, we will “promote the general welfare” of the nation.

We should begin with a frank assessment of the evidence on marriage promotion. If the evidence on the benefits of marriage is strong, the evidence on good ways to promote marriage is modest. Thus, I would propose a three-part strategy to the committee: jaw-boning, continuing the already strong record of creating programs to reduce nonmarital births, and creating a program with the explicit goal of promoting healthy marriages.

Jaw-Boning. Congress has already taken several actions to focus the public’s attention on the importance of family composition to the nation’s general welfare. The 1996 welfare reform law was perhaps the first time that Congress forcefully brought the issue of family composition to public attention. Not only did the law contain several provisions to reduce nonmarital births, but the law converted the old Aid to Families with Dependent Children program into the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program and gave it four specific goals. Three of the four goals address family composition; namely, reducing dependence on welfare by promoting work and marriage, reducing nonmarital pregnancies, and encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

Thanks in large part to the Bush administration, Congress is now returning to family composition as a major part of the debate on reauthorizing the 1996 welfare reform law. This debate has once again forcefully brought the issue of family composition to public attention and has ignited a debate that is being taken up, not just in Congress, but on the nation’s editorial pages and in campaigns for political office around the country. If the years of Congressional debate on the importance of work as a replacement for welfare is any example, this kind of debate serves the vital purpose of clarifying the nation’s values on marriage and child-rearing and reminding the public of how important it is to preserve and promote marriage and two-parent families.

Reducing Nonmarital Births. In addition to promoting public debate on the value of marriage, Congress should continue its efforts to reduce nonmarital births. Research shows clearly that having a child outside marriage, in addition to portending numerous problems for both the mother and child, substantially reduces the likelihood that the mother will subsequently marry. Nonmarital birth is precisely the problem that Senator Moynihan emphasized in his infamous paper nearly four decades ago. Unfortunately, Congress waited many years before doing anything about the problem, but several important programs are now well underway. Before the 1996 welfare reform law, these programs were aimed almost exclusively at reducing nonmarital births through family planning. But the 1996 welfare reform law contained several provisions designed to reduce nonmarital births through the use of other strategies. These included allowing states to stop increasing the size of welfare checks when mothers on welfare have babies, allowing states to deny benefits to unmarried mothers, strengthening paternity establishment requirements and child support enforcement, requiring teen mothers to live

under adult supervision and to continue attending school or lose their cash welfare benefit, giving a cash bonus to states that reduce their nonmarital pregnancy rate, and establishing a new program of abstinence education.

The abstinence education program has now been implemented in every state except California and has been substantially expanded by legislation enacted in 1997. Congress also enacted legislation requiring that the abstinence education program be subjected to a scientific evaluation. The Mathematica Policy Research firm of Princeton, New Jersey is now conducting the evaluation and results should be available later this year. Meanwhile, the Bush administration has adopted the policy of expanding abstinence programs until the amount of money the federal government spends on abstinence is roughly equal to the amount spent on family planning. There are ongoing disputes between many of the advocates who support family planning and the advocates who support abstinence, but it seems likely that both approaches contribute to reducing nonmarital birth rates. In any case, the birth rate to teenagers has fallen every year since 1991 and has declined by a little less one-third during that period. This is exceptionally good news. In addition, the nonmarital birth rate among all women leveled off in 1995 after more than three decades of continuous growth and has increased only slightly since then. There is still a great deal of room for improvement, but some progress is being made.

All the more reason the federal government, working with the states, should continue and even expand its campaign against nonmarital births. Policies that support both family planning and abstinence education should be continued, as should the goal of equalizing expenditures on the two approaches. One issue that deserves attention, however, is whether all entities receiving federal support are making a serious effort to offer an abstinence message. There are indications that many programs, especially Title X clinics, dispense birth control without engaging recipients in a full assessment of the health and other consequences of sexual activity. It would also be appropriate, especially for older clients, to discuss the advantages of marriage with those who indicate some interest in marriage in response to standard inquiries. If the website of the Title X program is any example, any thought about abstinence or marriage is completely beyond the purview of Title X clinics.

Fund Healthy Marriage Programs. The third component of a federal strategy to promote healthy marriages is to fund programs that aim explicitly to either reduce divorce or promote healthy marriage among unmarried couples, especially those that have had or are expecting to have a baby. The proposals adopted by the House and the Senate in their respective welfare reform reauthorization bills would provide an excellent start toward establishing programs of this type. State and local governments and private organizations, including faith-based organizations, could participate, thereby preventing the federal government from directly conducting the programs. Further, both bills make it clear that only states, organizations, and individuals who want to participate would do so. No program of mandatory marriage education or other pro-marriage activity should be funded. Similarly, in awarding funds on a competitive basis, the Department of Health and Human Services should ensure that programs consider the issue of domestic

violence and make provisions for addressing it where necessary. Finally, because we know so little about marriage-promotion programs, especially with poor and low-income families, the Department should insist that all projects have good evaluation designs, based on random-assignment where possible. Our primary goal over the next decade or so should be to learn what works and for whom.

Research has already produced good evidence that marriage education programs can be effective in the short run in improving communication, reducing conflict, and increasing happiness. Most of these programs have been implemented with married couples that are not poor, but there is good reason to believe that the short-term benefits of marriage education would be achieved with poor families as well.

It is to be hoped that many states and other organizations will attempt to work specifically with poor and low-income, unmarried parents. Sara McLanahan at Princeton and a host of top researchers around the nation are conducting a large-scale study of couples that have children outside marriage. The couples are disproportionately poor and from minority groups. This important research has already exploded several myths about couples that have nonmarital births. First, about 80 percent of the couples are involved exclusively with each other in a romantic relationship. In fact, about half of the couples live together. Couples that produce nonmarital births, in other words, typically do not have casual relationships. Second, a large majority of both the mothers and fathers think about marriage and say that they would like to be married to each other. Third, most of the fathers earn more money than the myth of destitute and idle young males would have us believe. Although nearly 20 percent of the fathers were idle in the week before the child's birth, showing that employment is a problem for some of these men, the mean income of fathers was nonetheless over \$17,000. Fourth, almost all the fathers say they want to be involved with their child – and almost all the mothers want them to be. If these young parents are romantically involved, if most say they are interested in marriage and want the father to be involved with the child, and if most have the economic assets that could provide a decent financial basis for marriage, then why don't more of these young couples marry? It would make great sense for states and private, especially faith-based, organizations to mount programs that attempt to help these young couples make progress toward marriage. The Department of Health and Human Services is already funding research programs of this type, but more such programs should be undertaken all over the nation.

The provision passed by this committee as part of welfare reform reauthorization would provide the funding, direction, and federal leadership necessary to move the nation in this direction. If the program is enacted and projects are initiated all across the country, a great deal of attention and energy will be focused on marriage as a vital national issue. Equally important, good programs carefully evaluated will inevitably increase our knowledge of what works. There is no issue on the nation's domestic agenda that holds greater promise to substantially reduce the nation's major social problems.

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Testimony of Joseph T. Jones
President and Chief Executive Officer

Center for Fathers, Families and Workforce Development
Baltimore, Maryland

Senate Finance Committee
Subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy Subcommittee

May 5, 2004

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Testimony of Joseph Jones
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify. My name is Joe Jones, I am President and CEO for the Center for Fathers, Families and Workforce Development (CFWD) a community based nonprofit organization established in 1999 that provides workforce development, responsible fatherhood and family services to the residents of Baltimore City. I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the staff of my organization and most importantly our program participants.

Ten years ago, when I began to work with low-income fathers there was little research and literature available on responsible fatherhood and the impact of father absence on children and families. The growth of the responsible fatherhood field is illustrated in that today we have an organization such as the National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF) that serves as a repository for information on fathering and its impact on children, families and communities.

During that time national foundations began to invest in research, policy and practices for this new social science field. This investment was made with the expectation that public funding streams would emerge to support the field. However, this has not become a reality and most foundations have disinvested from this work, the most notable exception is the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The need for organizations that promoted and worked toward achieving responsible fatherhood was met by organizations such as the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI), the National Center on Fathering (NCF), the National Partnership for Community Leadership (NPCL), Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization (IRF) and NCOFF.

I began my work with low-income fathers and their families in 1993 as an Addictions Counselor for a small infant mortality reduction program that operated within the Baltimore City Health Department. This initiative eventually became Baltimore City Healthy Start. At that time I provided services to 35 substance abusing pregnant women. My responsibilities included:

- 1) Getting them into early and consistent prenatal care and drug treatment and
- 2) Helping them manage issues that would affect the development of the fetus.

My work required that I meet these women where they were. This meant that I went to their homes, prenatal clinics, drug houses and other places that they frequented.

This outreach, particularly to their homes, led to my meeting many of the fathers of the babies who would be born to these women. What became clear was that the women and their partners struggled with the same issues. But there were few if any resources in the community to work with these expectant fathers. This reality led to the creation of the Men's Services Program.

I created Men's Services because too many children lived in situations that would almost certainly dictate that they would repeat the cycle of broken families and poverty as did

their fathers. I was able to convince the leadership of Baltimore Healthy Start of the importance of services for low-income fathers. As a result Men's Services was included as a part of a broader strategy to reduce infant mortality.

This time period coincided with the development of the "modern day" era of the responsible fatherhood movement. During this time period organizations and programs such as the NFI, NPCL, and NCOFF emerged. The efforts of these organizations built upon the existing foundation built by NCF and IRF.

I created CFWD to expand and enhance the work I began with Baltimore City Healthy Start. CFWD provides support services to fathers, family services to couples to benefit their children and workforce development services to both men and women throughout Baltimore City. **Additionally, to support the programmatic work of the organization we have developed the Men's Services Father's Journal, 50/50 Parenting and Exploring Relationships and Marriage with Fragile Families curricula.**

Responsible fatherhood and healthy marriages are not either or propositions. They are complimentary to each other. Men who understand and are able to fulfill their roles as fathers will also be able to be good partners. However, my experience is that many of the men we serve have a strong desire to be good fathers and good partners. But, simply, don't know how. Many of these men have never had an example of fathering having been reared in homes without fathers. And have essentially learned to be men and fathers on their own. This happens in communities where all too often involvement in drugs, alcohol, violence, incarceration and FATHERING CHILDREN out of wedlock determine manhood.

The lack of father involvement not only impacts a man's ability to establish a meaningful relationship with a woman and provide for a family but also affects his ability to be an effective parent.

The services provided by responsible fatherhood programs can reduce the barriers that prevent men from becoming role models for their children, valuable employees, taxpayers and husbands or responsible co-parents.

The field of responsible fatherhood has responded to and grappled with a number of challenges in its mission to help children, including the following.

Public Awareness: NFI has been instrumental in resolving this issue. It has heightened the importance of fatherhood and the impact of father absence on our nation.

Child Support: As the result of NPCL's Peer Learning College and other efforts child support and responsible fatherhood programs created the framework to pursue mutually beneficial relationships. Child Support Commissioner, Sherry Heller, in her speech at the National Child Support Enforcement Associations Mid-Year Policy Forum underscored the distinction between deadbeat and deadbroke fathers and reiterated her dedication to continue working on behalf of low-income dads.

Domestic Violence: As a result of the work of Dr. Ronald B. Mincy former Senior Program Officer at the Ford Foundation a working group of fatherhood practitioners, domestic violence professionals and public policy advocates was

convened. An outcome of this work has been the mentoring of CFWD by Dr. Oliver Williams of the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African-American Community, Jody Rafael of DePaul University and Anne Manard of the Domestic Violence Resource Network on the issue of domestic violence. This mentorship provided CFWD with the capacity to partner with a the House of Ruth Maryland, a Baltimore-based domestic violence organization.

All of these challenges have been confronted without significant public financial support.

The field of responsible fatherhood recognizes that the institution of marriage is an important and central component to promoting the well being of children. However, the field has not had the resources to take on this issue en masse. It is my firm belief that the field of responsible fatherhood can rise to meet this challenge, but there must be a bridge, between the fields of marriage and responsible fatherhood. We need to establish common ground to create a level of understanding, communication and respect.

Common ground between the two disciplines is only a start to building strong families through either marriage or co-parenting. However, there must be systems, structures and most importantly outreach and services that prepare low-income men to be providers and nurturers. And if a man and woman agree, husbands.

In my opinion there are a number of factors that contribute to a healthy marriage. They are:

- 1) Work that provides you with a sense of pride and purpose;
- 2) Freedom from the demons of alcohol and drugs;
- 3) Ability to communicate and respect your partner; and
- 4) A community that values marriage.

Unfortunately, for many men served by responsible fatherhood organizations the social welfare system does not recognize nor provide access to the type of services that would strengthen them to be partners in healthy marriages and relationships.

Fortunately, the field of responsible fatherhood and its programs has served as a viable resource for men who often have no other place to turn.

Prior to the emergence of the national debate on marriage CFWD recognized that unlike **mainstream** parents, low-income moms and dads don't have access to the resources that will help them overcome the challenges that occur within their relationships. There are no resources that could assist them to communicate, negotiate, compromise and decide how they will jointly raise their children. For this reason 50/50 Parenting was created. We expanded upon those concepts with the development of the Exploring Relationships and Marriage with Fragile Families curriculum. This is important because even parents who are no longer in a romantic relationship could benefit from relationship and marriage services, because ultimately they will end up with new partners.

Simply put, from my experience many single female-headed households were evolved because the parents gave up. I firmly believe that if they possessed the skills to manage their relationships, had access to meaningful employment, the ability to manage stress and additional supports to manage their lives their relationships could succeed for a

period of time. Some would choose to marry and some would work cooperatively to raise their children, though they may no longer be romantically linked.

As an organization we were forced to figure out how to respond to the issue of marriage. When one of our families invited me their home and indicated that they not only wanted to get married, but wanted get married at our facility. We were totally unprepared for this request. I sat with this family, who I had known for some time. I thought about the challenges they had overcome; addiction, \$ 30,000 in child support arrearages, six children between them, and living in public housing with very little income.

That night sitting in their living room, I asked God to help me give them a response that was respectful of the relationship we had developed and honest to their life situation. With divine guidance I told them that if they met with a member of the faith community of their choosing, received premarital counseling and that if that faith leader called me to affirm their potential as a married couple, I would consider their request.

This family took me up on my offer. Forced to keep my word, we arranged to transform our training room into a wedding chapel. I am pleased to introduce you to that family, Dwayne and Brenda Grimes.

Also, we have Dominic Walker, Charice Diggs and their infant son Zion. Dominick and Charice represent a couple who are committed to their young family and who are considered to be in the midst of the magic moment. The magic moment is considered by researchers and policy makers to be the optimal time to build strong families. Dominick and Charice have recently graduated from our 50/50 Parenting Program and they look forward to building a bright future together, overcoming the social and economic challenges to their new family.

To get fragile families to the point where they were able to consider marriage takes tremendous effort on their part and lots of support. But for so many challenged families there is no Men's Services Program and CFWD to guide them on their journey to family formation. This is a challenge we must overcome if low-income families are to consider marriage.

To effectively design and implement public policy that promotes healthy marriages and has the potential to create stable households where children can grow and thrive, we must create systems that are prepared to accept these parents where they are. The spirit of this concept is embodied in the bipartisan approach taken by leaders such as Senators Santorum and Bayh.

I wish I could tell you that the traditional way of marriage, where people marry and have children is the norm in my community, but that simply is not the case. But that doesn't mean that a strategy to promote healthy marriages is not applicable to their situations. These families must be met where they are: living in challenged communities struggling to meet the demands of family formation.

My organization has accepted this challenge. However, let me be clear as it exists today the responsible fatherhood field does not have the infrastructure or resources to absorb the number of families who could benefit from such a partnership. However, we must identify areas of common ground. There's too much at stake. This doesn't mean that we have to agree on every single point, but we must build upon our well-intentioned

positions. Also, there are many stakeholders who have a role in our work, including our partners in the child support, healthy marriage and domestic violence communities.

Testimony of
Theodora Ooms
Center for Law and Social Policy
before the
Committee on Finance
Subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy
United States Senate

Hearing on

The Benefits of a Healthy Marriage

Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 219
May 5, 2004

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is Theodora Ooms, and I am a senior policy analyst at the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), where I work on couples and marriage policy, with a special focus on low-income populations. In addition, I have worked as an independent consultant with several state and community healthy marriage initiatives, including the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative.

Today, I am going to describe some of the marriage-related activities going on around the country, describe how policymakers might address legitimate concerns about current marriage proposals, and suggest that some common ground on this contentious issue may be found in a "marriage-plus" perspective.

Until relatively recently, marriage was considered a private issue and not the business of government, especially not the federal government. But marriage is now no longer the "M-Word." In the past three years, in particular, marriage has become a hot topic, encouraged in large part by the current Administration. In 2001, the federal Administration for Children and Families declared that "healthy marriage" was one of the agency's top priorities, and it has committed at least \$90 million in existing program funding streams to support demonstration programs and research and evaluation projects since then.¹ This Committee has been debating a proposal in the welfare reauthorization to spend \$1.6 billion over five years to promote marriage. And this month, a number of Senate subcommittees are holding hearings on marriage.

In addition, quite a bit of marriage-related activity is going on around the country. A new report that we just released last week, *Beyond Marriage Licenses: Efforts in States to Strengthen Marriage and Two-Parent Families*, shows that every state has undertaken at least one activity or made at least one policy change designed to strengthen marriage and/or two-parent families in the last ten years—although most of these efforts have been modest. Since the mid-1990s, state and community leaders have instituted a range of legal, cultural, educational, and economic

strategies to promote marriage, reduce divorce, and strengthen two-parent families.² For example:

- Thirty-six states have revised their Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) eligibility rules to treat one-parent and two-parent households the same;
- Governors and other senior officials in nine states have declared strengthening marriage to be a public goal;
- Eight states have made significant changes to their marriage and divorce laws;
- In 40 states, government-funded programs provide couples- and marriage-related services in selected communities or counties, usually on a pilot basis; and
- In those 40 states, seven states and several communities have dedicated significant TANF funds to support marriage-related activities.

Unfortunately, very few of these initiatives in states are being carefully documented or evaluated.

Government involvement in promoting marriage remains controversial—both in Washington and in the states. While many researchers and policy experts agree that children raised in two-parent, married families do better on average than children raised in other situations, consensus has not yet emerged on what can or should be done to promote the well-being of children by supporting marriage.

In my view, strengthening marriage and two-parent families has the potential of being a genuinely non-partisan issue—if we can keep the focus on the goal of promoting child well-being and if we keep our minds open about the many causes of non-marital childbearing and marriage break-up in our society. We need to acknowledge that strengthening marriage is a new and controversial policy goal that should be approached cautiously, that there may be a diversity of strategies (including marriage education) that could make a difference, and that we should not seek simplistic solutions or raise expectations too high about the role of government in strengthening marriage.

Building Consensus Through a Marriage-Plus Perspective

Our new report on state activities to strengthen marriage and two-parent families suggests that state policymakers are realizing that this issue of marriage is complicated and that strategies to strengthen families may need to be multi-faceted. The report identifies three trends worth noting:

Increased attention to prevention. The earliest efforts related to marriage promotion concentrated mostly on passing laws to make divorce more difficult and on making declarations that marriage is a public good. Public officials and community leaders are now focusing more on fostering preventive, educational services offered on a voluntary basis to help couples better

choose marriage partners and create healthier, longer-lasting marriages. These latter initiatives have generally provoked less controversy, which may account for their growing popularity. In fact, these educational services are the only marriage strategy receiving any significant funding to date.

Expanded efforts to reach low-income couples in a variety of settings. Couples and marriage education classes have typically been offered to middle-class committed couples (engaged or already married) for a fee in free-standing, private or university-based programs or in faith-based institutions. In some states and communities, policymakers are now integrating preventive, educational services to individuals and couples (both married and unmarried) in ongoing government-funded programs that serve predominantly low-income families from a variety of racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, as well as to other special populations. Relationship education programs are now being offered to high school students, disadvantaged expectant and new parents, low-income unwed parents, adoptive and foster parents, parents of juvenile first offenders, incarcerated parents and their partners, refugees, and military couples. This new focus reflects, in part, the influence of flexible TANF monies and new federal government grants.

Interest in economic and other indirect strategies. Although states have thus far done little either to remove economic barriers to marriage or to provide economic incentives and support to encourage marriage and two-parent family formation, interest in economic strategies is growing. States will likely want to minimize financial and programmatic barriers to marriage in TANF, Medicaid, housing, and other public assistance programs, and in tax policy, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit—especially if this can be done without penalizing single parents. Several government-funded studies are underway to better understand the interactive effects of different program rules on family types. As the discussion about marriage policy broadens, states are likely to seek more information about what kinds of income support, employment programs, and other kinds of economic assistance can help stabilize marriages and couple relationships. More attention may also be paid to reinforcing the positive indirect effects on marriage that have already been identified in such programs as child support enforcement, nurse home-visiting, and teen pregnancy prevention.

These findings from our report suggest that states are amenable to a couples and marriage policy guided by a “Marriage-Plus” perspective. The “plus” in Marriage-Plus signifies a set of broader goals, more flexible and comprehensive strategies, and more diverse actors than proposed by many marriage promotion advocates. Let me describe to you what I mean:

Goals of Marriage-Plus. The primary purpose of any healthy marriage promotion initiative should be to promote the well-being of *all* children. The Marriage-Plus approach has two overarching goals. First, policies and programs should aim to help more children grow up with their two biological, married parents in a healthy, stable relationship. However, for many parents, marriage is not a feasible or desirable option. Thus, the second goal is to help these parents—whether never-married, separated, divorced, or remarried—to be financially capable and responsible and to cooperate, whenever appropriate, in raising their children. These are not competing goals. Children need us to pursue both.

Principles of Marriage-Plus. The Marriage-Plus approach is guided by several principles. “Healthy” marriage, not marriage for its own sake, should be encouraged and supported. Participation in marriage-related programs should be voluntary and tailored to meet the diverse needs of different populations. Strategies should be designed based on the best available research evidence and should be carefully evaluated. Finally, a Marriage-Plus approach focuses on the front end (making marriages better to be in), not the back end (making marriages more difficult to get out of).

Scope of Activities. Social science research has identified a wide range of economic, educational, legal, and cultural factors that affect whether couples marry, as well as the quality and stability of marriages. Therefore, efforts to promote or strengthen marriage should include a variety of strategies. Some may explicitly focus on marriage; others may have other primary goals, yet may indirectly have positive effects on marriage. For example, there is evidence that increasing parental employment and income, reducing work stress, and preventing teen pregnancy and out-of-wedlock births can all contribute to strengthening marriage and improving co-parenting by unmarried parents.³

The Role of Government. A Marriage-Plus approach is not the responsibility of government alone. Many parts of the community—including the legal, education, health, business, faith, and media sectors—all have important roles to play and need to work in partnership with public officials to pursue these goals.

Addressing Legitimate Areas of Concern

As I mentioned, in the last decade, research has emerged that indicates that, on average, children who grow up in families with both their biological parents who have a low-conflict marriage are better off in a number of ways than children who grow up in single-, step- or cohabiting-parent households.⁴ For instance, children living with single mothers are five times as likely to be poor as those in two-parent families.⁵ Marriage also benefits adults: in general married adults are healthier, live longer, and earn more and accumulate more wealth than single people.⁶ This research consensus is relatively new.

However, we are far from consensus on what policy decisions to make based on this research. Proposals (like the Administration’s) that focus solely or predominantly on marriage education have raised concerns from many, including CLASP. Policymakers should take these concerns into account as they design and implement marriage policies and programs. And they may be able to draw lessons from the experiences of states. I will discuss three of the most important concerns here:

Marriage programs and policies should not force or pressure women, especially young, poor, and vulnerable women, to enter or remain in bad, abusive marriages. The first order of business should be to do no harm. Too often there’s a dark side to marriage and intimate relationships—emotional, physical, and psychological abuse and violence. Abused women should not be further harmed by programs that may require, pressure, or in effect “bribe” women to stay in bad relationships. Low-income women are more likely to be involved in abusive relationships, and women often turn to government assistance to leave abusers.⁷

Many members of the domestic violence community at the national, state, and local levels have been especially articulate about the protections that need to be put in place in any marriage-related programming.⁸ In addition, a number of state marriage activities have worked hard to address these concerns. In Arizona, Florida, and Oklahoma, representatives of the domestic violence community are successfully working in collaboration with the leadership of the new marriage initiatives in these states. In Oklahoma, the training of relationships and marriage educators now includes information about indicators of partner and spousal abuse, as well as information about what services are available. On a few occasions, women shelter residents have attended relationship education workshops offered in shelters in order to learn how to avoid getting into bad relationships in the future.

The Administration has said their intent is to promote *healthy* marriage not marriage *per se*, and that participation in programs funded under the Healthy Marriage initiative will be voluntary. These assurances are welcome—as is the language in the Senate Finance bill that includes important provisions about voluntariness of services and requires consultation with domestic violence advocates. However, these assurances will need to be followed up in the proposal review process, regulations, guidance, and ongoing technical assistance. For example, if the Healthy Marriage initiative passes, grantees need to be encouraged to involve representatives of the domestic violence community in designing plans for any program or initiative. In addition, the government should make clear that grantees should be expected to set aside some of their funds to contract with domestic violence experts for training and technical assistance. Finally, more work needs to be done on clarifying what is meant in public policy terms by “healthy marriages.”

Marriage education may be useful, but it is not enough. If two poor parents are unemployed and have little education and no skills, just getting them to marry will not magically lift them out of poverty. We can all agree that marriage should not be our nation’s central poverty reduction strategy.

At the same time, there is ample data to show that poverty and marital status are strongly linked. But the causal relationship goes both ways. Parents are poor because they are not married, and they are often not married because they are poor. What can we conclude about the causes of the link between poverty and marital status? On the one hand, marriage can improve the economic situation of some low-income couples. When disadvantaged cohabiting couples marry, they often work harder, pool their resources, earn more and save more, and receive more support from their families.⁹ On the other hand, economics may be a key reason for the failure of so many low-income parents to marry or stay married. For instance, several studies suggest that the inability of many poorly educated, low-skilled men, especially urban African Americans, to economically support their families is an important reason why they do not marry the mothers of their children.¹⁰ This suggests that it makes sense to promote and strengthen marriage by improving low-income parents’ financial and educational situation.

There is some research evidence that economic strategies can make a difference for some couples. In the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) demonstration, income supplements to working couples receiving welfare in Minnesota had a positive effect on

stabilizing marriage (and reducing domestic violence).¹¹ In addition, in the Wisconsin W-2 study, passing through child support income to the custodial parents also reduced severe conflict between couples.¹²

Taken together, this suggests we should pursue multiple strategies in order to make any serious positive impact on marriage and co-parenting relationships in low-income populations. This is clearly one of the lessons of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, which concluded that while one-third of unmarried new parents in the national survey could benefit from relationships skills training alone, fully one-third of the unmarried parents would need a combination of relationship skills training and employment, mental health, and possibly other services. (The researchers found that efforts to strengthen the relationships of the last third would be not at all appropriate).¹³

Given the lack of research on marriage-related interventions, policymakers should proceed cautiously, try out a variety of strategies, and carefully evaluate the positive and negative consequences of these programs, particularly for low-income families and children. Couples and marriage policy is a new field. Few of the programs and initiatives undertaken so far have been evaluated. And while research has shown that a couple of the most prominent marriage education programs have produced positive effects, these studies have been conducted with mostly middle-class, committed couples. A number of initiatives described in our report have begun adapting marriage education programs for more diverse audiences, including fragile families, and ACF has committed funds to conduct rigorous evaluation of these kinds of programs. I believe we should proceed cautiously until we learn more—especially at a time when federal and state governments are cutting or freezing programs for the poor. As this new field evolves over the next decade, it will be critically important to document both the positive and negative consequences of these programs and to learn whether and how policies and programs can strengthen marriage and two-parent families in different populations—and thereby improve child well-being.

Looking to the future, policymakers should consider carefully several questions as they pursue government-funded marriage activities,¹⁴ including:

- Will public officials, community leaders, and program administrators be able to use grant funds to do the important but time-consuming work of inviting potential critics and skeptics—including the domestic violence community—into their planning processes?
- As states seek to expand marriage programs to new populations, how should existing programs and curricula be successfully adapted to meet the needs of a more economically, racially, and culturally diverse group of participants?¹⁵
- Will policymakers and program administrators make services available to unmarried parents who may not decide to marry but who would like to do a better job co-parenting their children?
- Will funds be available to build capacity to deliver marriage-related services effectively, such as training trainers to deliver the workshops and training program administrators, supervisors, front-line workers, and members of the community to discuss these issues appropriately with clients and refer them to the new services?¹⁶

- Are leaders sufficiently committed to design policies and programs based on the best theory and research available, to carefully document how public funds are being spent, and to invest in research and evaluation?

Toward Common Ground?

A number of lessons from activities in states and local communities suggest that there are some areas on which people can come together across political divisions to strengthen marriage and two-parent families:

Make healthy marriage initiatives broad enough to encompass the goal of promoting better relationships and co-parenting for those whom marriage is no longer feasible or even perhaps desirable. In Louisiana, for example, a marriage and co-parenting curriculum is being piloted to serve unwed parents called, *Exploring Relationships and Marriage in Fragile Families*. And two reader-friendly Guides have been developed and will be widely distributed across the state, one called *Marriage Matters*, which will be given to couples who apply for marriage licenses, and *Raising Your Child Together*, a guide to co-parenting and marriage for unmarried parents.¹⁷ And, as Oklahoma and other states have demonstrated, marriage initiatives should be sure to involve the domestic violence community in planning and implementation.

Don't ignore the economic barriers to marriage in low-income communities. The MFIP demonstration suggests that income supports can make a difference in marriage stability. Fatherhood programs are working to make sure that young men are better able to take care of their financial responsibilities for their families, whether married or unmarried. As the Fragile Families study suggests, many unmarried couples would benefit from job skills, mental health care, and other services.

Base healthy marriage programs and policies on the best data and research available—and require rigorous evaluations. States and local communities have confronted a real lack of data and research knowledge in developing their marriage initiatives. It is my hope that we focus our attention on learning more about marriage and family formation in a variety of populations and about what variety of strategies might strengthen marriage and two-parent families for the benefit of child well-being.

If the important concerns and questions I have outlined are addressed, we'll be more likely to create effective programs, avoid causing harm, and respond to the legitimate concerns of those who are skeptical about marriage-related government activity.

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² Ooms, Bouchet, & Parke, 2004.

³ Testimony of Theodora Ooms before the Subcommittee on Human Resources, Committee on Ways and Means hearing on *Welfare and Marriage Issues* held on Tuesday, May 22, 2001.

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Strengthening Couples and Marriage in Low-Income Communities *

By Theodora Ooms
Resource Center on Couples and Marriage Policy
Center on Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

INTRODUCTION

As a policy analyst I serve as a broker between the worlds of research, practice and policy. For more than twenty years I have been working in family policy. Within this broad area, marriage—the cornerstone of the family—has been viewed as the “m-word,” too sensitive an issue to address directly and publicly.¹ Thus I welcome the signs that marriage is beginning to emerge on the public agenda, and that conferences are being held to discuss how to strengthen marriage.

However, the evolving marriage “movement” is, for the most part, inadvertently ignoring the needs and circumstances of low-income couples, even though the poor are the population group most in need of help. Most of the legal reforms and program initiatives currently being proposed to revitalize and strengthen marriage are not likely, in my view, to have any significant impact on marital stability and quality, or nonmarital childbearing among the poor. There is a major exception. The new federal welfare reform program has the potential to help stabilize and strengthen couple unions among the poor. The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reform Act (PRWORA) established four purposes, of which three address promoting marriage, reducing out-of-wedlock childbearing, and strengthening two-parent families. (See Appendix for background on the law.)

In this paper I address four questions. First, why is it important to focus on the state of marriage in low-income communities? Second, what do we know and what more do we need to know about couple unions and marriage among the poor and near-poor? Third, what special barriers exist and opportunities are there to build upon within these groups? Fourth, what can we do, if anything, to help strengthen two-parent families and marriage in these communities? Much of my discussion focuses on the situation in African-American, urban, low-income communities largely because there is some relevant research to draw upon, which is not the case with other racial/ethnic groups.

* This paper is printed as Chapter 7 in *Revitalizing the Institution of Marriage in the 21st Century: An Agenda for Strengthening Marriage*, eds. Alan J. Hawkins, Lynn D. Wardle, and David Orgon Coolidge. © 2002 by Alan J. Hawkins, Lynn D. Wardle, and David Orgon Coolidge. Pages 79-100. Reproduced with permission of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., Westport, CT. <http://www.greenwood.com>.

Reasons to Focus on Low-Income Populations

It is important to focus on couples and marriage among the poor because they are at greater risk of single parenthood and the consequences for their children are more serious. A second reason is the issue of public costs. The rise in single parenthood among the poor has driven up the costs of welfare, Medicaid and many other public assistance programs. Third, the decline in marriage among the poor and near-poor is influenced by a more complex array of factors and assumes different shapes and patterns than in the rest of the population. Thus efforts to strengthen marriage for the population as a whole are not likely to be successful unless a deliberate effort is made to develop policies and services tailored to the needs and circumstances of poor families.

The decline in marriage (and the related increase in nonmarital childbearing) cuts across nations, class, religion and race; however, it is most marked among the poor. Low-income individuals are at higher risk of out-of-wedlock childbearing, of cohabitation, are less likely to marry, and when they do marry are more likely to separate and divorce than middle- or high-income couples.²

The proportion of children who live with only one parent has more than doubled since 1970, from 12 percent to 28 percent in 1996. Although the proportion is highest for black children, the rise has been steepest for whites.³ Almost half (49 percent) of children in female-headed households were poor in 1998.⁴ Single-parent households are five times more likely to be poor than two-parent households. This development is causing growing concern among policy makers and the public.

The proportion of all American children who are poor has been increasing—from 15 percent in 1970 to 20 percent in 1996, “but virtually all of this increase is associated with the growth of single-parent families.”⁵ (It is not possible to disentangle the direction of causation, since poverty is both a cause and an effect of single-parenthood.) Sawhill points out that the composition of this group of single parents has changed also. In the 1960s and 1970s, most of the growth of single-parent families was caused by increases in divorce, but in the next two decades all the increase was driven by out-of-wedlock childbearing. Currently, 32 percent of all children are born outside of marriage and these children are more likely to be long-term welfare dependents. (However 40 percent of these nonmarital births are to cohabiting couples.) Currently more than half of parents receiving welfare are not married to their child’s other parent, nearly 20 percent are divorced or separated, and 11 percent are married.⁶

Studies document that children raised in single-parent homes are at greater risk of poverty, and other negative outcomes such as school drop-out, juvenile delinquency, teen pregnancy, and are themselves more likely to become divorced.⁷ As noted the increased number of single parents has led to an increase in costs of welfare, medical assistance, food stamps, and many other assistance programs for the poor, as well as programs to deal with the issues of teen pregnancy and parenthood and troubled, poorly educated youth. In summary, there is substantial public interest in reversing the current trends in family formation among low-income populations.

COUPLE RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE AMONG THE POOR AND NEAR-POOR

Strategies to strengthen marriage in low-income populations need to be based on a sound understanding of their demographic trends, particular patterns of couple union, and the contexts, causes and consequences of these patterns. Unfortunately, although some information is available, there are many limitations and gaps in our knowledge of these patterns.

The demographic data that monitor trends in fertility, marriage, and out-of-wedlock pregnancy for the U.S. population as a whole are rarely presented by income or poverty status, as explained by Christine Bachrach. She says that the alternative strategy typically adopted is “to examine trend data according to relatively enduring characteristics that are associated with, but not identical to, poverty.”⁸ Race is one such characteristic, but it is a poor proxy for income or poverty. Level of education is often preferred.

Another problem is that while analysis of census data can provide a fairly good portrait of the association between poverty and single-parent status, these measures underestimate the presence of men or other adults in single-parent households. The use of the term *female-headed households* gives the false impression that these women are living without other adults in the household. In fact, a substantial minority live with others, both relatives and non-relatives. Analysis of the 1990 Survey of Income and Program participation found that 62 percent of single parents lived independently, 16 percent (mostly the younger, unmarried mothers) lived with their parents, 12 percent cohabited with unrelated men, and 11 percent shared with other adults.⁹ White and Hispanic mothers are roughly twice as likely to cohabit as black mothers, but black mothers are substantially more likely to live with parents. Moreover many of the women who report they are living independently have men in their lives as frequent visitors.

Researchers have had a great deal of interest in cohabitation in recent years; however, there remain major gaps in our understanding of patterns of cohabitation in the general population and in low-income populations in particular. We know that cohabitation has been increasing dramatically: there was a sevenfold increase between 1970 and 1996. Over half of all first marriages are now preceded by cohabitation. We also know that cohabitation is somewhat more common among low-income couples.¹⁰ Cohabiting couples have high rates of breakup and their children are exposed to more instability than children of married couples.¹¹ Yet most cross-sectional surveys do not capture the complex cohabitation histories and visiting relationships of unwed parents. The constant instability of these relationships may be a more serious disadvantage to the children than if they were being raised in a stable, one-parent household.¹² We also don't know about the prevalence or characteristics of long-term cohabiting couples among poor blacks or Latinos, and whether these unions resemble what we used to term “common-law” marriages.

Although there is a growing body of literature about couple relationships and marriage among blacks there is very little data about poor whites, Native Americans, or Latinos, or about the differences between urban and rural poor families. This is a serious gap in research. For example, there is evidence that there are considerable racial-ethnic differences in patterns of, and attitudes towards cohabitation and marriage, but these have been essentially ignored in the literature and public discussions about marriage.¹³ A growing proportion of the poor in the

United States comprises Latino and Asian immigrant families. Strong marriage and family ties and traditional family values are major strengths and resources for many immigrant groups. Apparently the process of assimilation does damage to these “family values.” A new wave of studies using census and other data “consistently indicate patterns of low rates of divorce and of single-parent families in the first (immigrant) generation but striking increases in the prevalence of marital disruption over time in the United States and particularly in succeeding generations, for some (immigrant) groups more than for others.”¹⁴

Within the substantial body of literature on African-American families, there are a growing number of qualitative studies on marriage and male/female relationships, especially among the urban Black poor. (I gratefully acknowledge the help of Dr. Robert Hill, noted African-American sociologist, for steering me to several invaluable sources of information on this subject.) This research focus has a long and controversial history.

The publication in 1965 of the Moynihan report, *The Negro Family: A Call to Action* placed a spotlight on the growth in black, female-headed households, and called them “broken” families. The report generated protest from many quarters. Several African-American scholars pointed out the biased nature of much of the research and commentary on black families and recognize that it continues today. They objected to the singular focus on one type of lower-class black family, to a preoccupation with pathologies rather than also examining the diversity and strengths within the black community that have enabled so many to survive and others to do well despite the odds.¹⁵

For example, Hill notes that in the 1990 census, married couples constituted the majority of black family households yet there is a virtual absence of research on African-American married couples. Hill also laments the failure to study the two-parent, two-earner, low-income black families who reside in the urban “underclass” areas defined as neighborhoods in which 40 percent or more people are poor. He points out that in these areas half of the families are two-parent, are not poor, and not on welfare, and three out of five families have income from earnings.¹⁶

Yet while it is important to avoid stereotyping, to present a balanced view of black families, and to focus on their strengths, Hill believes we should not commit the opposite error of avoiding the facts. Researchers must seek to understand the causes of the dramatic decline in marriage among African-Americans that has taken place since the 1960s. This decline is all the more dramatic when seen in historical context. Around the turn of the century, black young women were more likely to be married than white.¹⁷ Indeed in 1940, for every age and sex group, whites exceeded blacks in percentages never-married; but by the 1980s, just the opposite was true. Currently only 70 to 75 percent of African-American women can expect to marry during their lifetime as compared with 91 percent of white women.¹⁸

Black women are much more likely to give birth out-of-wedlock than white or Hispanic women. In 1999, 22 percent of births to non-Hispanic white women, 42 percent of births to Hispanic women and 69 percent of births to black women were nonmarital.¹⁹ When blacks marry they are twice as likely to divorce as white or Hispanic women.²⁰ And yet while the levels of out-of-

wedlock childbearing are higher for blacks, the trends have been steadily declining since the early 1990s, whereas they have been rising for whites and Hispanics.²¹

The combined effect of the decrease in black marriage rates, high black divorce rates, and the high (although declining) rates of nonmarital childbearing among blacks is that the majority of African-American children are now living in single-parent homes.

Explanations for the Decline in Marriage

Four principal explanations are often put forward to account for the nationwide decline in marriage. Most agree that a major factor is the changing economic status of women. Their entry into the labor force and increased earnings has created a so-called “independence effect” by diminishing the economic need for women to marry or stay married. The empirical evidence to support this intuitively appealing argument is slim, however.²² It also has less salience for African-American populations since black women have historically had high employment rates.

A second explanation given for the decline in marriage, especially among low-income African-Americans is the shortage of “marriageable” black men due an imbalance in the sex ratio between adult black men and women. This proposed imbalance is caused in part by high rates of male homicide and suicide; high rates of unemployment among low-skilled men, especially young black men in urban areas; and high rates of black male incarceration, and drug addiction. This theory was originally put forward by noted African-American scholar William Julius Wilson, based on his extensive studies of the effects of deindustrialization in the Chicago inner-city neighborhoods.²³ It was reinforced by the findings of an edited volume of papers by Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan²⁴ and has since gained wide currency. Although some empirical evidence has been found to support this thesis, the increasing black male unemployment rates have been found to account for only about 20 percent of the changes in marriage rates for black men from 1960 to 1980.²⁵

A third factor most often cited by conservatives as a major cause of the retreat from marriage among the poor is the expansion of welfare programs that occurred in the late 1960s and 1970s. Since these programs were targeted on giving assistance to single-parent families, it is argued that the government was stepping in to take the place of fathers, undermining their responsibility to provide for their families and creating financial incentives to break up or discourage marriage on the theory that “you get more of what you subsidize.”

There has been a vigorous debate among economists about whether research supports this view. The evidence is mixed and often conflicting. However, on balance, the new consensus is that the welfare programs undoubtedly played some contributory role to the rise in non-marital childbearing and divorce, but the magnitude of the effects was not large and certainly not large enough to account for the dramatic decline in marriage that has occurred over the past twenty years, and in all classes of society, not only the poor.²⁶ Some analysts have taken the position that there are substantial financial disincentives for many couples embedded within the various low-income assistance programs, including a very high marriage penalty within the Earned Income Tax Credit.²⁷ Others, however, are not so sure. A recent paper suggests that the

calculations of marriage penalties/bonuses are very complicated, and when cohabitation is introduced as an option “two-parent families fare better than single parent families regardless of whether they marry if the calculation takes into account child support payments and the additional costs of maintaining two separate households.”²⁸

The understanding and effect of financial disincentives/incentives on young people’s decision to marry are unknown. Middle income couples are not likely to be deterred from marrying by the fact that if both are earners they will be taxed at a higher rate than if they stayed single. However, the potential loss of several thousand dollars in benefits and refundable tax credits may deter young, low-income working couples from marriage and encourage cohabitation, since they are already living at the financial margin.

Fourth, the revolution in cultural and sexual values and gender roles of the past half-century has clearly played a strong role in the changes in reproductive and marital behavior across incomes levels. William Julius Wilson, in his most recent book, states “the weaker the norms against premarital sex, out-of-wedlock pregnancy and non-marital parenthood, the more that economic considerations affect the decision to marry.”²⁹ Shifts in attitudes about gender roles may also play a part in relationship difficulties among low-income families. As noted recently by ethnographer Kathryn Edin, “There is certainly evidence that among lower-income adults, women’s views (about gender roles) have changed far more dramatically than men’s, and the result is a mismatch in sex role expectations of poor men and women.”³⁰

All four of these factors undoubtedly play some part in the decline of marriage, and in communities with high concentrations of poverty, economic, cultural and social forces appear to reinforce each other in a downward, amplifying spiral across generations.

Kathryn Edin and her colleagues have recently conducted in-depth interviews with 130 low-income black, white and Puerto Rican single mothers in nine neighborhoods in the Philadelphia metropolitan area.³¹ These interviews confirm some of the above theories; when added to earlier studies conducted by Robin Jarrett, they create some powerful insights.³² The women revealed four major motives that explained why they are not married to the men in their lives:

- Economic pressures (the men’s erratic employment and earnings).
- Belief in male untrustworthiness (women spoke about the inevitability of male infidelity, their inability to handle money wisely, or care for children responsibly).
- Yearning for respectability and upward mobility (many of the women associated marriage with home ownership, big weddings and other markers of financial stability and upward mobility—and none of these seemed possible to achieve by marrying their current partners or boyfriends).
- Maintaining control and independence (these women expressed a strong desire to avoid economic dependence on men, which had often occurred during their early childbearing years, and envisaged marriage, a status they idealized and desired, as a partnership between equals—they assumed marriage would probably not happen until their children were in school or had left home).

Edin concludes, “These low-income single mothers believe that marriage will probably make their lives more difficult and do not, by and large, perceive any special stigma to remaining single.”³³ In a small number of interviews with low-income fathers, Edin and her colleagues confirmed the strong role economics plays as their responses make clear “that the role of the father is inextricably bound to a man’s ability to provide for his children—to ‘be there’ financially and emotionally.”³⁴

These sociological, demographic, and economic explanations of the decline in marriage leave out an important part of the story. Marital interaction researchers, who are generally clinical psychologists, believe the reasons for high levels of marital instability derive primarily from the nature of the relationship between the couple. They assume that relational qualities and patterns of interaction assume a much greater importance in contemporary marriages than in former times. Most of the traditional economic, legal, social and cultural constraints that used to keep marriages together (even unhappy ones) have fallen away. In addition, couples now have higher expectations for marital happiness—having all one’s needs met by one’s marital partner—and are readier to dissolve the union if they are not satisfied. The result is that there is much more pressure on young couples ability to communicate well, negotiate and resolve conflict, accept each other’s differences, and stay committed to working on the relationship. In their carefully controlled clinical studies these marital researchers have been able to identify characteristic patterns of relating that are highly predictive of divorce.³⁵

Each of these explanations suggests different approaches to attempting to strengthen and revitalize the institution of marriage. Before discussing these, however, I highlight below a few additional points that need to guide policy and program development for low-income couples. The first group fall into the category of barriers to overcome, the second are more in the nature of opportunities to build on.

Barriers to Overcome

The “M-word”

One of the major barriers to putting marriage on the public agenda is that so many of our nation’s leaders are reluctant to talk openly about what is happening to marriage today. There are a number of reasons why people want to avoid the subject or believe it is not a legitimate topic for government intervention.³⁶ Marriage is a personal and sensitive subject and brings with it many different kinds of personal and political “baggage.” Some fear that pro-marriage advocates want to restore patriarchy or deny the existence of domestic violence. There is also the real concern that promoting marriage is seen as stigmatizing and blaming single parents—many of whom are doing a good job under difficult circumstances—and that by imposing middle-class values on the vulnerable poor we may be acting coercively.

Progressive leaders are especially concerned that since single-parent households are more prevalent in low-income African-American communities, a pro-marriage agenda may seem especially insensitive to black concerns and realities. These fears and sensitivities about the “m-

word,” however real, should not be permitted to stifle study and debate on a topic of such importance to low-, middle- and high-income Americans alike.

Decoupling of Childbearing and Marriage

Ironically, while Americans persist in highly valuing marriage, they are becoming much less certain that marriage and childbearing need to be linked. Polls reflect a much greater tolerance and destigmatization of unwed childbearing. But when it comes to their own families, Americans in general still disapprove of unwed childbearing and there is still a general recognition that it is better to wait until marriage to have a child. A recent report points out that only about 14 percent of U.S. women in 1989 said that they would consider it acceptable for their daughter to bear a child without being married.³⁷ While black adults are somewhat more accepting, only 28.5 percent say they would consider it acceptable for their own daughter to have a child while unmarried. Surveys of younger people, however, reveal their attitudes are considerably more permissive about unwed childbearing. And in those African-American communities in which half to three-quarters of the children are born outside of marriage, there is probably less stigma attached to this status and less support for the belief that children are better off if they are born and raised by two married parents.

It is an enormously difficult challenge to think of effective ways of reversing this growing and widespread cultural acceptance of out-of-wedlock childbearing. It will require a marked change in the cultural messages that young people hear and see around them every day.

Complexity of Couple and Family Relationships

Initiatives to strengthen marriage in low-income communities will need to take into account the complexity of the couple's family relationships. Many low-income couples—whether black, white or Hispanic—do not move through the traditional stages of courtship (cohabitation), marriage, childbearing, and then perhaps divorce and remarriage that are the familiar sequence in middle-income populations. Family formation nowadays often begins not with marriage, but with the (typically unplanned) birth of a child. Often the baby's parents do not stay together but move on to new partners. Thus from the beginning many cohabiting couple households and first marriages may include a child of one of the partners. Families formed in this way face many ambiguities and tensions about who makes decisions, who the child has to obey, which partner pays what bills and so forth. In addition the relationships between the couple and the child's non-residential parent (often referred to in black communities as “my baby's daddy” or “my baby's mother”) are delicate and fraught with difficulty. In some respects these families encounter some of the same tensions and challenges as “blended” step-families.

External Stressors

Low-income families, especially those who reside in poverty neighborhoods, are daily exposed to a variety of experiences that place extraordinary stress on the couple and family relationships. In addition to the constant stress of making ends meet financially, and of working in unstable,

low-paying jobs, they have the frustrations of living in substandard housing in poorly serviced neighborhoods, without adequate transportation, and they and their children are continually in fear of crime and violence. Members of their immediate or extended families may be struggling with depression, alcoholism or drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, or may be in and out of jail, or some combination of those problems. Domestic violence is more prevalent in low-income households. In addition, black and other minority individuals are constantly exposed in the workplace or on the streets to incidents of racism and discrimination. Service providers who work with these couples note how often these accumulated stresses spillover into the home, and anger and frustration too often poison the relationship between couples and between parents and children.

Opportunities to Build On

Persistent High Valuation of Marriage

Although many skeptics assert that the high rates of out-of-wedlock childbearing and divorce indicate that marriage has virtually disappeared as a value among blacks, study after study proves the contrary. Just as in the population as a whole, marriage remains highly valued by African-Americans across income levels, and married couples, especially married men, report high levels of satisfaction with their lives.³⁸

In the National Survey of Black Americans conducted in 1979-1980 at the University of Michigan, (the first nationally representative sample survey of black adults in the nation), respondents identified six major functions for which marriage is considered very important: raising children, companionship, having a sustained love life (sex), safety (for women), help with housework, and financial security.³⁹

The continuing high value placed on the importance of marriage suggests that initiatives designed to strengthen marriage would be welcomed by many in the African-American community. (This is also certainly true in the Mexican-American community, where there is an even higher cultural value placed upon being married.) Indeed increasing numbers of African-American scholars and community leaders are talking to each other about the status of male-female relations in the African-American community. Many black churches are setting up programs to enrich and restore marriage.⁴⁰ And the black popular magazines and journals, such as *Ebony*, frequently feature articles on this subject just as their counterparts do for white readers. Today, male-female relations is the most widely discussed topic in the black media.

Gender-Role Flexibility

One of the major cultural strengths of African-Americans is the flexibility of family roles in general, and specifically between men and women.⁴¹ Two-earner families have long been the norm. Black mothers typically work outside the home, and perform other traditional roles of fathers, and fathers often care for the children and carry out traditional women's household chores. This flexibility has enabled many black families to survive economically. To the extent

that this egalitarian model is practiced in African-American communities it suggests that a major source of tension for many white couples may be less of a problem for blacks.

"Magic Moments"

Several recent studies report that there are moments and stages in the development of many low-income couples' relationships that, at least briefly, hold promise of a better and more long lasting future together. For example, in Kathryn Edin's study, many mothers report that prior to the pregnancy their relationships with their children's fathers were warm, romantic and loving, and a good number said they had even planned to marry, but then the relationship began to fall apart as the boyfriends began to panic at the prospect of having to assume responsibilities and commitments for which they felt unprepared.

Other mothers often described a golden period in their relationship with the child's father once their child is born. Often the father comes to the hospital during or after the birth, and the couple renews their desire to stay together and perhaps marry.⁴² This finding is echoed by the preliminary results from interviews conducted with young unwed parents in two cities (Austin, Texas and Oakland, California), part of a 20 city survey of so-called fragile families. In these couples more than half of the parents were living together when the child was born, 80 percent were "romantically involved" and 70 percent said their chances of marriage were 50-50 or better. In addition, 86 percent of the mothers were planning to put the father's name on the birth certificate and 90 percent of the mothers want the father to be involved in raising their child.⁴³ These findings led the researchers to identify the time of the birth of the child to an unmarried urban couple as a "magic moment" which could potentially be built upon. Other studies have shown that this magic moment does not last. The vast majority of these young men have limited skills, low literacy, do not work, or have a poor work history. Within a few years, the couple is likely to drift apart, and many of the fathers will disengage entirely from the relationship with their children.

These findings suggest that if the right kinds of help were offered to poor married or unmarried couples at these "magic moments," perhaps some of the relationships could be stabilized and the deterioration prevented.

Black Churches as Resources

Religious orientation is one of the greatest strengths of black families. And black churches have played a uniquely important role in the history and spiritual and social life of African-Americans. Increasingly, churches with large congregations (in the thousands) and considerable resources carry out a wide range of charitable activities and reform ministries to assist the members of the congregation and address many of the problems and needs of the community at large.⁴⁴ Some of these churches have developed strong family and marriage ministries, offering enrichment programs for married couples, workshops for single parents, and male responsibility programs for young male youth.⁴⁵ These congregations, which include large numbers of married as well as single individuals, could be a resource for the smaller, less well-endowed churches in low-income communities. One promising program model is to train volunteer married couples as mentors to befriend ("adopt") and support low-income young parents as they traverse the

inevitable ups and downs of their lives together. The need for marriage mentors is acute. Few young people today, especially those growing up in disadvantaged communities, have known examples of strong, healthy, egalitarian marriages that last.

STRENGTHENING COUPLE RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE IN LOW-INCOME POPULATIONS

In light of this review of the multiple factors that contribute to the decline in marriage in low-income populations, and the complex circumstances and pressures on the lives of poor families, it seems clear that the major legal reforms currently being proposed—covenant marriage, divorce law reform, required premarital education—are not likely to have much effect on the status of marriage in low-income communities. They simply do not respond to the complex problems and circumstances low-income couples face. In this section, however, I will suggest that there are a number of economic, cultural, educational and community-support strategies that are being tried, or are being proposed, that may be relevant and useful to the poor and near-poor. Some of these strategies stand a good chance of having some positive effects, although others may be questionable. Any single strategy by itself is unlikely to have much effect. But if they were all tried at once—the “saturation” approach—one could reasonably expect to see some changes in family formation behavior. (I do not discuss reforms within state marriage and divorce law which are the subject of several other chapters in this volume.)

Resources for strategies to aid low-income couples. All of these strategies will require a serious investment of resources—resources of funding, leadership, and the commitment and time of volunteers. What makes this discussion so timely and compelling is that the 1996 welfare reform law replacing the old AFDC program with the Temporary Assistance For Needy Families Program (TANF) can provide states and communities with the funds right now to “promote marriage...and to encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.” TANF funds should be targeted primarily, though not exclusively on low-income families. As of late 2001, only four states have made plans to use substantial TANF monies for these purposes. For instance, Oklahoma has made a commitment to use \$10 million of unspent TANF funds to help support the governor’s multi-sector initiative to reduce divorce and strengthen marriage. The Arizona legislature enacted legislation that allocates \$1.65 million of TANF funds to be spent on prevention-oriented, marriage related activities.⁴⁶

A second possible source of future federal funding is the Fathers Count Act of 1999, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives with an overwhelming bipartisan majority. Many advocates hope that in the near future it will pass the U.S. Senate, where it has drawn broad support. This act would provide grants to private and public organizations who will work with poor and low-income fathers to achieve three purposes: help fathers increase their incomes, promote successful parenting, and “promote marriage through counseling, mentoring and other activities.” (For more information, see the National Fatherhood Initiative website, www.fatherhood.org)

Economic strategies. Federal and state policy officials readily turn to fiscal incentives as instruments to achieve their policy goals. Thus there has already been some discussion about the

need to remove current financial provisions in the tax, welfare and other programs that may serve to deter marriage. States are now free to set their eligibility and other rules for receiving welfare assistance. Thus, they could change policies that currently discriminate against two-parent families and levy penalties on couples who marry. A few states are beginning to do so in small ways. West Virginia is giving married couples a 10 percent higher welfare grant than single parents. Several states are eliminating differential treatment of two-parent and one-parent families in determining eligibility for assistance. Taking this approach one step further, an analyst at a prominent conservative think tank is proposing to experiment with giving large cash bonuses to poor unwed young mothers who marry and stay married.⁴⁷

Another strategy to remove economic barriers to marriage for low-income couples is to offer noncustodial fathers job training and employment assistance on the same basis as agencies offer this assistance to welfare mothers. The TANF law allows assistance to noncustodial parents, as do the Welfare-to-Work grants funded under the Labor Department. Some advocates point out that this kind of assistance to low-income noncustodial fathers should also be available to low-income married fathers, and this is now possible in the TANF program.

A few advocates note that if men believed they would be held financially responsible for their children, they would be less likely to risk becoming a father or to walk away from marriage. Thus recent policies to encourage and require paternity establishment and the numerous reforms to strengthen child support enforcement can also be viewed as a strategy designed to prevent out-of-wedlock childbearing and reduce divorce.

Public education/changing the culture. State authorities and community leaders can use a wide variety of vehicles to provide basic education about marriage, such as the benefits of marriage to children, the rights and responsibilities of marriage, the typical stages of marriage, and resources to get information and help with relationship and marriage problems. Some communities are beginning to mount such public education campaigns to reduce out-of-wedlock childbearing and divorce and promote marriage. For example, the Virginia Health Department is spending state and federal TANF funds to support community coalitions dedicated to preventing out-of-wedlock pregnancy among young adults, ages 20-29, and promote the message that "marriage is the right place for a child to be born." The Greater Grand Rapids Community Marriage Policy Initiative has developed bill boards, posters, full-page newspaper ads, television shows, and brochures to explain the reasons for their initiative, tell stories of successful marriages, and share the "secrets" of strong, healthy relationships. The Florida Bar Association developed a handbook on marriage to give to all couples who applied for a marriage license. The State of Oklahoma has held several well-publicized events to promote their governor's ambitious Strengthening Marriage Initiative.

Developing a pro-marriage culture within the black or Latino communities, however, will require that black and Latino pastors, sports and media stars, singers, professionals, and others speak out in favor of marriage and show by their own example that they value it. In addition, African-Americans and Latinos need to become involved in developing educational and promotional materials which will have resonance in their communities.

Information, education and community supports for couples. Many marriage advocates believe that information and education about marriage should be as commonly available and accepted by the public as is information and education about parenting. They believe that every community needs to be a spectrum of information, education and community supports to meet the needs of couples at different stages in their relationships. Low-income couples should be able to have the same access to these kinds of services that middle-income couples are beginning to have through their schools, churches, or marriage education programs offered under private auspices.

This spectrum should include courses in high school to develop relationship skills, preventive relationship and marriage workshops and classes for young couples, intensive encounter weekends for troubled marriages, and mentor couples to offer ongoing support. The problem is that the growing field of marriage education—which teaches skills in communication, conflict resolution, acceptance and commitment, among other topics—offers programs largely designed for middle-income, white couples. However, a couple of the best-known program models have been adapted and used for less-well-off couples, such as enlisted personnel in the military, and for couples of minority ethnic and racial groups (e.g. the Denver University-based Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program, PREP, and the Family Wellness model in California).

Since these kinds of programs currently do not exist in low-income communities, advocates should think carefully about adapting them or creating new programs. TANF could be used to enhance and extend existing programs to offer ongoing skills-based relationship training. In Oklahoma, as part of a proposal for using unspent TANF funds, an ambitious capacity-building plan has been drafted that will train cooperative extension family life educators, health department child guidance staff, pastors, laypersons and others to offer these educational workshops to low-income and other couples on a sliding scale, fee-for-service basis, or in exchange for vouchers.

Couples should be able to ask about these programs and be motivated to participate in them. Again, Oklahoma plans to invest in training “gatekeepers”—such as nurse home visitors and welfare workers—who in the course of their daily work interact with young couples around the birth of the child, or at other critical life stages, such as moving from welfare to work. The training will help the gatekeepers have conversations with the young parents about their relationship and its potential for stability and marriage, and explore their interest in participating in relationship skills-building workshops. This training may also include assessing for the presence of domestic violence, or whether other kinds of services are needed to help stabilize and support the relationship such as job training or alcohol treatment, or legal services.

Couples and marriage education is not a silver bullet. Participation in a one-time course of educational workshops will not be sufficient help for many low-income couples over the long haul. Booster sessions and ongoing supports will be typically needed as well. Couple peer support groups, couples and marriage celebrations and seminars sponsored by churches or other organizations, marriage mentors and other resources and interventions may also need to be put into place. These resources may be created through working with the religious and nonprofit voluntary sectors.

In my view, any and all of these strategies will be successful only if they obtain a broad consensus of support from the state and community leadership and the public at large. They must be soundly based in research, inclusive and sensitive to the “hot button” concerns. I suggest that strengthening marriage strategies for low-income populations, indeed for all populations, should be guided by the following general principles:

- Public promotion of marriage must be careful not to stigmatize single individuals or single parents, must acknowledge the realities of domestic violence, and point out that some marriages should never begin and others are better ended.
- Coercive and punitive policies should never be used to promote marriage.
- Information along with educational services and supports should be available to strengthen relationships between parents whether they are married or not married.
- Community-level initiatives should invite low-income couples, representing the racial and ethnic backgrounds prevalent in the community, to help design and shape the activities and assure that they are adapted to the needs and circumstances of the populations they are intended to help.
- While it is appropriate to remove existing financial disincentives to marriage, offering substantial monetary incentives to individuals to marry would be unwise policy, since immediate financial gain should not be the sole or even principal reason for marriage.
- Initiatives to strengthen marriage should target couples at highest risk and at especially vulnerable or magic moments when they are most ready and willing to get help.
- Strategies should focus on improving the quality of the marriage or the couple’s relationship, not solely preserving its stability.

CONCLUSION

There is a strong public interest in reversing the decline in marriage in the nation generally and among the poor and near-poor in particular. The research basis for action, however, is slim. In the past researchers have generally not disentangled differences by race/ethnicity and income and have largely failed to specifically study low-income couple relationships, whether they are married or unmarried. We do know that the decline in marriage among the poor and near-poor is influenced by a more complex array of factors, and assumes different shapes and patterns. Hence, any reversal of this decline poses a different and more complex set of challenges for low-income couples.

This chapter has suggested that we do know enough to begin to try a number of different strategies tailored to low-income populations and see what works and what seems most acceptable. There are a few hopeful signs that state policy officials are beginning to address the issue. The mission and resources of the TANF program offers an unusual and timely opportunity to plan and implement strategies to strengthen couple relationships and marriage in low-income populations.

APPENDIX: TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF) PROGRAM AND HOW IT RELATES TO MARRIAGE

In the 1996 law establishing the Temporary Assistance For Needy Families program (TANF) three “family formation” goals are spelled out in the four purposes of the Act (emphasis supplied):

1. “to provide assistance to needy families....
2. “to *end dependence of needy parents* on government benefits *by promoting* job preparation, work and *marriage*....
3. “to prevent and reduce the *incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies* and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies”
4. “to *encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families*.”

Only the first of these family formation goals requires spending TANF funds on “needy” families (as defined by the state). However our general sense is that for political reasons any activities using TANF funds would need to be targeted primarily in low-income communities. Moreover, state MOE (Maintenance-of-Effort) funds must be targeted on needy families.

The TANF law includes a “charitable choice” provision which allows contracts, vouchers or other funding for charitable, religious or private organizations. Thus churches and faith-based organizations can receive funding on the same basis as any other nongovernmental provider. However, in order to avoid entanglement in possible First Amendment issues, some have advised creating a partial “wall” between the government and the religiously sponsored services, such as setting up a separate “religiously affiliated” nonprofit to administer the government-funded programs, provide social services without a religious message, and keep distinct accounting records.

The federal government has given some guidance to states on how to pursue these family formation goals.⁴⁸ This guidance document clarifies that states have considerable flexibility in deciding how to spend their block grant funds to achieve the broad purposes of TANF. The guide offered a few suggestions of policy changes or activities that could be engaged in to promote marriage and encourage two-parent families:

1. Provide premarital and marriage counseling and mediation services;
2. Change TANF eligibility rules to provide incentives for single parents to marry or for two-parent families to stay together;
3. Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families (married or unmarried) by using TANF to fund services—such as job placement and training for noncustodial parents—designed to promote responsible fatherhood and increase the capacity of fathers to provide emotional and financial support for their children.

For examples of activities to strengthen two-parent families and marriage that could be funded through TANF, visit the website of the Center for Law and Social Policy: www.clasp.org.

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2000 Marriage Licenses

*Efforts in States to Strengthen
Marriage and Two-Parent Families*

A State-by-State Snapshot



APRIL 2004

Theodora Ooms

Stacey Bouchet

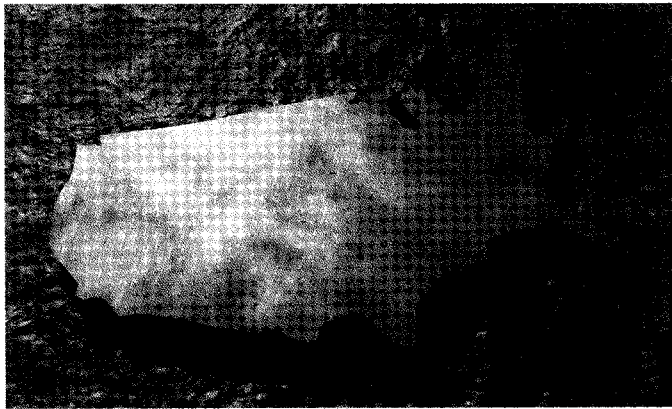
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Beyond Marriage Licenses

*Efforts in States to Strengthen
Marriage and Two-Parent Families*

A State-by-State Snapshot



APRIL 2004

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Stacey Bouchet

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Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the many federal and state officials and program leaders who responded to our requests for information. In particular, we are especially grateful to Bill Coffin, Naomi Goldstein, Aaron Larson, and Mack Storrs of the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This report has also greatly benefited from the assistance of our colleagues at the Center for Law and Social Policy. Thanks to Mark Greenberg, Christine Grisham, Alan Houseman, Jodie Levin-Epstein, Paula Roberts, and Vicki Turetsky for their careful review and comments; to Margaret Lloyd and Angie Parker for their assistance in gathering and organizing the data; and to John Hutchins and Gayle Bennett for their skillful editing. Any errors or omissions are the responsibility of the authors alone.

This report was supported in part by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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Recommended citation: Ooms, T., Bouchet, S., & Parke, M. (2004). *Beyond Marriage Licenses: Efforts in States to Strengthen Marriage and Two-Parent Families*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy.

Designed by *amp&rsand graphic design, inc.*, Washington, DC + Boulder, CO, www.ampersand-design.com

Printed by Graphic Visions Associates, Gaithersburg, MD, www.graphicvisions.com

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Part One

The Story of Efforts in States to Strengthen Marriage and Two-Parent Families

Introduction

The popular understanding of the role government plays in marriage is generally limited to two functions performed by state governments: granting marriage licenses and issuing divorce decrees. Beyond that, the widespread assumption has been that marriage is a private issue, best left to individuals, couples, and perhaps religious institutions. However, in the past decade, leaders at the national, state, and local levels have looked at expanding the role of government in marriage, reflecting, in part, rising concern by policymakers and the public alike about the apparent negative effects of single parenthood on children.¹ The promotion of healthy marriages is now on the policy agenda.

This report is the first to provide a state-by-state snapshot of activities begun since the mid-1990s that are *explicitly* designed to strengthen and promote marriage and to reduce divorce and that involve some level of government as a sponsor, funder, or otherwise active partner. In addition, reflecting CLASP's Marriage-Plus perspective (see box on p. 6), the report includes activities designed to promote cooperative relationships between parents who are not married. (This report, however, does not address the important—and much-debated—issue of same-sex marriage. For resources on that issue and others not covered in this report, see Appendix 1.)

This report comes at an important moment. With the prospect of dedicated funding for activities to promote healthy marriage becoming available under a reauthorized Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) welfare program, state policymakers are interested in what kinds of initiatives have already been implemented. In the past couple of years, for example, officials from at least two dozen states have attended marriage-related meetings sponsored by the federal government and by state government associations.² Even if a new federal funding stream for marriage promotion activities is not created, interest in promoting marriage and reducing divorce rates is likely to continue to grow at community, state, and federal levels.

Background: The Growing Government Interest in Marriage

Marriage and divorce have typically been viewed as the province of state law. It is state law that determines the conditions of entry into—and exit out of—marriage and that establishes the legal obligations and rights of spouses.

Over the past century, in response to the women's rights movement and other major cultural shifts, changes in state law have transformed the institution of marriage in many important ways. By the middle of the twentieth century, state law and court decisions had granted wives rights to own property and gradually unraveled most of the other legal underpinnings of patriarchy, although it wasn't until the mid-1980s that state courts declared that marital rape was illegal. By the early 1980s, most states had adopted so-called "no fault" divorce laws—in which divorce can usually be obtained by mutual consent and/or on the demand of at least one party³—essentially ending the government's role in deciding the appropriate grounds for divorce. This change, in particular, has contributed to what some have called the new "privatization" of marriage.⁴

Meanwhile, rising rates of out-of-wedlock childbearing and divorce resulted in a three-fold increase since 1960 in the proportion of children growing up in single-parent households. Studies published in the late 1980s and early 1990s identified the negative effects of divorce on many children and the greater likelihood of disadvantage experienced by children raised by single parents.⁵ This research helped fuel the concern about child well-being that began to be translated into policies to reduce the incidence

of single parenting at national, state, and local levels in the early to mid-1990s.

At first, state reform efforts related to marriage focused primarily on legislation to make it more difficult to divorce. Next, some communities and states began to promote policies and programs that would prepare people better for marriage. In these early state marriage initiatives, the decline in marriage was considered to be a problem for the general public; no special effort was made to reach low-income populations.

Welfare Reform

At the national level, however, policy-makers interested in family formation focused primarily on the rising rate of out-of-wedlock childbearing and its link to welfare and other social costs. In 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which turned the federal welfare program into a block grant to states, was the first federal law to explicitly promote marriage and encourage the formation of two-parent families.

Most of the public debate about the 1996 welfare reform focused on requirements for welfare recipients to work and on the imposition of time limits for welfare assistance. Little attention was paid at the time to the fact that three of the four purposes of the new law referred to marriage and family formation:

1. to provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives,
2. to end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work and marriage,
3. to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies, and
4. to encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

The welfare law gave states considerable flexibility with respect to how they spend TANF monies. For instance, while

The “Marriage-Plus” Perspective

CLASP’s work in couples and marriage policy is guided by a “Marriage-Plus” perspective. The “plus” in Marriage-Plus signifies a set of broader goals, more flexible and comprehensive strategies, and more diverse actors than proposed by many marriage promotion advocates.

Goals of Marriage-Plus. The primary purpose of any healthy marriage promotion initiative should be to promote the well-being of *all* children. The Marriage-Plus approach has two overarching goals. First, policies and programs should aim to help more children grow up with their two biological, married parents in a healthy, stable relationship. However, for many parents, marriage is not a feasible or desirable option. Thus, the second goal is to help these parents—whether never-married, separated, divorced, or remarried—to be financially capable and responsible and to cooperate, whenever appropriate, in raising their children. These are not alternative goals. Children need us to pursue both.

Principles of Marriage-Plus. The Marriage-Plus approach is guided by several principles. “Healthy” marriage, not marriage for its own sake, should be encouraged and supported. Participation in marriage-related programs should be voluntary and tailored to meet the diverse needs of different populations. Strategies should be designed based on the best available research evidence and should be carefully evaluated. Finally, a Marriage-Plus approach focuses on the front end (making marriages better to be in), not the back end (making marriages more difficult to get out of).

Scope of Activities. Social science research has identified a wide range of economic, educational, legal, and cultural factors that affect whether couples marry, as well as the quality and stability of marriages. Therefore, efforts to promote or strengthen marriage should include a variety of strategies. Some may explicitly focus on marriage; others may have other primary goals, yet may indirectly have positive effects on marriage. For example, there is evidence that increasing parental employment and income, reducing work stress, and preventing teen pregnancy and out-of-wedlock births can all contribute to strengthening marriage and improving co-parenting by unmarried parents.

The Role of Government. While this report focuses on the role of government in marriage promotion, a Marriage-Plus approach is not the responsibility of government alone. Many parts of the community—including the legal, education, health, business, faith, and media sectors—all have important roles to play and need to work in partnership with public officials to pursue these goals.

For more information, read the CLASP Couples and Marriage Policy Brief Series:
 No. 1: *Marriage and Government: Strange Bedfellows?* by Theodora Ooms (August 2002)
 No. 2: *More Than a Dating Service? State Activities Designed to Strengthen and Promote Marriage* by Mary Parke and Theodora Ooms (October 2002)
 No. 3: *Are Married Parents Really Better for Children? What Research Says About the Effects of Family Structure on Child Well-Being* by Mary Parke (May 2003)
 No. 4: *Who Are “Fragile Families” and What Do We Know About Them?* By Mary Parke (January 2004)

To view these briefs, visit: www.clasp.org.

spending related to purposes (1) and (2) is limited to “needy” families, as defined by the states, purposes (3) and (4) are not directed solely at needy families. Also two-parent families are not defined in the law, and thus states are free to establish their own reasonable definitions.

How have states pursued the TANF family formation goals since 1996? The majority of states have changed policies to make it easier to provide cash assistance to two-parent families. Some have used TANF dollars to fund teen pregnancy prevention, and others have funded responsible fatherhood programs, which serve non-custodial parents. Only seven states have dedicated significant TANF dollars specifically to strengthen and promote marriage and couple relationships.⁶

However, as TANF reauthorization approached, many conservatives complained that the states had not done enough to pursue the program’s family formation goals. In 2001, the new Bush Administration, supported by several Congressional leaders, made marriage promotion one of its priorities, which quickly became one of the most controversial topics in the reauthorization debate. In May 2002, the Republican House passed the Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act (H.R. 4737), which, among other things, would have amended the TANF program to encourage states to make greater efforts to promote marriage and, to a lesser extent, responsible fatherhood. The most important provisions related to family formation included:

- ❖ A revision of purpose four to promote *healthy* two-parent *married* families and *encourage responsible fatherhood* [new language in italics].
- ❖ A new competitive grants program for states to be spent on a variety of allowable activities relating to marriage⁷—\$200 million a year (\$100 million federal monies with a dollar-for-dollar state match).
- ❖ A Marriage Research and Demon-

stration Funds program allowing the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to spend \$100 million a year for five years for research, demonstration projects, and technical assistance primarily related to the marriage activities defined in the competitive grants program.

In addition, the bill authorized \$100 million over five years for a grant program, the Promotion and Support of Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage. However, these funds would not come from the TANF block grant but would need separate appropriations. In total, the proposed legislation earmarked \$1.6 billion over five years for the promotion and support of marriage. Most of the funds would come from redirecting bonuses to states available in the 1996 law: the \$100 million out-of-wedlock birth bonus (awarded annually to the five states with the greatest percentage reduction in out-of-wedlock births—without an increase in abortion rates) and a portion of the high-performance bonus (awarded annually to states for the highest achievements in various measures intended to further the goals of TANF).

Although welcomed by some, these marriage promotion proposals were met by skepticism and opposition from many quarters.⁸ For example, some have expressed fears that women may be coerced or “bribed” to enter hasty and ill-considered marriages or be forced to remain in abusive marriages. Others were concerned that privileging marriage would mean discriminating against single parents. Some (including CLASP) asserted that the bill allocated too much money for marriage programs and that these monies were to be spent on too narrow a range of activities.⁹ Some also expressed concern that there were not sufficient protections, especially against domestic violence.

In June 2002, the Senate Finance Committee passed a bipartisan TANF

reauthorization bill that allocated less money (\$1 billion) for marriage-related programs and considerably broadened the scope of activities that could be funded to include teen pregnancy prevention and other programs that decreased out-of-wedlock childbearing or strengthened marriage but that didn't include explicit marriage-related content. This bill was never brought to the floor of the Senate for a vote, however, and TANF was not reauthorized in 2002.

In 2003, the House passed a new TANF reauthorization bill (H.R. 4) that was nearly identical to the House bill of the previous year.¹⁰ A similar bill was voted on by the Senate Finance Committee, however as this report goes to press, the full Senate has not acted on TANF reauthorization.

Federal Funding for Marriage-Related Projects, 2001–2003

In 2001, Wade Horn, the Assistant Secretary overseeing the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, declared that a Healthy Marriage Initiative was one of nine ACF priorities.¹¹ In 2002–2003, ACF used several existing funding vehicles within the agency (independent of TANF) to commit at least \$90 million over a number of years for marriage-related demonstration grants, research and evaluation projects, and technical assistance.

Demonstration Grants (individual grants are briefly described in the state profiles):

❖ *Office of Child Support.* In 2002, three marriage-related grants were funded under the Special Improvement Project (SIP) program and were intended to encourage new ways to approach unwed parents to emphasize the importance of healthy marriage to a children's well-being. In 2003, four five-year grants were awarded to states under the Section 1115 waiver authority (of the Social Security Act), which authorizes states

to conduct experimental, pilot, or demonstration projects that are likely to assist in promoting the objectives of the child support program. These projects are "testing new strategies to support healthy marriage and parental relationships with the goals of improving the well-being of children, promoting paternity establishment, and increasing the financial and emotional support to children."¹²

❖ *Children's Bureau Discretionary Grants.* In October 2003, the Children's Bureau awarded seven grants to state and county child welfare agencies to promote healthy marriage and family formation as a means of achieving safety, permanency, and well-being for children and families. The projects target biological, foster, and adoptive families in the child welfare system and are designed to support and strengthen marital and co-parenting relationships. The grants were awarded for three years in the amount of \$200,000 per year.

❖ *Child Welfare Training Grants for Healthy Marriage and Family Formation.* In October 2003, the Children's Bureau awarded five-year grants to five public and non-profit institutions of higher education. The grant activities included developing, field testing, implementing, evaluating, and disseminating competency-based curricula and training for front-line and/or supervisory child welfare staff to help them effectively address issues of healthy marriage and family formation in the child welfare system.

❖ *The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR).* In 2002, ORR gave a discretionary grant to two national organizations, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Office of Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS), to collaboratively launch pilot programs in eight cities called the Refugee Family Strengthening Project. Additional

grants were given to nine national refugee resettlement organizations. The purpose of these projects was to ease the integration process and strengthen refugee families and marriage by providing communication, listening, conflict resolution, and financial management skills to refugee families (including Somali, Somali Bantu, Vietnamese, Congolese, Haitians, Cubans, and Sudanese, among others), and to increase community understanding of the many challenges refugee families face during the resettlement experience. In October 2003, the HIAS received a \$200,000 grant to continue to provide these services in four of the original eight pilot sites, and the USCCB/MRS received \$1 million to continue the other four sites and expand the services to a total of 20 cities.¹³

- ❖ *The Office of Community Services (OCS).* In September 2003, OCS awarded \$40,000 in grants under its block grant training and technical assistance program to Community Action Agencies in three communities for relationship and marriage education programs for low-income families.

Technical Assistance, Research and Evaluation Grants and Contracts. In 2001–2003, ACF awarded several grants and contracts to national organizations and research firms to provide a variety of technical assistance, research, and evaluation activities. These include:

- ❖ A 15-month, \$330,000 contract was awarded by the Office of Community Services to the Institute for Social and Economic Development (ISED) in Washington, DC, to explore how financial asset-building strategies can contribute to strengthening marriage by helping families gain economic self-sufficiency. The project links marital counseling and marriage enrichment with financial literacy and asset development. ISED provides

consultation and technical assistance to over 300 organizations around the country to help low-income families build financial assets, including the Individual Development Account Network.¹⁴

- ❖ In 2002, ACF funded the Lewin Group to provide technical assistance to states and communities interested in developing community coalitions and comprehensive strategies to promote healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood. The Peer to Peer Technical Assistance Network, also funded by ACF, has conducted several meetings of state policy officials interested in healthy marriage promotion.¹⁵
- ❖ In 2002–2003, the ACF Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation funded several significant evaluation and research projects:
 - The Building Strong Families Project is a large-scale, comprehensive demonstration and random-assignment evaluation of programs that are designed to strengthen the relationships and support the marital aspirations of unmarried couples around the time of the birth of a child. Primary contractor: Mathematica Policy Research Inc. Award: \$19 million over nine years.¹⁶
 - The Supporting Healthy Marriages project is an eight-site random-assignment evaluation of interventions designed to support marriage among low-income couples in their childrearing years who are married or planning to marry. Primary contractor: MDRC. Award: \$38.5 million over nine years.
 - Evaluation of community-wide initiatives to promote healthy marriage. The evaluation will document implementation and impact in 8–12 sites. Contractors: RTI International and the Urban Institute. Award: \$20.4 million over seven years.
 - Exploring options and making recommendations for addressing gaps in

national, state, and local marriage and divorce statistics. Primary contractor: the Lewin Group. Award: \$979,160 over two years (jointly funded by the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation).

- Documenting and analyzing marriage incentives (and disincentives) for low-income families in state and federal tax and transfer programs. Primary contractor: The Urban Institute. Award: \$464,451 over two years.
- Assessing the state of the art in measuring healthy marriage. Grantee: Child Trends, Inc., through the NICHD Family and Child Well-Being Network. Award: \$260,000 over two years.

Goals and Limitations of This Report

This report seeks to provide an introductory map to the emerging landscape of couples and marriage policy. We hope it will stimulate an informed discussion about strategies that are most effective with particular populations, about the importance of building capacity to implement these new efforts, about what unanticipated positive and negative consequences might result from these programs, and about what gaps in knowledge remain.

Before presenting the findings of our research, we offer three caveats. First, we want to make it clear that inclusion of an activity in this report does not imply endorsement by CLASP or the authors. In fact, while some of the activities we describe appear promising and reasonable, others seem to us not very useful or possibly harmful.¹⁷

Second, this report does not aim to document how the new policies and programs are, in fact, being implemented nor what effects they are having on marriage and divorce. Third, while we reviewed a wide variety of sources, this re-

port does not claim to be an exhaustive inventory of all of the new government-related marriage activities occurring in the states. In some cases, the examples are only illustrative. (For more on how the information for this report was gathered, see Appendix I: Method and Primary Sources, p. 66.)

Couples and marriage policy is a fast-moving field. Each week, we learn about new activities in the planning stages and proposals awaiting approval and funding. This report remains a snapshot of a particular time and is generally current as of Fall 2003—including information about new federal grants awarded in October 2003.

Summary of Findings

What have we learned? Overall, although the field of couples and marriage policy is still in its infancy, more is happening in the states than is generally realized. However, the degree of interest in this issue varies considerably among states. Since the mid-1990s, every state has made at least one policy change or undertaken at least one activity designed to promote marriage, strengthen two-parent families, or reduce divorce. The large majority of states (36) have revised their TANF eligibility rules to treat one-parent and two-parent households the same. Nineteen states have set up separate state-funded welfare programs for two-parent families, which makes it easier for them to provide assistance to these families. For eight states, TANF policy changes were the only type of marriage-related activity identified.

Governors, senior public officials, and/or legislatures in nine states (Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Louisiana, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah) have declared strengthening marriage to be a public goal, and most of these leaders have followed up by launching marriage promotion programs. Eight states have made significant

changes to their marriage and divorce laws. In 40 states, government-funded programs provide couples- and marriage-related services in selected communities or counties, most often on a pilot basis. And, of these, seven states—Arizona, Louisiana, Michigan, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Utah, and Virginia—and several communities have dedicated significant TANF funds to support marriage-related activities.

Only nine states and one tribal agency offer welfare recipients financial incentives or “bonuses” to marry, and none require welfare mothers to attend any marriage programs.

While it was not the purpose of this study to document the degree of support or opposition to these new marriage initiatives, we did note that in a few states (particularly Arizona, Florida, and Oklahoma) developers of marriage and fatherhood initiatives were working with representatives of the domestic violence community—a constituency which in other states has been a vocal critic of marriage promotion efforts.

There appears to be no clear demographic or economic pattern that helps explain why some states have more marriage-related activity than others, although (with the exception of Michigan) the states in which there is quite a lot of government-related activity going on—Arizona, Florida, Louisiana, Michigan, Oklahoma, Utah, and Virginia—are located in the south or west, and would generally be characterized as more conservative politically. Among these “high-activity” states, the majority have very high child poverty rates, but a few do not. Some have very high divorce rates, others have high rates of out-of-wedlock births, and, in others, these demographic indicators are not remarkable.¹⁸ It is worth noting that there is little marriage-related policy activity in the northeastern states, and two of the three most-populous states (California and New York) have no appreciable state marriage initiatives.¹⁹

To what extent have the TANF family formation goals and the availability of TANF funds driven the interest in launching couples and marriage activities in the states? In several of the high-activity states (Arizona, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Utah), the marriage initiatives were created independent of TANF and were initially not targeted to low-income populations. However, as plans evolved and interest in funding new services emerged, TANF became—and continues to be—the major funding source for the marriage activities in these states. And the states using TANF funds are increasingly targeting their marriage-related services to low-income families. In addition, as noted above, a number of new state demonstration projects are being funded with other ACF sources. Some states fund marriage-related services from non-federal sources, such as the Children’s Trust in Alabama and Family Trust Fund in Texas, which receives monies from increased marriage license fees.

Perhaps the most surprising finding of this study is the diversity of initiatives underway in states to strengthen marriage and/or two-parent families and reduce divorce. This report organizes them into four main categories: (1) state policy initiatives, commissions, and campaigns; (2) changes in state marriage and divorce law designed to strengthen marriage and reduce divorce; (3) programs, activities, and services; and (4) policy changes related to marriage and two-parent families in TANF and child support programs.

We explain each of these categories in detail below and then step back to make some comments about trends, gaps, and possible future directions. The state profiles (see p. 23) are organized according to these four categories, and Appendix II summarizes the information across all states and the District of Columbia. In addition, Appendix III provides selected contact information for initiatives in the seven “high-activity” states.

1. State Policy Initiatives, Commissions, and Campaigns

In 10 states (Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Louisiana, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah), the governor, legislators, or other high-ranking policy officials have publicly focused on marriage-related issues through one or more of the following actions:

- ❖ Launching major policy initiatives, including the enactment of laws or high-level executive branch actions, that establish and fund programs designed to specifically promote and strengthen marriage and reduce divorce;
- ❖ Establishing marriage commissions or councils charged with developing and implementing specific policies;
- ❖ Holding summits or other events that bring together various groups to discuss marriage-strengthening policies;
- ❖ Conducting media campaigns that promote marriage or discourage divorce;
- ❖ Issuing proclamations recognizing the importance of marriage as a public good or declaring marriage as the foundation for child well-being and healthy communities; and
- ❖ Publishing marriage handbooks to be given to couples who apply for marriage licenses.

2. Changes in State Marriage and Divorce Law

State law governs the terms and conditions under which individuals marry and divorce and determines spousal rights and responsibilities. Since the mid-1990s, some states have introduced incentives for couples to take marriage preparation courses before they marry. In addition, a number of state legislatures have considered the option of covenant marriages, in which divorce is somewhat more difficult to obtain. The state profiles include information about both types of changes enacted in marriage law;²⁰

- ❖ Marriage License Fee Reduction: Five states (Florida, Maryland, Minnesota,

Oklahoma, and Tennessee) have enacted laws that reduce marriage license fees for engaged couples who participate in marriage preparation classes or pre-marital counseling.

- ❖ Covenant Marriage Law: Three states (Arizona, Arkansas, and Louisiana) have enacted covenant marriage laws, and legislation has been introduced in at least two dozen other states. Under these laws, couples applying for a marriage license must choose to be married under the existing marriage law in the state or under a new covenant marriage contract. The latter generally requires marriage education or counseling prior to the marriage, as well as before divorce. Divorces can be obtained only upon specific grounds, such as adultery, abuse, or abandonment, or after a long period of separation, typically two years.²¹

3. Programs, Activities, and Services

This category includes programs, activities, and services that aim to directly promote and strengthen healthy marriage and two-parent families. To be included in this report, some level of government—federal, state, or local—must be involved, whether as the originator, a funder, or an active partner with non-government organizations. Examples of activities in this category include couples and marriage education and support for adults, relationships and marriage education for high school students, and fatherhood programs with co-parenting or marriage components. Also included are “capacity building” activities—such as training individuals to provide marriage-related services—and public education, community awareness, and outreach components of service programs. In addition, this report describes services sponsored by two often-overlooked government sources: the armed services and state cooperative extension services,

which are generally based in state land-grant universities.

In most of the states profiled here, couples and marriage-related programs, activities, and services are confined to only a few communities. In Oklahoma and Florida, however, some couples and marriage activities are statewide.

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults. Since the mid-1990s, a growing number of states and communities have started providing couples and marriage education, but there is no way of knowing exactly how many of these programs there are.²² (Thirty-two states have at least one program in this category.) Many of these programs grew out of decades of research on what makes relationships and marriages succeed or fail, building on curricula and couple inventories first developed in the 1960s and 1970s (and offered primarily to engaged couples). Couples and marriage education programs now vary considerably in length, content, and format, as well as in the settings in which they are offered (including community centers and houses of worship). Currently, most programs are curricula-based, presented in a classroom-style format, and aim to change attitudes and dispel myths about marriage and to teach relationship skills—especially related to communication and conflict resolution—to adults at various life stages: single, dating, engaged, newly married, marriages in crisis, and those who are remarried. Most of the programs were developed for middle-class couples,²³ although, with TANF funding, several states have begun to adapt curricula for other populations. While these programs have generally proven popular with participants, the only curriculum model that has been evaluated to determine its long-term impact on couples is the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP).²⁴

Other types of educational and support programs include couple mentoring of young, newly married couples or couples in crisis; pre-marital assessments

through the use of couple questionnaires; marriage enrichment/encounter days or weekends; and couple support groups. In addition, some states are currently developing demonstration programs that focus on offering young, unmarried couples who have recently given birth—sometimes referred to as “fragile families”—a variety of services that also incorporate marriage and co-parenting components.

Relationship and Marriage Education for High School Students. Several nationally recognized curricula exist for teaching middle and high school students about skills for building successful relationships and marriages,²⁵ yet there is little information available about how many schools use them. Individual teachers, rather than school districts, often decide whether to use a particular curriculum. For example, Connections, one of the best-known curricula, is used in at least some schools in all but a few states; in California, it is being used in more than 200 locations.²⁶ The creators of relationship education curricula do not generally track how widely their products are used by a state or school district and, hence, how many students have taken these courses. Often, once a curriculum is sold, no follow-up with the school or program is attempted. The state profiles note six states in which curricula are being used in a significant number of high schools. These courses are generally offered as electives. Florida is the only state so far to require four hours of relationship and marriage education for high school graduation, but no particular curriculum is prescribed.

Fatherhood Programs with Co-Parenting and Marriage Components. Over the last decade, there have been a growing number of state and community-based efforts designed specifically to promote the importance of fatherhood and to help fathers become more involved with their children. Among these, what are often called “responsible fatherhood” programs provide low-income,

non-custodial fathers (whether never-married, cohabiting, separated, or divorced) with job training and placement, child support payment assistance, peer support groups, parenting classes, legal assistance, and individual counseling.²⁷ This report, however, includes only those fatherhood programs that emphasize services to promote “team” or “co-parenting” and/or include some focus on marriage.

Why are some fatherhood programs getting involved in promoting co-parenting and marriage? For one, a 1998 review of the research has shown that the quality of a father’s relationship with the mother of his children is a major factor in his level of involvement with his children, whether the parents are married or not.²⁸ When non-custodial fathers do not get along with the mothers of their children, they are more likely to remove themselves from their children’s lives (and are also less likely to pay child support). While mediation and co-parenting classes are often offered to (or mandated for) divorcing parents by family courts, this is not the case for couples who have never married. Mediation services and co-parenting classes for never-married couples are designed to help non-custodial fathers repair relationships with the mothers of their children so they can co-parent effectively, which includes paying child support. More recently, a few fatherhood programs have begun to explore how to promote marriage, when appropriate, for some of these couples.

At least 11 states (Arizona, Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Virginia) are funding responsible fatherhood activities that promote co-parenting and/or marriage, and these are described briefly in this report. In addition, four national organizations are beginning to help state and community-based fatherhood programs incorporate a stronger focus on co-parenting and marriage.²⁹

Military Marriage-Related Programs.

For at least two decades, the armed services have studied the impact of changes in family life on military recruitment, readiness, and productivity, as well as the effect of particular aspects of military life (i.e., frequent transfers and overseas deployments) that place serious stress on military couples, which contributes to what the military regards as unacceptably high levels of divorce and domestic violence in the military. In response, the different branches of the armed services have provided family support services for couples and single parents, such as spousal employment services, child care, special housing benefits for married couples, and family advocacy (family violence) services. The Air Force, for instance, requires family support centers to provide family life education programs at all bases, which often include marriage and relationships courses. Family support centers are also generally available at Navy bases.

Since 1990, the Marine Corps has trained chaplains and family support center staff in the PREP marriage education curriculum (see p. 13), which is now offered widely on a voluntary basis. In 2001, the Army launched a six-site pilot demonstration, the Building Strong and Ready Families (BSRF) program, which provides an enriched PREP program to married soldiers, including marital and health assessments and referrals, as well as marriage enrichment weekends.³⁰ In 2003, the Army made plans to expand the program to 17 brigades in the U.S. and to bases in Germany and Italy; however, this expansion has been significantly slowed down by the war in Iraq. The state profiles note Army bases in 11 states that have been or are expected to eventually participate in the multi-site BSRF program.

State Cooperative Extension Marriage-Related Services. The Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), a federal agency in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA),

seeks to promote human health and nutrition; strengthen children, youth, and families; and promote sustainable American communities. It links USDA education and research resources and programs with the system of universities and state cooperative extension offices in all counties, states, territories, and the District of Columbia.

Many cooperative extension county educators (sometimes called extension specialists) are trained family life educators. In cooperation with public and private system partners (for example, the armed services) and land grant universities, they provide a range of services to improve the well-being of families, including parenting education, family resource management, nutrition education, youth development, and life skills education for welfare families. Educational programs offered by family life extension specialists are typically offered in communities at no or low cost. Individual extension specialists have offered couples and marriage education in the past, but recently some state cooperative extension services have begun training more specialists to provide couples and marriage education and related services in more communities.³¹ These state profiles describe significant new marriage-related activities currently being conducted by cooperative extension in six states (Alabama, Florida, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Utah). In addition, several family life extension specialists are developing a research-based National Extension Marriage and Couples Education curriculum model.³²

Multi-Sector Community Marriage Initiatives. A growing number of communities are bringing together public officials, health professionals, community leaders, clergy, judges, and citizens to develop services to support healthy marriages. These multi-sector community initiatives often begin with a group of faith leaders who agree to require premarital preparation for all couples wishing to be married in their houses of wor-

ship. Gradually, other leaders in the community add a variety of public education activities, events, and services, both secular and religious. We report on five multi-sector initiatives to strengthen marriage and reduce divorce—in Wilmington, Delaware; Greater Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cleveland, Ohio; Chattanooga, Tennessee; and Washington State.

4. Policy Changes Related to Marriage and Two-Parent Families in TANF and Child Support

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) established the TANF welfare program, replacing an entitlement program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), with block grants to the states.³³ As noted previously, three out of the four purposes of the 1996 welfare law are related to family formation—namely to promote marriage, reduce out-of-wedlock childbearing, and encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

States were given considerable flexibility in determining the rules for their state TANF programs. Most states made an effort to address the TANF family formation goals. Many eliminated the stricter two-parent family eligibility requirements. A few offered financial incentives for marriage. Some set up separate state-funded programs for two-parent families (to avoid incurring the financial penalties for failing to meet the higher federal work participation rates imposed on two-parent families). A couple of states modified child support regulations that may discourage marriage. Each of these policy options are discussed in detail below, and the state profiles describe any changes that states have made in these regulations to meet the family formation goals.

Two-Parent Family Eligibility. In 1988, the Family Support Act required all states to serve two-parent families under the AFDC-UP (unemployed parent)

program, which had been an option for states previously. Under AFDC-UP, two-parent families (whether married or unmarried) were eligible for assistance only if the parent designated as the “principal wage earner” was (1) considered to be unemployed or underemployed, meaning he or she was employed less than 100 hours per month (referred to as the “100-hour rule”), and (2) if he or she could meet certain work history requirements.³⁴ These eligibility requirements created a barrier for some needy parents with a child in common to marry or live together. Program administrators and caseworkers found that these rules were especially likely to penalize very young parents who had little or no work experience and large families where one parent worked for low wages for more than 100 hours but remained financially needy. For these and other reasons, two-parent families in the AFDC-UP program historically constituted a very small proportion of the welfare caseload, somewhere between 5 to 7 percent in most states.³⁵

With the flexibility under the 1996 welfare law, states had the freedom to eliminate the “special rules” that restricted the inclusion of two-parent families in state TANF programs, and many of them did so in whole or in part.³⁶ We found that, as of August 2002, 36 states now base two-parent family eligibility for TANF cash assistance solely on financial circumstances.³⁷ These states have eliminated both the 100-hour rule and the special work history requirements, and they no longer limit receipt of assistance to two-parent families in which a parent is incapacitated or “unemployed.” Eleven states have partially eliminated the higher requirements.

However, the TANF law did require states to impose a higher work participation rate on two-parent families than on single-parent families—90 percent versus 50 percent. These different rates apparently reflected an assumption that in two-parent families there would be no

good reason why at least one parent shouldn’t be working or in a work program. This has turned out not to be the case. TANF administrators have learned that many of these families have significant barriers to employment—for example, when one parent is a full-time caretaker of the other parent who is disabled—and hence it has been very difficult for states to meet these higher participation rates for two-parent families.

As of 2002, 22 states had set up separate state programs for two-parent families funded solely by state dollars.³⁸ Two-parent families served through these separate state-only programs are not subject to federal TANF participation and work requirements.³⁹ This enables states to serve two-parent families without risking incurring financial penalties for failing to meet the federal 90-percent work participation rates.

Marriage “Incentives.” Nine states have devised so-called marriage incentives for welfare recipients. West Virginia instituted a \$100 monthly “bonus” for recipients who marry or are already married to the father of their children. Three other states (Alabama, Mississippi, and Oklahoma) disregard a spouse’s earnings for a limited number of months when determining financial eligibility or grant amounts.⁴⁰ One TANF tribal agency in California also provides a one-time bonus of \$2,000 to welfare recipients upon marriage, as well as an additional \$1,500 if they have a traditional Native American wedding ceremony.

Forgiveness of Child Support Arrears Upon Marriage or Reconciliation. The average low-income, non-custodial father owes several thousand dollars in back child support payments. In many cases, these arrearages are owed to the state—not the families—as reimbursement for welfare payments made by the state on the children’s behalf. For low-income couples who wish to marry or reunite, these arrearages represent a significant economic burden and stressor for cou-

ples who are already struggling financially. Tennessee and Vermont⁴¹ forgive child support arrearages owed by a non-custodial parent to the state if the parents marry or reunite.

Conclusion

Since the mid-1990s, state and community leaders have instituted a range of legal, cultural, educational, and economic strategies to promote marriage, reduce divorce, and strengthen two-parent families. This report shows that, although the field of couples and marriage policy is new, quite a bit of activity is going on around the country—much more in some states than others. However, most of these couples and marriage initiatives remain modest in scale, using very limited funds and reaching small numbers of people.

Looking across the states, three current trends are worth noting:

Increased attention to prevention. The earliest efforts related to marriage promotion concentrated mostly on passing laws to make divorce more difficult and on making declarations that marriage is a public good. Public officials and community leaders are now focusing more on fostering preventive, educational services offered on a voluntary basis to help couples better choose marriage partners and create healthier, longer-lasting marriages. These latter initiatives have generally provoked less controversy, which may account for their growing popularity. In fact, these educational services are the only marriage strategy receiving any significant funding to date.

Expanded efforts to reach low-income couples in a variety of settings. Couples and marriage education classes have typically been offered to middle-class committed couples (engaged or already married) for a fee in free-standing, private or university-based programs or in faith-based institutions. In some states and communities, policymakers are now inte-

grating preventive, educational services to individuals and couples (both married and unmarried) in ongoing government-funded programs that serve predominantly low-income families from a variety of racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, as well as to other special populations. Relationship education programs are now being offered to high school students, disadvantaged expectant and new parents, low-income unwed parents, adoptive and foster parents, parents of juvenile first offenders, incarcerated parents and their partners, refugees, and military couples. This new focus reflects, in part, the influence of flexible TANF monies and new federal government grants.

Limited focus to date on economic and other indirect strategies. States have thus far explored only a limited range of strategies either to remove economic barriers to marriage or to provide economic incentives and support to encourage marriage and two-parent family formation. As interest in couples and marriage policy increases, states will likely want to minimize financial and programmatic barriers to marriage in TANF, Medicaid, housing, and other public assistance programs, and in tax policy, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit—especially if this can be done without penalizing single parents. Several government-funded studies are underway to better understand the interactive effects of different program rules on family types. One thing is already clear, however; reducing policy barriers to marriage is a complex and potentially expensive task.

As the discussion about marriage policy broadens, states are likely to seek more information about what kinds of income support, employment programs, and other kinds of economic assistance can help stabilize marriages and couple relationships. More attention may also be paid to reinforcing the positive indirect effects on marriage that have already been identified in such programs as child

support enforcement, nurse home-visiting, and teen pregnancy prevention.

Looking to the future, this report raises important questions for policymakers to consider as they pursue healthy marriage activities, including:

- ❖ Will public officials, community leaders, and program administrators have the will and the resources to do the important but time-consuming work of inviting potential critics and skeptics—including the domestic violence community—into their planning processes?
- ❖ As states seek to expand marriage programs to new populations, can existing approaches be successfully adapted to meet the needs of a more economically, racially, and culturally diverse group of participants?²⁴²
- ❖ Will policymakers and program administrators make services available to unmarried parents who may not decide to marry but who would like to do a better job co-parenting their children?
- ❖ Will enough attention be paid to building capacity—that is, orienting administrators to the new services, training trainers to deliver the workshops, and training front-line workers

to discuss these issues appropriately with clients and refer them to the new services?²⁴³

- ❖ Are public officials sufficiently committed to fund activities that are based on the best theory and research available and to carefully document how public funds are being spent? And will they have the patience to proceed cautiously in this arena until we learn more from research about what works and for whom?

The interest in couples and marriage policy is clearly growing. With or without targeted new federal funding, some states and communities are likely to expand their initiatives in this arena. Unfortunately, few of the programs and initiatives described in the report have been evaluated. The recent federal investment in research and evaluation of marriage programs is a step in the right direction. As this new field evolves over the next decade, it will be critically important to document both the positive and negative consequences of these programs and to learn whether and how policies and programs can strengthen marriage and two-parent families—and thereby improve child well-being.

Endnotes

1. Parke, M. (2003, May). *Are married parents really better for children? What research says about the effects of family structure on child well-being*. Couples and Marriage Policy Brief No. 3. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy.
2. For example, more than 400 representatives from the Pacific Hub states attended a conference, "Working Together to Strengthen Families," held in Seattle in August 2002, which was co-sponsored by the federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Region X Office. In December 2002, the National Conference of State Legislatures and the National Governors Association co-sponsored a conference, "Strengthening Marriage and Two-Parent Families: State Policy Choices," at the Johnson Foundation Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin. State governments also have co-sponsored conferences on marriage and healthy families in Florida, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and New Jersey. The ACF African American Healthy Marriage Initiative sponsored forums in 2003-2004 in Atlanta, Chicago, and Dallas.
3. See American Bar Association, Family Law Section, www.abanet.org/family/faq.html.
4. For background on the history of government involvement in marriage, see Cott, N.C. (2002). *Public vows: A history of marriage and the nation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Also see Ooms, T. (2001). The role of the federal government in strengthening marriage. *Virginia Journal of Social Policy and the Law*, 9(1). Available at www.clasp.org.
5. See Parke, 2003.
6. For a review of how states have responded to the goal of reducing nonmarital childbearing, see Nowak, M.W., Fishman, M.E., & Farrell, M.E. (2003, February). *State experiences and perspectives on reducing out-of-wedlock births. Final report*. Washington, DC: The Lewin Group. See also Orth, D.A., & Goggin, M.L. (2003, December). *How states and counties have responded to the family policy goals of welfare reform*. Albany, NY: Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government.
7. The "allowable" activities included public advertising campaigns on the value of marriage and skills needed to increase marital stability and health; education in high schools on the value of marriage, relationships skills, and budgeting; marriage education, marriage enhancement, and relationship skills programs for engaged couples, individuals interested in marriage, and non-married pregnant women and expectant fathers; marriage mentoring programs in at-risk communities; and programs to reduce disincentives to marriage in means-tested aid programs, if offered in conjunction with any of the other activities in the list.
8. Ooms, T. (2002). *Marriage and government: Strange bedfellows? Couples and Marriage Policy Brief No. 1*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy.
9. See Levin-Epstein, J., Ooms, T., Parke, M., Roberts, P., & Turetsky, V. (2002). *Spending too much, accomplishing too little: An analysis of the family formation provisions of H.R. 4737 and recommendations for change*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy. Available at www.clasp.org.
10. For more information, see Parke, M. (2003, June). *Marriage-related provisions in recent welfare reauthorization proposals: A summary*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy. Available at www.clasp.org.
11. To view the nine ACF priorities, visit: www.acf.dhhs.gov/acf_about.html#priorities.
12. Secretary Tommy G. Thompson quoted in Administration for Children and Families press release. (2003, May 9). *ACF approves child support demonstrations in Michigan and Idaho*. Washington, DC: Author. Available at www.acf.dhhs.gov/news/press/2003/release_050903.html.
13. In each site, the programs are working in collaboration with Catholic Charities, the local Office of Refugee Resettlement, and the Diocesan Office of Family Life Ministries. HIAS and USCCB have adapted four nationally known marriage education curricula to meet the special cultural needs of refugee families. These four curricula are the Practical Application of Intimate Relationships Skills (PAIRS), the Power of Two, the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), and the Family Wellness Program. For further information, contact Kimberly Haynes, Program Developer Strengthening Refugees and Marriages, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migrant Refugee Services, at khaynes@uscbb.org, and Maria Teverovsky, Coordinator, Refugee Family Strengthening Program,

- Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, maria.tevcrovsky@hias.org.
14. Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) are matched savings accounts that help low-income individuals and families accumulate assets to buy a home, start a business, or obtain job training and education. See www.ISED.org and www.idanetwork.org. In this project, ISED is partnering with five national organizations: the Alliance for Children and Families; the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies; Catholic Charities, USA; Lutheran Services of America; and United Way of America. For further information, contact James Gatz, Office of Community Services, federal Administration for Children and Families, at 202-401-5284 or jgatz@acf.hhs.gov.
 15. For more information, see www.acf.hhs.gov/key.html or contact Bill Coffin, Special Assistant for Marriage Education, at bcoffin@acf.hhs.gov.
 16. The initial idea for the Building Strong Families (BSF) project grew out of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing longitudinal study conducted by the Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. See http://crcw.princeton.edu/fragile_families. See also Parke, M. (2004). *Who are "fragile families" and what do we know about them?* Couples and Marriage Policy Brief No.4. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy. The BSF also builds on a previous Mathematica project designed to develop a conceptual model for interventions with fragile families at the time of the birth of their child. See Dion, M.R., et al. (2002, January). *Helping unwed parents build a strong and healthy marriages: A conceptual framework for interventions. Final report*. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research Inc. Available at www.mathematica-mpr.com.
 17. For guidelines in assessing the potential merits or dangers of a particular marriage support or promotion strategy, see Ooms, T., & Parke, M. (2002, October). *More than a dating service? State activities designed to promote and strengthen marriage*. Couples and Marriage Policy Brief No. 2. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy. Available at www.clasp.org.
 18. In 1998, for example, child poverty rates in these states ranged from 26 percent in Louisiana (ranked 50th in the nation), 23 percent in Oklahoma and Arizona (tied for 41st), 22 percent in Florida (tied for 36th), 17 percent in Michigan (26th), and 13 percent in Utah (2nd). See Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2002). *Kids count data book: State profiles of child well-being*. Baltimore, MD: Author. In 1990, states with the highest divorce rates were Nevada (11.6 per 1,000 total population), Oklahoma (7.7), and Arizona and Arkansas (6.9). See Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (Undated). *Marriage and divorce rates by states: 1990, 1995, and 1999-2001*. Atlanta, GA: Author. Available at www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr50/99_01mardiv.pdf. However, state divorce data are very uneven in quality, and, since 1995, four states (California, Colorado, Indiana, and Louisiana) have not reported divorce data to the federal government. In addition, Texas did not report divorce data in 2001. As an example of how unreliable some state data can be, Oklahoma's divorce rate as reported to the federal government appeared to have dropped dramatically in 2000 and 2001; however, it turned out that the two largest counties had not reported their divorce data to the state that year. Eason, J. (2003, February). Public Strategies, Inc. Personal communication.
 19. See Kids Count Data Book 2002, endnote 18.
 20. In contrast, several states have tried to make it easier to marry by reducing waiting periods for marriage licenses and eliminating blood test requirements. See http://www.law.cornell.edu/topics/Table_Marriage.htm for information on requirements for marriage.
 21. For more information on covenant marriages, go to www.divorcereform.org/cov.html. See also Spaht, K. (1998). Louisiana's covenant marriage: Social analysis and legal implications. *Louisiana Law Review*, 59, 63-130.
 22. For a national directory of the best known couples and marriage education programs, see www.smartmarriages.com. Some organizations in the nonprofit, private, and faith-based sector—notably the Catholic Church—have been offering various types of premarital preparation for decades. See, for example, Center for Marriage and the Family. (1995). *Marriage preparation in the Catholic Church: Getting it right*. Omaha, NE: Creighton University.
 23. There are a few exceptions: the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), while originally developed for middle-income couples has also been adapted and widely used with low-income couples in the military, and the Family Wellness Program, based in Scotts Valley, CA, has been adapted and offered to many low-income

- Latinos and other ethnic and racial groups (www.familywellness.com).
24. PREP, developed over 20 years by researchers at the University of Denver, has been widely used across the U.S., as well as in other countries. Evaluations of the PREP program have found small but promising results five years later, including improved couple communication and reduced divorce rates. See Halford, W.K., & Moore, E.N. (2002). Relationship education and the prevention of couple relationship problems. In A.S. Gurman & N.S. Jacobson (Eds.), *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy* (5th Edition). New York: Guilford Press. For a description of the curriculum and articles on the evaluations, see www.prepinc.com.
 25. Pearson, M. (2002). *Can kids get smart about marriage? A veteran teacher reviews some leading marriage and relationship education programs*. Piscataway, NJ: The National Marriage Project. Available at <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/publications/pubCanKids.htm>. For a directory of youth programs, see www.smartmarriages.com.
 26. Reed, K. (2003, May 29). Personal communication. For more information about Connections, contact Kay Reed at the Dibble Fund, 800-695-7975 or skills@dibblefund.org.
 27. For example, the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) has funded Responsible Fatherhood Demonstration Projects in eight states: California, Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, Washington, and Wisconsin. See Pearson, J., & Thoennes, N. (2000). *OCSE responsible fatherhood programs: Early implementation lessons*. Washington, DC: OCSE, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
 28. See Doherty, W.J., Kouneski, E.F., & Erickson, M. (1998, May). Responsible fathering: An overview and conceptual framework. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 277-292.
 29. These organizations are the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) in Gaithersburg, MD (www.fatherhood.org), the National Partnership for Community Leadership (NPCL) in Washington, DC (www.npcl.org), National Center for Fathering in Kansas City, MO (www.fathers.com), and the National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families in Washington, DC (www.npnff.org).
 30. Bloomstrom, G.L. (2002, March). Army building strong and ready families program. *NCFR Report*, 47(1), F11-F15; Bloomstrom, G. (2002, November 22 and 2003, May 16). Director, Ministry Initiatives Directorate. Personal communication. For more information, contact bloomgl@occh-un.army.mil. For general information about marriage and family programs and policies in the military, see the Military Family Resource Center at www.mfrc-dodqol.org, managed by Calibre Associates.
 31. Kolbe, A.M. (2002, November-December). Director, Family Consumer Science and Nutrition, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service. Personal communication. For more information, contact akolbe@reeusda.gov.
 32. A similar effort was undertaken to create the National Extension Parent Education Model curriculum in 1994, which was distributed to every extension specialist and remains available on the web. For more information, contact H. Wallace Goddard, University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service at Wgoddard@uaex.edu or 501-671-2104. Also see Smith, C., Cudaback, D., Goddard, W., Myers-Walls, J. (1994). *National extension parent education model*. Manhattan, KS: Kansas Cooperative Extension Service. Available at www.cyfernet.org/parenting_practices/preface.html.
 33. Established in the 1930s primarily for widows and their children, the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program eventually expanded to provide financial support to low-income, single-parent families of all types (widowed, separated and divorced, and never married).
 34. These requirements were (a) six or more quarters of work within 13 calendar quarters or (b) is qualified to receive unemployment compensation within the last year. State Policy Documentation Project: www.spdp.org/tanf/categorical/categsumm.htm.
 35. Another reason for the small numbers of two-parent families participating in welfare programs is the prevailing belief in many low-income communities that only single parents can receive cash assistance. State welfare agencies have done very little public education or outreach to counter this belief.
 36. Unless otherwise noted in the state profiles, these eligibility rules are irrespective of whether the couple is legally married. The term "two-parent family" means a couple (whether married or cohabiting) with a child in common where paternity has been legally established.

37. Falk, G., & Tauber, J. (2001). Welfare reform: TANF provisions related to marriage and two-parent families. *CRS Report to Congress*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.
38. Storrs, M. (2003, January 10). Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Personal communication. Technically "separate state programs" means one in which the state expenditures are claimed to meet the "maintenance of effort" (MOE) requirement.
39. Savner, S., & Greenberg, M. (1997). *The new framework: Alternative state funding choices under TANF*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy. Available at www.clasp.org.
40. Stephanie Saroki points out that there are a variety of minor ways in which state rules and practices can vary with respect to how generously they treat two-parent families. For example, states can choose how much income and assets to disregard when determining the income eligibility. Thus, a state like California, which has a very generous earned income disregard, treats two-parent families with two wage earners more favorably than a state that has a small income disregard. In determining benefit amounts, states also choose whether to provide more assistance to an adult than to a child. In some states, for instance, the monthly benefit is higher for a two-parent, two-child family than for a one-parent, three-child family—because it is assumed that an adult costs more than a child. Finally, the frequency with which states require welfare recipients to report changes in income may vary. For example, if reporting is required only every six months, this may have the effect of disregarding a new spouse's income for six months. See Saroki, S. (2003, April 1). *Marriage policy and welfare reform: Recommendations for structuring a "marriage-neutral" TANF program*. Policy Analysis Exercise. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government. Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Public Policy.
41. The term used in the Vermont statute is "re-united"—it makes no specific reference to marriage.
42. Ooms, T., & Wilson, P. (forthcoming). The challenges of offering relationship and marriage education to low-income couples. *Family Relations*, special issue on innovations in marriage education, edited by Jeffrey Larkin.
43. This has been one of the major lessons of the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative. See Myrick, M., & Ooms, T. (2002). *What if a governor decided to address the M-word? The use of research in the design and implementation of the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative*. Paper presented at the American Association of Public Policy and Management annual conference in Dallas, November 7, 2002. Available from rooms@clasp.org.

Part Two

State-by-State Profiles

Note: Appendix III is a list of Key Contacts in Seven High-Activity States, defined as states in which the authors identified a good deal of funded activity related to strengthening marriage (denoted with asterisks in the profiles). For the other states, whenever possible, we have included contact information about particular programs or activities in the endnotes.

Alabama

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In January 2003, the Alabama Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board was awarded a \$200,000 "Special Improvement Grant" from the Office of Child Support Enforcement, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The grant is being used to fund four pilot programs targeting new, low-income parents who are romantically involved but not married. Building upon the findings on new, unmarried parents from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study,¹ the programs provide employment services and relationships skills classes and promote marriage using a curriculum called "Caring for My Family." The programs also seek to increase paternity establishment and child support payments. Program staff receive training on domestic violence. Sites may deliver the program to the parent couples either in a group format or in individual home visits.²

State Cooperative Extension Marriage-Related Services

The Healthy Couples, Healthy Children project is a coordinated state effort to offer and evaluate marriage education programs in Alabama. Funding is provided by the state Children's Trust Fund to the Cooperative Extension Service at Auburn University. Extension Family Life specialists in five pilot counties (Elmore, Escambia, Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, and Walker) will coordinate Community Councils of interested local professionals from the public and private sectors and from faith-based organizations. Ten key community professionals in each of the five pilot counties will be trained in two marriage preparation curricula: (1) the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), used primarily for couples about to marry or couples already in their first marriage, and (2) The Smart Steps for Remarriages program, a recently designed program offered to couples for whom the current marriage is remarriage for at least one of the partners. The University Extension Service is planning an evaluation of the program.³

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed the “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Current eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances. Alabama established a separate state two-parent program.

Marriage Incentive: Disregards the earned income of a new or reconciling spouse for three months.

Alaska

Programs, Activities, and Services

Military Marriage-Related Programs

The Army’s Building Strong and Ready Families program is offered to couples at Fort Wainwright, near Fairbanks, and Fort Richardson, near Anchorage. It offers enlisted soldiers and their spouses marital assessments and relationships skills training (PREP curriculum); extensive health assessments, screening, and referrals (including for substance abuse and domestic violence); and marriage enrichment weekends.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed the “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Current eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.⁴

Arizona*

State Policy Initiatives, Commissions, and Campaigns

Legislative Marriage Initiative

In April 2000, the legislature passed a law that established the Marriage and Communication Skills Program, funded with \$1.15 million set aside from Arizona’s TANF block grant. The program established a Community-Based Marriage and Communication Skills Program Fund and a nine-member Marriage and Communication Skills Commission. The Commission provides oversight to the Department of Economic Security in awarding TANF funds for the marriage skills training programs and in the creation and dissemination of a marriage handbook. These activities are described in more detail below.

Changes in State Marriage and Divorce Law

Covenant Law

The Arizona Covenant Marriage Law, passed in 1998, requires couples who enter into a covenant marriage to submit a statutorily prescribed written statement and sign an affidavit that they have received premarital counseling from a member of the clergy or from a marriage counselor. The law requires that this premarital counseling include discussion of the meaning of covenant marriage, of the obligation to seek counseling in times of marital difficulties, and of grounds required for legally terminating a covenant marriage. These grounds include adultery, conviction for a felony or imprisonment, abandonment by one spouse for at least a year, physical or sexual abuse (of the spouse or a child), domestic violence or emotional abuse, separation for

at least two years, and habitual alcohol or drug abuse. Couples may also reach agreement to divorce.⁵

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults⁶

The law that created the Marriage and Communication Skills Program allows TANF funds to be spent on the following marriage support and education activities:

- ❖ \$1 million for contracts competitively awarded to community-based organizations to offer courses and workshops to couples on marriage education, communication skills, and domestic violence. The workshops are voluntary and participants pay a small portion of the cost. In 2001-2002, 11 organizations were awarded contracts. In January 2003, four of the current contractors received additional funding, and additional contracts were awarded to contractors located in “underserved areas” of the state. These contracts were revised to permit attendance by individuals as well as couples. There is no formal evaluation of this program, but participants are asked to fill out customer satisfaction surveys.
- ❖ \$75,000 for vouchers that pay the entire cost of the workshops for families with incomes below 150 percent of the federal poverty level.
- ❖ \$75,000 to develop and distribute a free State of Arizona Marriage Handbook to all marriage license applicants. The Marriage Handbook, which is available in English and Spanish, is distributed by the County Superior Court Clerks. It includes a list of the organizations awarded contracts for workshops and information about how to apply for the vouchers.

In 2002 and 2003, Catholic Social Services in Phoenix received federal Office of Refugee Resettlement funds through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) to conduct a pilot program, Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages Program. Working with the local Office of Refugee Resettlement, the program seeks to strengthen refugee families and marriages by providing communication, conflict resolution, listening, parenting, and financial management skills training. The activities are also designed to increase community understanding of the challenges facing refugees during the resettlement experience.

Fatherhood Programs with Co-Parenting and Marriage Components

In 2002, Arizona was awarded a demonstration grant of \$99,596, from the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement under the child support section 1115 waiver program, to increase child support collection from low-income, non-custodial parents. This grant has been awarded to a coalition of fatherhood program providers primarily in Maricopa and Pima Counties, which includes government, community, and faith-based organizations. The federal grant has been supplemented with state dollars for a total of \$343,434. The program will cover a range of topics, including services and education about job readiness, employment and child support, couples and family relationships, parenting skills, domestic violence, and the benefits of marriage. The Lewin Group is conducting a program evaluation.⁷

Military Marriage-Related Programs

Planning is underway to offer the Army’s Building Strong and Ready Families Program to couples in Fort Huachuca, near Tucson, when the national program is expanded. This program offers enlisted soldiers and their spouses marital assessments and relationships skills training (PREP curriculum); extensive health

assessments, screening, and referrals (including for substance abuse and domestic violence); and marriage enrichment weekends.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Arizona has removed the “100-hour rule,” but retains special work history requirements for two-parent families.⁸

Arkansas

State Policy Initiatives, Commissions, and Campaigns

Governor’s Conference on the Family

Governor Mike Huckabee (R) convened a Governor’s Conference in 1999 in response to what he declared a “marital emergency” in the state. He called for a 50 percent reduction in divorce in Arkansas and encouraged community leaders to form community marriage policy initiatives.⁹

Changes in State Marriage and Divorce Law

Covenant Law

In 2001, legislation was passed that created an option for Arkansas couples to choose a covenant marriage contract. When a couple enters into a covenant marriage, they must agree to receive authorized counseling emphasizing the purposes and responsibilities of marriage. They are also legally bound by two limitations not applicable to other couples who marry in Arkansas: (1) they consent to obtaining marital counseling if problems develop while they are married, and (2) they can only seek a divorce or legal separation for limited reasons, including adultery, felony, physical or sexual abuse of spouse or a child, living apart for two years, “habitual drunkenness, cruel and barbarous and dangerous behavior, or behavior that imposes intolerable indignities.”¹⁰

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed the “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is now based exclusively on financial circumstances.

California

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In October 2003, the Orange County Department of Social Services received a three-year, \$200,000-per-year demonstration grant from the federal Children’s Bureau of the Administration for Children and Families. The primary goal of this grant is to strengthen the relationship of parents who are being served by the child welfare agency. A nationally known skills-building program, Relationships Enhancement (RE),¹¹ will be provided to at least 1,200 couples in seven of the family resource centers. It will be offered in both English and Spanish and offered free or at low cost. The project will build community capacity to deliver the program through a “Train the

Trainer” effort offered to community-based and faith-based organizations. A quasi-experimental evaluation design has been proposed.¹²

In 2002 and 2003, the Jewish Family Service of San Diego received federal Office of Refugee Resettlement funds through the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) to conduct a pilot program, Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages Program. Working with the local Office of Refugee Resettlement, the program seeks to strengthen refugee families and marriages by providing communication, conflict resolution, listening, parenting, and financial management skills training. The activities are also designed to increase community understanding of the challenges facing refugees during the resettlement experience. In 2003, Catholic Charities of the East Bay (Oakland) received Office of Refugee Resettlement funds through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to conduct a similar range of program activities.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: California has removed the special work history requirements for two-parent families, but the “100-hour rule” is still in effect. Established a separate state program for two-parent families.

Marriage Incentives: The Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians Consortium operates a tribal TANF program in Riverside and Los Angeles counties. The Consortium has developed a marriage promotion program in which Native American TANF recipients who marry are given a lump sum (\$1,500) towards the costs of a Native American traditional wedding ceremony. Once married, they are given a one-time \$2,000 marriage bonus. (In addition, the marriage promotion program offers workshops on such topics as “Pathways to Healthy Relationships” for both married and unmarried couples.)¹³

Colorado

State Policy Initiatives, Commissions, and Campaigns

In 2000, the Office of Governor Bill Owen (R) began exploring a range of initiatives designed to strengthen marriage within the broader context of strengthening families. In September 2002, the Governor, in collaboration with the state Department of Human Services and federal Administration for Children and Families Region VIII officials, held a two-day policy conference, Strengthening Families, which addressed, among other topics, marriage, two-parent families, and fatherhood, especially in low-income populations. Around 300 participants representing more than 30 government, community-based, and faith-based organizations attended.¹⁴

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In October 2003, the Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver received a five-year, child welfare training grant from the federal Children’s Bureau (\$200,000 for the first year). The project is a collaboration between the school, the Learning Systems Group in Washington, DC, Dr. Howard Markman, University of Denver (co-founder of the PREP program), and child welfare officials in Colorado, Wyoming,

and Kansas. The goal is to develop, test, implement, evaluate, and disseminate a competency-based training program to enhance child welfare worker, supervisor, and administrative capacity to strengthen marital and parenting relationships of the families they serve. In addition, the project aims to identify systemic barriers to transferring this training into practice. The project intends to train 300 frontline child welfare workers, supervisors, and administrators across Colorado, Wyoming, and Kansas.¹⁵

In September 2003, the Denver Indian Family Resource Center received a three-year grant (\$100,000 per year) from the federal Administration for Native Americans (ANA) to develop a curriculum designed for an urban Native American community designed to teach healthy relationships skills across the lifespan. The grant also contains a component designed to increase Native American fathers' involvement with their children.¹⁶

In 2002 and 2003, the Jewish Family Service of Denver received federal Office of Refugee Resettlement Funds through the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) to conduct a pilot program, Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages Program. Working with the local Office of Refugee Resettlement, the program seeks to strengthen refugee families and marriages by providing communication, conflict resolution, listening, parenting, and financial management skills training. The activities are also designed to increase community understanding of the challenges facing refugees during the resettlement experience.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed "100-hour rule" and work history requirements. Eligibility is now based solely on financial circumstances.

Connecticut

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In 2003, the Catholic Migration and Refugee Services in Hartford received federal Office of Refugee Resettlement funds through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) to conduct a pilot program, Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages Program. Working with the local Office of Refugee Resettlement, the program seeks to strengthen refugee families and marriages by providing communication, conflict resolution, listening, parenting, and financial management skills training. The activities are also designed to increase community understanding of the challenges facing refugees during the resettlement experience.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed "100-hour rule" and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances. Established a separate state program for two-parent families.

Delaware

Programs, Activities, and Services

Multi-Sector Community Marriage Initiatives

In 2003, the Delaware Ecumenical Council on Children and Families, Inc., Wilmington, received a \$40,000 grant from the federal Office of Community Services, Block Grant Training and Technical Assistance Program. The purpose of the grant is to use the capacities of faith communities and other social welfare education, advocacy, and service organizations to promote healthy marriage among low-income Delawareans. The funded activities include coalition-building and community education and leadership designed to assess the availability of current services and supports available to form and sustain healthy marriages and to identify gaps in services and recommendations on how to fill those gaps.¹⁷

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances. Established a separate state program for two-parent families.

District of Columbia

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In 2002, the D.C. Administration of Human Services, Income Maintenance Division, awarded Abundantly Living Services, a minority-owned counseling/consultant firm, a pilot contract of \$40,000 to strengthen marriages among low-income couples. The contract called for training local ministers in the use of pre-marital inventories (or questionnaires) with engaged couples and for training ministers and staff to deliver one-day workshops in relationships skills for low-income couples.¹⁸ The monies were also spent on paid radio spots advertising the availability of the workshops. According to the program director, one of the lessons learned in this pilot program was that these services need to be made available to single people, many of whom are in serious relationships.

Florida*

State Policy Initiatives, Commissions, and Campaigns

Florida Marriage Preparation and Preservation Act of 1998

In 1998, Governor Lawton Chiles (D) signed the Florida Marriage Preparation and Preservation Act, making Florida the first state to require marriage skills education as a part of its high school curriculum. The law states that “the family is the foundation of society,” and that “the marital relationship is the foundation of the family and that consequently, strengthening marriages will lead to stronger families, children, and communities, as well as a stronger economy.” The Act mandates several marriage preparation and support activities (described on the following pages). However, no

funds were set aside to implement this law—apart from a grant to Florida State University for curricula review and development, research, and evaluation.

Strengthening Families and Marriage Initiative, 2003

Governor Jeb Bush (R) declared in his January 2003 State of the State message that he planned to make strengthening families one of his Administration's top priorities. He stated that strong marriages, families, and communities are the foundation on which our society is built.¹⁹

In May 2003, the state legislature enacted a law (SB 480) repealing a Fatherhood Commission and creating a Commission on Marriage and Family Support, which was set up in July 2003. It also confirmed Jerry Regier as the Secretary of the Department of Children and Families. Regier had previously led the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (see p. 49). Commission members are appointed by the Governor and the legislature, and the Commission is administered by the Ounce of Prevention Fund, a public/private partnership. Although it functions independently, the Commission works closely with the Florida Department of Children and Families and other agencies.

The legislation spelled out several tasks for the Commission: functioning as a clearinghouse and resource center, developing public education and awareness materials, and preparing three reports in its first year on (1) programs, resources, and strategies that exist in Florida for supporting safe, violence-free, and nurturing parenting; (2) programs that teach relationships skills for different types of couples, including divorcing parents; and (3) promising practices being tried in other parts of the country. The Marriage and Family Support Commission is expected to continue to focus on some activities promoting responsible fatherhood (see pp. 31–32).

State officials contracted with the University of Florida to conduct a state baseline survey of attitudes, beliefs, and demographics related to marriage and family formation, which was modeled on a survey conducted by the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative. The survey report was published in December 2003.²⁰

Changes in State Marriage and Divorce Law

Marriage License Fee Reduction

The 1998 Marriage Preparation and Preservation Act reduced marriage license fees by \$32.50 for couples who present valid certificates of completion of at least four hours of instruction at a qualified, registered premarital preparation course provider. Couples who do not choose to take a course must wait three days after they receive their marriage license before they can marry.

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

The 1998 Marriage Preparation and Preservation Act mandates the following:

- ❖ All couples applying for marriage licenses must sign a statement saying they have read a handbook prepared by the Florida Bar Association informing them of their rights and responsibilities during marriage and upon dissolution of marriage.
- ❖ The premarital preparation courses approved for the reduced marriage license fee may include instruction regarding: (a) conflict management, (b) communication skills, (c) financial responsibilities, and (d) children and parenting responsibilities.

To be on the approved list of courses, teachers must register with the county clerks and send their curricula to the Florida State University Center for Marriage and Family, which reviews the course curricula “to determine their efficacy.” The law also awarded the Center a grant to conduct related research and evaluation and develop a standard curriculum, which would eventually be offered across the state to assure some uniformity. The curriculum the Center developed, *Building a Strong Marital House*, which draws upon marital research by John Gottman of the University of Washington, is being offered as a pilot to couples in Leon County at no cost. The Center is planning to train other professionals in this curriculum so that it can be offered more widely across the state.²¹

- ❖ Couples with children who file for divorce may be required by the judge to take a Parent Education and Family Stabilization course.

In October 2003, the Department of Children and Families received three, three-year, \$200,000-per-year demonstration grants from the federal Children’s Bureau. The grants will go to three organizations that will train educators in providing relationships skills and marriage strengthening programs to couples and families primarily in the child welfare system. The organizations will also conduct research.²² The three funded organizations are:

- ❖ The new Florida Marriage and Family Research Institute is based at the Academy for Teaching, Learning, and Leadership, University of Central Florida. The project will provide research and training for public and private agency staff and faith-based community organizations providing services to couples and families.
- ❖ Big Bend Community-Based Care serves eight counties in the northwestern area of the state. This project will base its service interventions on the research and curriculum of John Gottman, University of Washington.²³
- ❖ PAIRS (Practical Application of Intimate Relationships Skills) will conduct the project in collaboration with the National Partnership for Community Leadership (NPCL) and the help of a community advisory board. Drawing upon the experience of the PAIRS program,²⁴ this project will build capacity of local child welfare agency staff to work with mothers, fathers, and the parents as a couple.

Relationships and Marriage Education for High School Students

The 1998 Marriage Preparation and Preservation Act requires all Florida students to complete a one-half credit in life management skills, which must include marriage and relationship skill-based education, in order to graduate from high school. Different curricula are being used in different counties and schools. In the Tallahassee area, the course is *Partners for Peers*, based on the Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills (PAIRS) curriculum, adapted for high schools under the sponsorship of the Family Law Division of the American Bar Association.²⁵

Fatherhood Programs with Co-Parenting and Marriage Components

In 1996, Governor Chiles and the legislature created the Florida Commission on Responsible Fatherhood, which promoted responsible and healthy fathering among all fathers—whether married, separated, divorced, or never married. Administered by the Ounce of Prevention Fund, the Commission received significant funding (over \$1 million annually) from three state government agencies: the Department of Children and Families for administrative costs, the Department of Health for fatherhood programs, and the Agency for Workforce Innovations for job placement and parent education programs. Beginning in 1997, the Commission funded approximately 30 fatherhood

programs and provided information and public education on fatherhood. The Commission also worked closely with representatives of the domestic violence community to raise awareness of and prevent family violence and abuse.

In June 1997, the Commission published a report, *Policy Regarding Marriage and the Wellbeing of Children*, which argued that public policy that promotes long-lasting marriage is consistent with the goal of promoting responsible fatherhood. The Commission report recommended several strategies to strengthen marriages and reduce father-absent families, including creating pro-marriage education, premarital preparation, and mentoring programs; encouraging statewide adoption of Community Marriage Policies (see Appendix I, p. 67); implementing a public service campaign to educate the public about the benefits of marriage and the damages of divorce; enacting further legislation to strengthen the Florida Marriage Preparation and Preservation Act; encouraging shared domestic responsibility between husbands and wives; and using surplus TANF funds for pilot programs to reduce hostility in divorce proceedings.

As of July 1, 2003, the Fatherhood Commission was discontinued, but some of its activities are expected to be continued by the new Commission on Marriage and Family Support.

State Cooperative Extension Marriage-Related Services

Family life extension agents offer premarital education classes on a quarterly basis in 10 counties and intermittently in other parts of the state. These classes use the *Before You Tie the Knot Curriculum* developed by educators in the Florida extension service.²⁶

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed the “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances. Established a separate state program for two-parent families.

Georgia

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In 2002 and 2003, the Jewish Family and Community Service of Atlanta received federal Office of Refugee Resettlement funds through the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society to conduct a pilot program, Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages Program. Working with the local Office of Refugee Resettlement, the program is designed to strengthen refugee families and marriages by providing communication, conflict resolution, listening, parenting, and financial management skills training. The activities are also designed to increase community understanding of the challenges facing refugees during the resettlement experience.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Georgia has abolished the “100-hour rule” but has retained the special work history requirements for two-parent families.²⁷ Established a separate state program for two-parent families.

Hawaii

Programs, Activities, and Services

Military Marriage-Related Programs

The Army’s Building Strong and Ready Families (BSRF) program has been offered to couples in five brigades at Schofield Barracks, near Wahiwa, as part of a pilot program. This program offers enlisted soldiers and their spouses marital assessments and relationships skills training (PREP curriculum); extensive health assessments, screening, and referrals (including for substance abuse and domestic violence); and marriage enrichment weekends. This program will be continued when the BSRF program is expanded.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances. Established a separate state program for two-parent families.

Idaho

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In May 2003, the city of Nampa, in partnership with the Healthy Families-Nampa Coalition, received a \$544,000 federal child support demonstration grant (under 1115 waiver authority) to promote healthy marriages and parental relationships. The coalition is a group of religious, civic, education, minority, media, and business leaders—including the director of a local domestic violence center—focused on supporting healthy marriages. The federal funding for this project is a supplement to the federal support the state currently receives for providing child support services. Participating churches and community partners will contribute \$1 in matching resources for every \$2 in federal money, and the city of Nampa will administer the grant.

The grant is to be used over a five-year period to deliver faith-based and community initiatives in support of healthy marriages and responsible parenting, including premarital instruction; parenting classes; marriage and family enrichment; couple mentoring; and counseling for unwed, expectant mothers and couples, couples in crisis, and children impacted by adverse family circumstances. There will also be a focus on helping fathers, including prison inmates, develop good fathering skills. According to the grant proposal, these activities and services will seek to improve the enforcement of child support obligations, increase cooperation in establishing paternity, and decrease

divorce rates, thereby leading to a decline in the number of child support cases. The federal government will be conducting an evaluation of the project outcomes.²⁸

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

Illinois

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In 2002 and 2003, the Family Ministries Office of the Archdiocese of Chicago received federal Office of Refugee Resettlement funds through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) to conduct a pilot program, Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages Program. Working with the local Office of Refugee Resettlement, the program seeks to strengthen refugee families and marriages by providing communication, conflict resolution, listening, parenting, and financial management skills training. The activities are also designed to increase community understanding of the challenges facing refugees during the resettlement experience. In 2002, the Jewish Family and Community Services received a federal Administration for Children and Families grant from the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society to conduct a pilot program with similar goals and activities.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances. Illinois set up a separate state program for two-parent families in 2001 and 2002.

Indiana

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In 2003, Catholic Social Services in Indianapolis received federal Office of Refugee Resettlement funds through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) to conduct a pilot program, Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages Program. Working with the local Office of Refugee Resettlement, the program seeks to strengthen refugee families and marriages by providing communication, conflict resolution, listening, parenting, and financial management skills training. The activities are also designed to increase community understanding of the challenges facing refugees during the resettlement experience.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: The “100-hour rule” applies to new two-parent applicants only. If a current single-parent TANF recipient decides to marry or cohabit, the

100-hour rule is waived and future benefits are based solely on financial circumstances.²⁹ Established separate state two-parent family program.

Iowa

State Policy Initiatives, Commissions, and Campaigns

In 2003, the legislature appropriated approximately \$75,000 to conduct Marriage Forums (focus groups) around the state to determine what local communities might want and expect from a state-operated marriage initiative.³⁰

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

Kansas

Programs, Activities, and Services

Military Marriage-Related Programs

Planning is underway to offer the Army’s Building Strong and Ready Families program to couples in Fort Riley, near Junction City, when the program is expanded. This program offers enlisted soldiers and their spouses marital assessments and relationships skills training (PREP curriculum); extensive health assessments, screening, and referrals (including for substance abuse and domestic violence); and marriage enrichment weekends.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

Kentucky

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In October 2003, the University of Louisville received a five-year grant from the federal Children’s Bureau (\$161,064 for the first year). The goal of this project is to develop a competency-based training curriculum in healthy marriage and family formation specific to child welfare in order to strengthen marriage and families and thereby prevent or reduce child maltreatment. The curriculum will be developed in partnership with the local child welfare agency, faith-based organizations, and other community organizations. The project will provide training to 50 community child welfare teams and managers and to faith-based organizations.³¹

Military Marriage-Related Programs

Planning is underway to offer the Army’s Building Strong and Ready Families program to couples in Fort Campbell, near Clarksville, when the national program is ex-

panded. This program offers enlisted soldiers and their spouses marital assessments and relationships skills training (PREP curriculum); extensive health assessments, screening, and referrals (including for substance abuse and domestic violence); and marriage enrichment weekends.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: The “100-hour rule” is only used to determine the initial eligibility of a new TANF family. Once the family is deemed eligible, the rule no longer applies.

Louisiana*

State Policy Initiatives, Commissions, and Campaigns

National Marriage Day

In 1999, February 14 was proclaimed “National Marriage Day” by then-Governor Mike Foster (R).

Governor’s Commission on Marriage and Family

In 2000, the state legislature approved a resolution recommending that the Governor develop a “council on marriage” charged with developing, monitoring, and evaluating marriage programs, policies, public education, and curricula to make sure that the state is in no way discouraging or undermining marriage.³³ In response, Governor Foster established the Governor’s Commission on Marriage and Family in March 2001. The Commission is charged with examining ways to promote marriage and remove disincentives to marriage created by law or public policy, particularly among populations with low marriage rates.³⁴

Healthy Marriages and Strong Families Initiative Legislation

In 2002–2003, the state legislature approved a total of approximately \$1,375,000 in TANF funds to be spent by the Department of Social Services on a series of “family strengthening initiatives...designed to enable low-income parents to act in the best interest of their child.” Its components are described below.

Changes in State Marriage and Divorce Law

Covenant Law

In August 1997, Louisiana enacted the first Covenant Marriage Act in the nation. The law requires couples applying for a marriage license to be given a choice between the regular marriage contract and a covenant marriage contract, under which couples express their intent to remain married for life. Couples who opt for a covenant marriage agree to receive premarital counseling from a member of the clergy or marriage counselor and to seek marital counseling before applying for a divorce. The grounds for divorce include adultery, conviction for a felony, one year of abandonment, physical or sexual abuse of the spouse or a child, and separation for at least two years. (The state’s no-fault divorce statute requires a 180-day wait before filing for a divorce.) An independent study of the implementation and effects of the Covenant Marriage Act is underway, and some preliminary results have already been published.³⁵

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

Since September 2002, as part of the new Healthy Marriage and Strengthening Families Initiative, the state Department of Social Services, Office of Family Support, has used approximately \$1.375 million in TANF funds for contracts with outside vendors to develop a series of products and services primarily for low-income, unmarried couples ("fragile families").

Fatherhood, Co-Parenting, and Marriage

The following activities were funded under the Healthy Marriage and Strengthening Families Initiative:

- ❖ A handbook for unmarried, low-income parents, emphasizing the importance of co-parenting and the value of marriage, to be distributed in prenatal care clinics and birthing hospitals and by public assistance and nonprofit staff.
- ❖ A marriage handbook for newlyweds, engaged couples, and individuals interested in marriage to be distributed by pastors, counselors, and marriage license clerks and in other settings.
- ❖ A curriculum for low-income fathers, low-income mothers, and unwed couples that will focus on building strong families and what it means to have a healthy marriage and healthy relationship. The curriculum will be pilot-tested. The state plans to develop a certification process and to begin training staff to use the curriculum in 2004.
- ❖ A 10- to 20-minute video complementing the handbooks and curriculum that will serve as an outreach/educational tool for community- and faith-based social service organizations.
- ❖ Preparation of a series of brief "clips," based on the video, to be distributed as television and radio public service announcements.
- ❖ A survey of low-income, unmarried new parents in Louisiana, based in part on the national Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Survey. The survey asks about attitudes and perceived myths with regard to relationships and marriage. (The survey was funded by an additional state appropriation of \$505,000 in 2002.)³⁶
- ❖ A demonstration program focused on strengthening the relationships skills of low-income parents. In two demonstration sites, community-based organizations were funded to provide relationships skills training and education to low-income married and unmarried couples.
- ❖ In 2002, the legislature appropriated \$3 million for several parenting initiatives focused on helping non-custodial fathers be more responsible and effective fathers. In 2003, an additional \$750,000 was appropriated to develop a statewide fatherhood demonstration program similar to the national Parents Fair Share program. Several of these projects emphasize promoting and facilitating strong co-parenting relationships.

In October 2003, the Department of Social Services received a three-year demonstration grant from the federal Children's Bureau (\$200,000 annually). The project will train staff of Family Resource Centers to add a healthy marriage/strengthening relationship component to the services they offer "fragile" families. The training will build on the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) curriculum, supplemented with other tools and materials. The project evaluation will compare the effects of using different modes of service delivery and curriculum components.³⁷

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

Maine

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In 2003, Catholic Charities Maine in Portland received federal Office of Refugee Resettlement funds through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) to conduct a pilot program, Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages Program. Working with the local Office of Refugee Resettlement, the program seeks to strengthen refugee families and marriages by providing communication, conflict resolution, listening, parenting, and financial management skills training. The activities are also designed to increase community understanding of the challenges facing refugees during the resettlement experience.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Applicant families have the option of including or excluding the income of step-parents when determining TANF eligibility.³⁸

Maryland

Changes in State Marriage and Divorce Law

Marriage License Fee Reduction

In May 2001, Governor Parris Glendening (D) signed a law allowing any county in Maryland to discount marriage license fees for couples who complete premarital preparation courses. The course must be at least four hours in length and include instruction in conflict management, communication skills, and financial and parental responsibilities. The course must be offered by certain categories of qualified providers, as defined in the law.

Programs, Activities, and Services

Fatherhood Programs with Co-Parenting and Marriage Components

In 2001, the Maryland Welfare Innovation Act created a Commission on Responsible Fatherhood. The Commission was charged with educating citizens about the problems children face when raised without a responsible father, with identifying barriers to responsible fatherhood and proposing strategies to overcome them, and with coordinating programs within the state. A variety of fatherhood initiatives and programs in various sites throughout the state are supported and guided by the Commission and funded by government and private foundation sources.³⁹

One of these programs is the Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development (CFWD) in Baltimore, which is one of the federally funded Partnership for Fragile Families sites. Under a grant from the Ford Foundation, CFWD has developed a

co-parenting curriculum called “50-50” Parenting, designed for low-income, never-married couples. In 2002, CFWD received a contract from the Louisiana Department of Social Services to develop a marriage and healthy relationships curriculum for fragile families, to be used in Baltimore and programs in Louisiana. This curriculum for low-income fathers explores the knowledge, expectations, and attitudes about marriage and discusses the benefits of healthy marriage for children. The curriculum also offers relationships skills training to those fathers and mothers in committed relationships.⁴⁰

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances. Established a separate state program for two-parent families.

Child Support

Since 2000, the Maryland Office of Child Support has been conducting a debt-leveraging pilot demonstration program in Baltimore City. Non-custodial fathers who have accumulated burdensome child support arrears (while unemployed or in jail, for instance) may enter into an agreement with the child support office whereby their debt will be gradually reduced on a monthly basis if they regularly attend a responsible fatherhood program and pay their current support obligations. While the reduction of this debt is not conditional upon the parents reuniting or marrying, one of the aims of this program is to improve mother-father relationships, as well as to promote involvement of non-custodial fathers with their children.⁴¹

Massachusetts

Programs, Activities, and Services

Fatherhood Programs with Co-Parenting and Marriage Components

In 1997, the Governor’s Advisory Commission on Responsible Fatherhood and Family Support was created by executive order. In a statement of guiding principles, it defined a responsible father as, among other things, one who “sustains a strong and vital marriage . . . and if not married, establishes legal paternity . . . and actively shares with the child’s mother in the continuing emotional, physical and financial care of their child.” In its first year-end report, the Commission made several recommendations, including “recognizing and promoting the importance of caring, committed, collaborative and long-lasting marriages” and helping non-married parents co-parent better.⁴² The Commission’s work inspired a number of initiatives, including the Father Friendly Initiative, operated under the Boston Healthy Start initiative, a site in the Partners for Fragile Families Project.

The Fatherhood Initiative, based in the state Office of Child Support, is working in three communities—Worcester, Boston, and Brockton—to develop fatherhood peer support groups and referral networks for pre-marital and other kinds of marriage education and support services.⁴³

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed the “100-hour rule.” Retained the special work history requirements.⁴⁴

Michigan*

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In July 2001, the Michigan Family Independence Agency (FIA) launched a five-site pilot demonstration project, Encouraging Family Formation (EFF), with \$250,000 in TANF funding for FY 2002. The five pilot counties were Wayne, Genesee, Berrien, Kent, and Charlevoix/Emmet. The projects were funded with a combination of federal, state, and county monies. In FY 2003, only the Wayne County and Kent County sites received continued funding due to budget cuts.

In these pilot programs, county-level providers offered a six-week series of classes to all custodial parents (mostly single mothers) receiving cash assistance. Recipients were encouraged to attend these classes when their babies were between 7–12 weeks of age (that is, before the mothers were subject to TANF work requirements). Most sites offered various incentives (e.g., gifts) to participants to complete the program. Other mothers in the community could also participate upon request. On-site child care was provided, and the mothers were encouraged to bring the fathers of their babies to the classes. The five pilot sites were encouraged to use a new curriculum, *Caring for My Family: Family Formation and Fatherhood Curriculum*, specially developed by the cooperative extension service at Michigan State University. The classes typically focused on parenting skills and appropriate discipline, communication skills, stress and anger management, joint decision-making and problem-solving, benefits of marriage, health issues, choosing a day care provider, and family planning, among other issues. Each site provided information about domestic violence and healthy relationships. The Kent County site made particularly strong efforts to increase the participation of fathers. The initial plan to evaluate these pilot programs was dropped as a result of state budget cuts.⁴⁵

In 2003, Catholic Human Development Outreach in Grand Rapids received federal Office of Refugee Resettlement funds through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) to conduct a pilot program, Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages Program. Working with the local Office of Refugee Resettlement, the program seeks to strengthen refugee families and marriages by providing communication, conflict resolution, listening, parenting, and financial management skills training. The activities are also designed to increase community understanding of the challenges facing refugees during the resettlement experience.

Fatherhood, Co-Parenting, and Marriage

In May 2003, the state of Michigan was awarded \$990,000 from the federal government for a five-year child support demonstration program (under a 1115 waiver) to improve the establishment of paternity, increase child support, and improve the relationships of fathers with their children and the mothers of their children. The project

focuses particularly on low-income communities. It also includes efforts to reduce the potential for domestic violence.

The grant is awarded to three collaborating organizations in West Michigan—Healthy Marriages Grand Rapids serving as the lead agency in partnership with City Vision and West Christian Foundation. Healthy Marriages Grand Rapids is described below. City Vision is a collaboration of 10 established “Institutions of Trust” (i.e., grassroots/neighborhood organizations) that provide a variety of services (including jobs, food pantries, etc.) in the low-income communities of Grand Rapids. The West Michigan Christian Foundation is raising the required matching dollars from the private sector. This project also works with the Kent County Family Independence Agency, Head Start, and other public agencies that serve low-income families. The grant does not affect the amount of child support funding the state receives from the federal government.

The specific objectives of the demonstration program, Healthy Marriages, Healthy Relationships, are to increase effective co-parenting skills among married and non-married parents, to increase the participation by non-custodial fathers in the lives of their children, to increase the number of couples who participate in marriage preparation, and to decrease the divorce rate among low-income couples. The curricula and services used will be customized to meet the needs of different urban populations.⁴⁶ The program will be evaluated by an external organization under contract with the federal Administration for Children and Families, as well as with the cooperative efforts of the Calvin College Social Research Center.

Multi-Sector Community Marriage Initiatives

Healthy Marriages Grand Rapids (HMGR) is a multi-sector initiative formed in 1997 to support healthy, life-long marriage “as a worthy personal goal, as well as the ideal context within which to conceive and rear children.”⁴⁷ The program is housed at the Pine Rest Family Institute, a unit within a comprehensive private community mental health center that coordinates the wide range of participating community partners. The marriage initiative has been funded by private foundations, corporations, and individual donors.

HMGR established three long-range goals: to reduce the divorce rate and out-of-wedlock birth rate by 25 percent in Kent County (the home of Grand Rapids) within 10 years and to increase the percentage of churches that offer premarital education to 75 percent. HMGR has emphasized the involvement of religious and business leaders, health care and social service professionals, judges, and other community leaders. Since 1997, the initiative has:

- ❖ Launched a community awareness campaign about the HMGR initiative.
- ❖ Formed five task forces defined by profession: faith-based organizations, business leaders, health and social service professionals, judges, and African American pastors.
- ❖ Publicized a “Menu for a Successful Marriage” on area billboards and in full-page newspaper advertisements.
- ❖ Published a brochure, *Marriage and Family-Friendly Businesses*, which provides strategies to become a marriage- and family-friendly employer and highlights local businesses that have family-friendly policies. The brochure is distributed to CEOs and human resource directors in the community.

- ❖ Conducted research on state and county statistics on marriage, divorce, and births to unmarried mothers; held focus groups with TANF clients; reviewed open divorce records; and surveyed family-friendly employer policies in the Greater Grand Rapids Community. These studies, conducted in collaboration with the Social Research Center at Calvin College, have helped to identify high-risk populations and develop strategically designed programs and services.
- ❖ Provided regular premarital education and marriage enrichment classes for couples in Greater Grand Rapids and held marriage enrichment events and weekends for African American couples.
- ❖ Provided training on several of the leading marriage and relationships skills curricula for counselors, clergy, and lay leaders.
- ❖ Piloted a “condensed” premarital education program offered on-site in the courthouse, which is required for all couples wishing to be married in a civil ceremony by the judge who performed the most marriage ceremonies in the county.
- ❖ Participated as a partner in one of the state’s five-site demonstration programs for TANF families, Encouraging Family Formation (described above).

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

Minnesota

Changes in State Marriage and Divorce Law

Marriage License Fee Reduction

In 2001, Minnesota enacted a law that reduced the marriage license fee from \$70 to \$20 for couples who agree to attend a 12-hour premarital education course. The course must include a premarital inventory component and teach communication and conflict management skills and be offered by a licensed or ordained minister or licensed marriage and family therapist.

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In 2002 and 2003, Catholic Charities in St. Paul received federal Office of Refugee Resettlement funds through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) to conduct a pilot program, Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages Program. Working with the local Office of Refugee Resettlement, the program seeks to strengthen refugee families and marriages by providing communication, conflict resolution, listening, parenting, and financial management skills training. The activities are also designed to increase community understanding of the challenges facing refugees during the resettlement experience.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances. Established separate state program for two-parent families in 2002.

Mississippi

Programs, Activities, and Services

Fatherhood Programs with Co-Parenting and Marriage Components

In October 2000, the state Division of Community Services launched a Responsible Fatherhood Initiative with \$4.5 million in TANF funding in FY 2002 and \$1.6 million in FY 2003. The family formation goals of TANF are addressed in the fatherhood training programs, including encouraging two-parent families and promoting marriage. The agency funds nonprofit organizations, including community action agencies, to conduct 15 responsible fatherhood programs. The programs provide services to address barriers to responsible father involvement, including job assistance, education, and transportation. In addition, these programs offer a curriculum developed by the National Center for Fathering, "Secrets of Effective Fathering," which teaches team-parenting skills and plans to incorporate a focus on healthy marriages.⁴⁸

Policy Changes Related in TANF and Child Support

TANF⁴⁹

Two-Parent Eligibility: Removed "100-hour rule" and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

Marriage Incentive: Disregards the income of a newly married biological or step-parent in determining a household's eligibility for welfare for the first six months after the couple marries.

Missouri

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In October 2003, the Forest Institute of Professional Psychology in Springfield received a five-year child welfare training grant from the federal Children's Bureau (first-year funding level is \$187,099). The Forest Institute, in partnership with Southwest Missouri State University and the Southern Region of the Missouri Division of Family Services, will develop, implement, and institutionalize a competency-based curriculum to train child welfare staff to provide effective family formation services to their low-income clients residing in eight Ozark counties. The initial phase of the training will focus on child abuse prevention, relationship enhancement, and family formation services. The second will involve mentoring trainees as they provide the services to their clients. In addition, a network of government and community- and faith-based organizations is expected to assist in addressing other needs of these clients.⁵⁰

Military Marriage-Related Programs

Planning is underway to offer the Army's Building Strong and Ready Families program to couples in Fort Leonard Wood, near Waynesville, when the national program is expanded. This program offers enlisted soldiers and their spouses marital assessments and relationships skills training (PREP curriculum); extensive health assessments, screening, and referrals (including for substance abuse and domestic violence); and marriage enrichment weekends.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support*TANF*

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

Montana**Programs, Activities, and Services***Couples and Marriage Education for Adults*

In 2001, Families First of Montana, located in Missoula, received a 20-month grant of \$20,000 in TANF funds for the Family Empowerment Project, administered through the Children’s Trust Fund. The grant was designed to provide a wide array of free services to TANF families, including parenting classes, support groups, programs for divorcing parents, guided play groups, and one-on-one consultations. In addition, these families can also be referred for relationships and marriage strengthening workshops, family strengthening workshops, and couples mediation.⁵¹

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support*TANF*

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

Nebraska**Programs, Activities, and Services***Couples and Marriage Education for Adults*

In October 2003, the state Department of Health and Human Services received a three-year demonstration grant from the federal Children’s Bureau (\$200,000 annually). This project will focus on the population living in the Omaha Enterprise Community (a HUD-designated enterprise/empowerment zone) and will also be available to the community at large. The planned activities include launching a public awareness program on the benefits for children of stable, healthy marriages and engaging at least 150 couples each year in a six-month-long, individualized strengths-based marriage preparation program. The aim is to increase by 20 percent the number of children in the community raised by both parents in stable and healthy marriages.⁵²

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support*TANF*

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Current eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances. Established separate state program for two-parent families.

Nevada

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances. Established a separate state program for two-parent families.

New Hampshire

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In April 2002, the state legislature passed a bill establishing a legislative committee to research a plan to implement, operate, and fund a marriage education and enhancement program. According to the bill, the program may include premarital education courses and may require students to take a family life skills course for high school graduation. The committee was tasked with looking into building a coalition between state and local officials, the New Hampshire Department of Education, the University of New Hampshire, the state's cooperative extension, the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, and the New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence.⁵³

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed the work history requirements but retained the “100-hour” rule.

New Jersey

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In 2003, the First Baptist Community Development Corporation (FBCDC) in Somerset received a \$40,000 grant from the federal ACF Office of Community Services, Block Grant Training and Technical Assistance Program. The FBCDC will expand their family support education and training offered through their Family Resource Center by implementing a relationship/marriage initiative training program called Couples With Promise designed for at-risk couples.⁵⁴

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances. Established a separate state program for two-parent families.

Marriage Incentive: Since 1992, the state has excluded the income of a non-needy step-parent in computing a cash assistance grant, provided the household income does not exceed 150 percent of poverty.

New Mexico

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

New Mexico set aside \$400,000 in TANF funds for use in FY 2003 to be spent on premarital training, marriage education classes, and fatherhood and parenting programs. A grant was awarded to the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, New Mexico State University, to deliver services to families in three counties. The program, called the Strengthening Families Initiative, will offer parenting classes, enhanced life skills (related to money management and employment, for example), and nutrition education to expectant, teen, single, divorced, abusive, and incarcerated parents. The program, which is offered in English and Spanish, also teaches ways of coping with stress and maintaining healthy couple relationships.⁵⁵

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

New York

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In October 2003, two universities in the state were awarded five-year child welfare demonstration grants. At Syracuse University, the grant will be implemented by an inter-professional coalition of academic departments, including the School of Social Work, the Department of Child and Family Studies, and the Department of Marriage and Family Therapy, working with area child welfare agencies. The aim of the project is to lower the rate of child abuse and neglect through strengthening the marriages of families in the child welfare system. Planned activities include: identifying best practices, field testing and disseminating a competency-based training curriculum, training 33 graduate students in the three participating departments, delivering continuing education workshops to 100–150 employees of regional child welfare agencies, and disseminating relevant information to the public through various media outlets.⁵⁶ The first-year funding level was \$135,688.

The other grant will be implemented by the School of Social Work, State University of New York at Albany, in collaboration with the State Office for Children and Family Services, the Social Work Education Consortium, and the Center for Human Services Research. The plan is to develop a competency-based curriculum and training plan that promotes family-centered practice, healthy marriage and family formation, and father involvement in child welfare practice. The curriculum and training will be based on emerging research, especially on fragile families and father involvement in child welfare. The activities will be adapted to the cultural needs of a diverse population across the state.⁵⁷ The first-year funding level was \$200,000.

Military Marriage-Related Programs

The Army’s Building Strong and Ready Families program was offered to couples in Fort Drum, near Watertown, as part of its pilot program and will be offered again

when the program is expanded. This program offers enlisted soldiers and their spouses marital assessments and relationships skills training (PREP curriculum); extensive health assessments, screening, and referrals (including for substance abuse and domestic violence); and marriage enrichment weekends.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

North Carolina

Program, Activities, and Services

Military Marriage-Related Programs

The Army’s Building Strong and Ready Families program was offered to couples in Fort Bragg, near Fayetteville, as part of its pilot program and will be again when the program is expanded. This program offers enlisted soldiers and their spouses marital assessments and relationships skills training (PREP curriculum); extensive health assessments, screening, and referrals (including for substance abuse and domestic violence); and marriage enrichment weekends.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

North Dakota

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: North Dakota strictly enforces higher eligibility requirements for two-parent families.⁵⁸ In effect, the state TANF program does not offer benefits to two-parent families. In the few instances when it does, the state places the two-parent families in a separate state program.⁵⁹

Marriage Incentives: The state disregards the income of a step-parent in determining a household’s eligibility for welfare for the first six months after the couple marries.

Ohio

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In 2003, Catholic Charities in Cleveland received federal Office of Refugee Resettlement funds through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) to conduct a pilot program, Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages Program. Working with the local Office of Refugee Resettlement, the

program seeks to strengthen refugee families and marriages by providing communication, conflict resolution, listening, parenting, and financial management skills training. The activities are also designed to increase community understanding of the challenges facing refugees during the resettlement experience.

Fatherhood Programs with Co-Parenting and Marriage Components

In January 2003, the Cleveland Marriage Coalition (see below) was awarded a \$199,994 Special Improvement Grant from the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement to fund a 17-month pilot program to develop and test a relationship and marriage curriculum for low-income, unmarried parents. The program planned to recruit a total of about 70 low-income couples to participate in two-hour relationship education classes for six weeks. The program is adapting the Survival Skills for Healthy Families curriculum, developed by the Family Wellness Program of Scotts Valley, CA. The program will be evaluated to assess improvements in the couples' relationships, their intent to marry, and the establishment of paternity and payment of child support.⁶⁰

State Cooperative Extension Marriage-Related Services

State extension offices offer educational programs and materials to strengthen couples and marriage, with a special focus on helping couples with remarriage and coping with divorce.⁶¹ The extension service also distributes a quarterly newsletter, *Marriage Matters*, throughout the state. Some agents conduct regular local radio shows on couple and marriage enrichment topics.

The Ohio State University (OSU) Extension Service is collaborating with local professionals to support two multi-sector community marriage coalitions in Cleveland and Columbus (described below).

Multi-Sector Community Marriage Initiatives

The Cleveland Marriage Coalition, founded in January 1999, is a nonprofit, inter-religious organization of individuals, mental health professionals, and interfaith clergy dedicated to strengthening marriage by training professionals to provide relationships skills to engaged and married couples. Its initial aim was to expand the number of clergy signing the Coalition Covenant—a pledge to commit to strengthen marriage and become a resource on marriage-related research, education, and services for public policymakers, community leaders, and the media. In 2003, the Coalition received a federal Office of Child Support Enforcement grant (see above).

The Columbus Marriage Coalition was organized in April 2002 by representatives from the higher education, mental health, faith, and business communities. The goal of the Coalition is to work with the OSU Extension to develop marriage-enhancing programs and services and to serve as an information clearinghouse.⁶²

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

Oklahoma*

State Policy Initiatives, Commissions, and Campaigns

The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative

In January 1999, Governor Frank Keating (R), in his Inaugural and State-of-the-State addresses, laid out a series of social goals, including a commitment to reducing the state's divorce and out-of-wedlock birth rates by one-third by 2010. Oklahoma's divorce rate was the second highest in the nation, and he believed it was creating serious, negative economic consequences for children, adults, and the state's economy.

In February 1999, Governor Keating and his wife hosted a conference on marriage, which launched the statewide Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI), a multi-sector effort, including the faith community, business leaders, government officials, legal community, health and social service providers, public education, and the media. A year later, in March 2000, Keating set aside \$10 million from the TANF reserve fund to be used to strengthen marriage and reduce divorce. These funds have primarily been used to provide services to couples, with a special emphasis on serving low-income populations. Other state and private sector funds are also supporting activities of the OMI.

Howard Hendrick, the Director of the Department of Human Services, oversees the OMI. The OMI also has a broad-based, statewide steering committee and a coordination committee (which includes representatives of the domestic violence community) and receives advice and consultation from state and national experts in couples and marriage research, programs, and policy.⁶³ The OMI is continuing under the administration of Governor Brad Henry (D) who took office in January 2003.

Changes in State Marriage and Divorce Law

Marriage License Fee Reduction: Effective November 1999, couples who participate in premarital counseling receive a reduction in their marriage license fee from \$25 to \$5.

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In its first two years, the OMI consulted with individuals and groups in the public and private sectors and planned future activities. These initial activities were funded with private foundation monies and discretionary state dollars. Under a competitive bid, the Department of Human Services contracted with a small Oklahoma City public affairs/public relations firm, Public Strategies, to manage and coordinate the Initiative. After extensive review and consultation, the OMI selected the Preparation and Relationships Enhancement Program (PREP) curriculum, developed over 20 years at the University of Denver, as the primary service to be offered to couples and individuals.

Since 2000, the Initiative has drawn upon the \$10 million in unspent federal welfare block grant funds for the following activities:

- ❖ Trained state employees from a wide variety of publicly funded agencies and community leaders (for example, clergy and mental health professionals) to offer education and relationships skills workshops (PREP) in every county in the state.

The OMI has formal partnerships with the Department of Health to train child guidance personnel, with Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service to train family life educators, and with the Oklahoma Association of Youth Services to train staff in its first offenders program. In addition, Head Start staff, home visiting nurses, prison chaplains, and others are receiving PREP training.⁶⁴

- ❖ Piloted a married couples mentoring program to serve as follow-up support for couples participating in the skills workshops.
- ❖ Provided staff development and training to administrators and supervisors in TANF and other public programs so they can discuss marriage with clients and refer them, when appropriate, to the PREP workshops.
- ❖ Provided ongoing public education and awareness activities using local and national marriage experts who deliver lectures, write articles, and present at meetings.
- ❖ Encouraged prominent religious leaders to sign a covenant to offer marriage preparation courses and marriage mentors to couples during the first crucial years of marriage.
- ❖ Conducted a statewide survey of churches, congregations, synagogues, and mosques to find out what marriage- and family-related services and supports they provided or would be interested in providing.
- ❖ Collaborated with Oklahoma State University in a variety of research and evaluation activities, including conducting a baseline telephone survey of Oklahomans regarding marriage-related behavior and attitudes about marriage. A preliminary report of the survey was published in July 2002.⁶⁵
- ❖ Collaborated with the state domestic violence coalition to assure inclusion of information about domestic violence in all levels of training and cross-training of program staff.
- ❖ Established a Resource Center of materials and program models and a directory of services and programs available throughout the state (see www.okmarriage.org).
- ❖ Hired a full-time person to serve as the state government liaison with the faith-based community on marriage and other issues.

In October 2003, the Children and Family Services Division of the state Department of Human Services was awarded a three-year child welfare demonstration grant by the federal Children's Bureau, ACF (\$200,000 annually). The grant focuses on providing marriage education to families who have been approved to adopt children with special needs. The project will use three different modes of service delivery and a variety of settings and formats, including two weekend retreats (in Oklahoma City and Tulsa) and education workshops for the adoptive parents and also for members of the community. In the second year, the project will serve families in rural areas. An evaluation will compare the results of the different approaches.⁶⁶

Relationships and Marriage Education for High School Students

The OMI-sponsored survey on marriage found that Oklahomans are 2.5 years younger than the national median age when they marry, which the survey authors believe is a factor in the state's high divorce rates.⁶⁷ This finding encouraged the OMI to help high school students develop relationships skills, as well as more realistic expectations of marriage. The OMI worked with PREP and Connections (a relationships education programs for high school students) to merge the two curricula into one new version for use in elective Family and Consumer Life Skills classes. For the

pilot program, 24 teachers were trained and “field tested” the combined curriculum to 750 high school students in the spring and summer of 2003. The plan is to roll out a revised curriculum, based on input from the current field test, to 300 teachers for implementation in the 2003–2004 school year.

Military Marriage-Related Programs

Planning is underway to offer the Army’s Building Strong and Ready Families program to couples in Fort Sill, near Lawton, when the program is expanded. This program offers enlisted soldiers and their spouses marital assessments and relationships skills training (PREP curriculum); extensive health assessments, screening, and referrals (including for substance abuse and domestic violence); and marriage enrichment weekends.

State Cooperative Extension Marriage-Related Services

The Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, based at Oklahoma State University, is a partner in the OMI. Thirty-seven of its extension agents offer PREP workshops on a regular basis in counties across the state.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Eliminated the “100-hour rule” but retained the work history requirements for two-parent eligibility. The state is currently piloting a program that eliminates the special work history requirements for two-parent families.

Marriage Incentives: Disregards all income of a TANF recipient’s new spouse for three months. Combines the income of cohabiting, unmarried parents to determine a household’s welfare eligibility.

Oregon

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Eliminated the “100-hour rule” but retained the work history requirement.⁶⁹

Pennsylvania

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In January 2003, the Community Services for Children, Inc. (CSC) in Allentown was awarded a \$177,374 Special Improvement Grant from the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement. CSC, in collaboration with local faith-based organizations, will provide marriage education and employment and other services to unwed parents involved in Early Head Start or Head Start. This project is designed as a 17-month pilot program. The couples, who are screened to rule out domestic violence, attend a 12-week course. Participants receive a meal during the class, child care, and gift certificates to local restaurants. In order to obtain refunding, the program will have to

demonstrate results, which include a declaration of intent to marry from half of the participants and employment for all the men.⁷⁰

In 2003, the Fayette County Community Action Agency (FCAA) in Uniontown received a \$40,000 grant from the federal Office of Community Services, Block Grant Training and Technical Assistance Program. FCAA will add a relationship education component to the range of services it currently offers to low-income couples.⁷¹

In 2002 and 2003, the Office of Family Life Ministries in Allentown received federal Office of Refugee Resettlement funds through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) to conduct a pilot program, Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages Program. Working with the local Office of Refugee Resettlement, the program seeks to strengthen refugee families and marriages by providing communication, conflict resolution, listening, parenting, and financial management skills training. The activities are also designed to increase community understanding of the challenges facing refugees during the resettlement experience. In addition, Catholic Charities of Pittsburgh received a grant from USCCB/MRS in 2003 for similar purposes.

Relationships and Marriage Education for High School Students

A number of schools in Pennsylvania have adopted PEERS as Partners, a curriculum designed to teach students communication, negotiation, and relationship stress management skills.⁷² Designed for classroom settings for students in grades 11 and 12, the Partners curriculum is a 10-week program consisting of 10 50-minute sessions. Students are also taught budgeting skills and how family law impacts their lives.⁷³ No teacher training is required, although local lawyers usually teach the legal sessions.

Fatherhood Programs with Co-Parenting and Marriage Components

In September 1999, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge (R), in conjunction with the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI), launched the Pennsylvania Fatherhood Initiative (PFI), as a state-funded affiliate organization. NFI is helping PFI design programs and services that encourage responsible fatherhood.⁷⁴ Drawing upon the \$6.5 million allocated by the Pennsylvania state legislature to fund PFI activities, staff from state agencies and community programs will participate in the NFI workshop, "Building Systems that Support Marriage Within Existing Fatherhood Programs."

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Eliminated the "100-hour rule" but retained the work history requirements.⁷⁵

Rhode Island

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed the "100-hour rule" and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

Established a separate state program for two-parent families who were not able to meet the federal work participation requirement.⁷⁶

South Carolina

State Policy Initiatives, Commissions, and Campaigns

In 2001, the state attorney general set up a commission to develop policies to support marriage and families, as well as to explore faith-based programs and mentoring. The panel was to compare South Carolina policies to those of other states to find out which state policies discourage marriage and family formation.⁷⁷ However, due to a change in political leadership, the Commission was disbanded without fulfilling its charge.

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In the Department of Social Services, TANF recipients are all expected to participate in a program that includes a variety of life skills, including job readiness, parenting, co-parenting, and relationships skills development. Plans are underway to train faith-based and community leaders in the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) and to make PREP workshops available for TANF recipients who have young children and who are interested in improving co-parenting and/or moving towards marriage.⁷⁸

Military Marriage-Related Programs

Planning is underway to offer the Army's Building Strong and Ready Families program to couples in Fort Jackson, near Columbia, when the program is expanded. This program offers enlisted soldiers and their spouses marital assessments and relationships skills training (PREP curriculum); extensive health assessments, screening, and referrals (including for substance abuse and domestic violence); and marriage enrichment weekends.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed "100-hour rule" and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

South Dakota

State Programs, Activities, and Services

Relationship and Marriage Education for High School Students

In 1999, 40 high school teachers of family and consumer sciences were trained in the Connections Curriculum, a program that teaches communication skills with a focus on marriage and personal relationships. This program was funded for one year through several different sources of state funds. An evaluation of a sample of the students who completed the program compared with those who did not reported some positive changes in conflict resolution skills and in attitudes toward how to strengthen

troubled marriages. While the state-funded program was not continued due to budget cuts, some of the teachers continue to teach the program on a voluntary basis.⁷⁹

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: No action taken concerning changes in eligibility. Established a separate state program for two-parent families, but, in 2002, the state had no two-parent cases.⁸⁰

Tennessee

Changes in State Marriage and Divorce Law

Marriage License Fee Reduction

In July 2002, the state legislature increased the marriage license fee from \$10 to \$62.50 but offered a fee reduction of \$60 if applicants provide a valid certificate of completion of an approved premarital course.⁸¹

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In 2002 and 2003, Catholic Charities Refugee and Immigration Services in Nashville received federal Office of Refugee Resettlement funds through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) to conduct a pilot program, Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages Program. Working with the local Diocesan Office of Family Ministries, the program seeks to strengthen refugee families and marriages by providing communication, conflict resolution, listening, parenting, and financial management skills training. The activities are also designed to increase community understanding of the challenges facing refugees during the resettlement experience.

State Cooperative Extension Marriage-Related Services

A professor at the University of Tennessee conducts in-service training for state extension service educators in couples and marriage education (training the trainers) to build the capacity of the Extension Service to offer marriage education programs around the state. At these trainings, First Things First (see below) is presented as a model for educating and engaging the community in efforts to strengthen marriages and families.⁸²

Multi-Sector Community Marriage Initiatives

In 1997, several Chattanooga civic leaders formed a community-wide initiative, called First Things First, "to rebuild, renew, and revitalize the city," beginning with focusing on families. First Things First is a nonprofit organization funded by private foundations and donors. Community organizations, including government agencies (such as schools and health departments), serve as partners in the initiative's activities.⁸³

First Things First has established three strategic goals: to reduce the number of divorces in Hamilton County by 30 percent while at the same time strengthening marriages; to reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies in the county by 30 percent over three

years; and to increase the involvement of fathers in raising their children by 30 percent. The major activities of the initiative include:

- ❖ Under the auspices of Marriage Savers, a national organization, encouraged area churches to sign a community marriage policy in which they pledged to marry only couples who had received a substantial premarital education program.
- ❖ Held many media awareness and communications activities and events designed to promote responsible fatherhood, reduce teen pregnancy, and promote healthy marriages.
- ❖ Organized a Divorce Education and Mediation Pilot Project for the county courts.
- ❖ Worked with the business community and other partners to focus on family-friendly workplace policies and to recognize a family-friendly Business of the Year and a Family of the Year.
- ❖ Hosted training seminars for area counselors and mental health professionals to teach them skills needed to help couples overcome difficulties and stay married.
- ❖ Held various events to promote the importance of effective fathering, including a Fatherhood Summit and Symposium, and brought the program, Boot Camp for New Dads, to area hospitals.
- ❖ Worked with the Health Department, Regional Health Council, and the County Medical Society to provide public information and awareness about teen pregnancy prevention and out-of-wedlock childbearing.
- ❖ Held marriage educational seminars and day-long workshops for hundreds of couples on relationships skills.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF⁸⁴

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Established a separate state program for two-parent families.

Marriage Incentive: Those welfare recipients who marry may choose to either include or exclude the spouse from the assistance group in determining continued eligibility. If including the spouse in the group, his/her income is disregarded if it is below 185 percent of the need standard for the household.

Child Support

The state forgives child support arrearages owed by a non-custodial parent who marries the custodial parent of his or her children, as long as he or she resides in the home.

Texas

State Policy Initiatives, Commission, and Campaigns

In 2003, the state legislature required the welfare department to create a Healthy Marriage Development Program for welfare recipients. The legislation called for three types of instructional courses on (i) skill development for engaged and married couples; (ii) physical fitness and nutrition and cooking; and (iii) parenting skills, including step-parenting. The law also requires the department to pay couples up to \$20 per month, per course, to facilitate participation in these courses.

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In 1999, Governor George W. Bush (R) signed legislation increasing the marriage license fee by \$3. The monies go into a Family Trust Fund, administered by the attorney general, which supports a number of marriage-related activities and research.⁸⁵ The law also required the creation of a premarital education manual to be distributed to all marrying couples. The handbook, *When You Get Married*, was prepared by the Attorney General's Office under the guidance of an advisory committee whose members included marriage and family counseling professionals, religious practitioners, and family law attorneys. This handbook is also given to school-age parents who are not married.

In 2003, two organizations in the state—the Diocesan Migrant and Refugee Services in Dallas and Catholic Charities of the Dioceses of Galveston-Houston—received federal Office of Refugee Resettlement funds through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) to conduct the Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages Program by providing communication, conflict resolution, listening, parenting, and financial management skills training. The activities are also designed to increase community understanding of the challenges facing refugees during the resettlement experience.

Relationship and Marriage Education for High School Students

The Child Support Division of the Attorney General's Office is updating a school-based curriculum, PAPA, to include discussion of marriage. This curriculum will be provided at no cost to all secondary schools in Texas. Information is included about the possible benefits to children when parents marry. The companion video includes interviews with young couples who are married and who are considering marriage.

Fatherhood Programs with Co-Parenting and Marriage Components

In 1999, Governor Bush started the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) of Texas with a seed grant. The NFI of Texas seeks to improve the health and well-being of children by reducing father absence and promoting responsible fatherhood through information and public awareness and education activities. Beginning in 2003, NFI of Texas has focused on integrating a marriage component into its activities, including piloting a one-day workshop, *Building Systems of Support for Marriage in Fatherhood Programs*.⁸⁶

Part of the Ford Foundation's and the federal Office of Child Support's Fragile Families Initiative, the Texas Fragile Families (TFF) Initiative is a partnership of the Center for Public Policy Priorities and the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health. Local foundations are also providing support. In 2000, TFF funded 11 demonstration programs across the state to provide employment-related, education, and peer-support services to young fathers and their families. The sites have worked closely with local child support offices. In four of these sites, called the Bootstrap Project, peer groups participate in extensive parent education training, including skills training, mediation services, and legal assistance for those who decide to pursue marriage with the mother of their children.⁸⁷

Military Marriage-Related Programs

Planning is underway to offer the Army's Building Strong and Ready Families program to couples in Fort Bliss, near El Paso, and in Fort Hood, near Killeen, when the program is expanded. This program offers enlisted soldiers and their spouses marital assessments and relationships skills training (PREP curriculum); extensive health assessments, screening, and referrals (including for substance abuse and domestic violence); and marriage enrichment weekends.

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support***TANF***

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed "100-hour rule" and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances. Established a separate state program for two-parent families.

Marriage Incentive: Since June 2002, excludes the income of a new spouse for six months in establishing eligibility for TANF.

Utah***State Policy Initiatives, Commissions, and Campaigns**

In 1994, Governor Mike Leavitt (R) and First Lady Jacalyn S. Leavitt established the Governor's Initiative on Families Today (GIFT) to focus attention on strengthening marriages and families. GIFT sponsors marriage enrichment conferences each year, featuring local and national experts on marriage and parenting. The Governor's Commission on Marriage, formed in 1998, received \$600,000 in TANF funds for four specific projects towards the fulfillment of the fourth TANF purpose, "Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families." The TANF-funded activities are described below.

Each year during his administration, former Governor Leavitt signed marriage proclamations stating that marriage is important to the public good, and, in 2001-2003, recognizing February 7-14 as Marriage Week USA.⁸⁸ The Marriage Commission holds an annual recognition of "Gold Medal Marriages," and the Governor and First Lady honor the state's "Couple Married Longest" each year at the GIFT annual conference. The Commission is asking mayors and community leaders in Utah to honor and recognize marriage in their jurisdictions.

Programs, Activities, and Services***Couples and Marriage Education for Adults***

The Governor's Commission on Marriage uses TANF funds for various projects, including:

- ❖ A booklet, titled *Building a Successful Marriage*, which is for home-visiting nurses, Head Start programs, and others to distribute to young, unmarried parents ("fragile families") and families with a parent in prison.
- ❖ A website, www.utahmarriage.org, provides information about marriage enrichment and other resources and a toll-free telephone information and referral service.
- ❖ An 18-minute video in English and in Spanish titled, *Marriage News You Can Use*, which is given to all couples who apply for a marriage license and made available

at high schools, public libraries, Family Support Centers, and PTA Resource Centers.

- ❖ Training family life educators, cooperative extension agents, religious leaders, and others in the PREP relationships skills program to provide free workshops to community residents.
- ❖ Conducting a statewide survey on marriage behavior and attitudes, using the survey instrument developed by the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (see p. 49).⁸⁹ The report was published in December 2003.⁹⁰

Relationships and Marriage Education for High School Students

An elective high school course, “Adult Roles and Responsibilities,” is offered in approximately 97 high schools in the state. Twenty percent of Utah juniors and seniors take the class. The state plans to apply for funding to add material on child development and parenting, provide schools with textbooks and audio-visual materials for the course, and expand the program into additional high schools.

State Cooperative Extension Marriage-Related Services

The Utah State University Cooperative Extension Service is working with the Governor’s Commission to offer marriage-related services, including planning PREP leaders training and creating an online course for credit. In addition, the Extension Service is conducting a survey of couples who were given the video, *Marriage News You Can Use*, to assess whether it was helpful.⁹¹

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed the “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances. Established a separate state program for two-parent families.

Vermont

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed the “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

Child Support

If arrearages accrue after support rights have been assigned and the parents subsequently reunite, the Office of Child Support may not take any action to collect the support arrearages, unless the reunited family has a gross income equal to or greater than 225 percent of the federal poverty level.⁹²

Virginia*

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

Virginia’s Partners in Prevention (PIP) program, sponsored by the Department of Health, is an initiative to reduce the number of out-of-wedlock births among young

adults aged 20-29, primarily by focusing on relationships and marriage. The program has received \$1 million in TANF monies each year for four years to fund approximately 18 community coalitions representing 48 cities and counties. These coalitions are charged with reaching out to young adults (and their parents) with messages designed to discourage risky sexual behavior, avoid abusive and violent relationships, and promote waiting until marriage to have children. One community program, "Marriage Before the Carriage," held a prize drawing for a new car for young people who signed a statement that they were waiting until marriage to have children.

In 2002, the Virginia Health Department produced a TV public service announcement with the message that babies need two parents and that "Marriage First" . . . is "the thing to do."

In 2003, the Diocesan Refugee and Immigration Services in Richmond received federal Office of Refugee Resettlement funds through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) to conduct a program, Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages Program. Working with the Diocesan Office of Family Life Ministries, the program seeks to strengthen refugee families and marriages by providing communication, conflict resolution, listening, parenting, and financial management skills training. The activities are also designed to increase community understanding of the challenges facing refugees during the resettlement experience.

Fatherhood Programs with Co-Parenting and Marriage Components

Founded in 1996, the Virginia Fatherhood Campaign (VFC), based in the Virginia Department of Health, was the first statewide, state-funded fatherhood campaign in the nation. The goals of the VFC are to: improve fathering skills, involve fathers in the lives of their children, and keep fathers involved in the lives of their children. The VFC has provided seed money to approximately 75 fatherhood programs across the state. In addition, it provides public education and a resource center of fatherhood materials and has aired public service announcements. In 2003, VFC received funding from TANF, at the level of \$400,000 annually. VFC contracts with the National Fatherhood Initiative to provide a marriage section in four regional trainings each year for approximately 200 family service workers.

Two of VFC's affiliated fatherhood programs in Hampton conduct activities to promote co-parenting and marriage.⁹³ Parents Educating Parents, Inc. (PEP), an initiative focused primarily on fathers, has developed a program, Preparing for Deployment, to strengthen relationships between fathers and mothers in the military. PEP also conducts a program for incarcerated dads, which facilitates family visitation and offers pro bono legal assistance, child support counseling, and job assistance, as well as group discussions about the value of marriage.

In 2002, the Hampton Roads Healthy Marriages project was launched. In collaboration with the Hampton University CARE (HU-CARE) Fatherhood Program, it offers courses for couples on healthy relationships and parenting.⁹⁴

In July 2003, the state Department of Social Services (DSS) announced a federal grant of \$990,000 from the Office of Child Support Enforcement (under a 1115 waiver program) to the Hampton Road Marriage Coalition for a four-year project, which

will include employment, social services, and child support and fatherhood services, as well as family relationships and parenting skills. Combined with matching local and state funds, the total project funding is \$1.679 million.

The project's main goals are to improve paternity establishment and increase financial support for children. It places a major emphasis on helping both custodial and non-custodial parents participate in employment. State fatherhood programs HU-CARE and PEP will be closely involved in providing services. The project will make extensive use of case managers. In addition, the project will attempt to promote stable family environments, improve couple's relationships and reduce the potential for domestic violence. (Project personnel will be required to screen participants for evidence of domestic violence and refer appropriate individuals for services.) Peninsula Marriage and Family Resource Center is being set up to provide workshops for married, single, separated, divorced, and cohabiting couples on a wide range of topics. The project will be evaluated by a team from the DSS research and statistics office.⁹⁵

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed the "100-hour rule" and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances. Established a separate state program for two-parent families.

Washington

Programs, Activities, and Services

Couples and Marriage Education for Adults

In 2003, the Refugee Assistance Program of the Archdiocesan Housing Authority in Seattle received federal Office of Refugee Resettlement funds through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) to conduct the Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages Program. Working with the Diocesan Office of Family Life Ministries, the program seeks to strengthen refugee families and marriages by providing communication, conflict resolution, listening, parenting, and financial management skills training. The activities are also designed to increase community understanding of the challenges facing refugees during the resettlement experience.

Multi-Sector Community Marriage Initiatives

Founded in 1997, Families Northwest, a nonprofit organization originally focused on the religious sector, began working with the government and other sectors in 2001. In its first years, it focused primarily on encouraging churches throughout the state to sign Marriage and Family Agreements (MFA), in which a group of churches in a community agree to work cooperatively to uphold the societal value of marriage and healthy families and relationships. In addition, Families Northwest has conducted numerous church leadership forums; created a website, PSAs, and an online newsletter, *Marriage Matters*; and conducted various research activities. It has received funding from private foundations, corporations, churches, and individual donors.

In 2002, Families Northwest planned a conference, *Working Together to Strengthen Families*, with the Pacific regional office of the federal Administration for Children and Families. The conference focused on strengthening couple relationships and promoting fatherhood and marriage. Families Northwest has also been working closely with government officials and Native American leaders to develop a proposal for federal funding for a community-based project to strengthen fatherhood and promote healthy marriages in Yakima County.⁹⁶

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed the “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

West Virginia

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed the “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

Marriage Incentive: Adds a \$100 “marriage bonus” payment to the monthly cash benefit of any family that includes a legally married man and woman who live together and have children in common.

Wisconsin

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed the “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

Wyoming

Policy Changes in TANF and Child Support

TANF

Two-Parent Family Eligibility: Removed the “100-hour rule” and work history requirements. Eligibility is based exclusively on financial circumstances.

Endnotes

1. This study is co-directed by Sara McLanahan, Princeton University, and Irv Garfinkel, Columbia University. See <http://crlw.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies>.
2. Castaldo, L. (2003, June 6). Personal communication. For more information, contact Lisa Castaldo, Program Director for Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage Programs, Children's Trust Fund of Alabama, 334-353-4563, lcastaldo@ctf.state.al.us.
3. Francesca Adler-Baeder, Ph.D., CFLE (Certified Family Life Educator). (2002, September 24). E-mail posting on www.smartmarriages.com on-line newsletter. For further information, contact Dr. Adler-Baeder at Auburn University, 334-844-3234 or adlerfr@auburn.edu.
4. Fitzgerald, E. (2002, August). Central Office, Alaska Division of Public Assistance. Personal communication.
5. For complete language of the bill, go to www.divorcereform.org/ari.html.
6. Levine, B. (2003, March). Department of Economic Security. Personal communication. Also see Marriage and Communications Skills Commission. (2002). *Annual report, July 1, 2001–June 30, 2002*. Phoenix, AZ: Author.
7. Cook, M. (2003, April 6). Office of Child Support, Department of Economic Security. Personal communication.
8. Vaitkus, A. (2002, August). Arizona Family Assistance Administration. Personal communication.
9. See www.smartmarriages.com/legislation.html#governor's.
10. See www.divorcereform.org/cov.html for information on Arkansas covenant marriage laws.
11. See www.NIRE.org for information about the Relationship Enhancement (RE) program. RE is one of the most extensively tested skill-building programs. Evaluations show impressive short-term gains in skills for participating couples compared to control groups. See Silliman, B., Stanley, S.M., Coffin, W., Markman, H.J., & Jordan, P.L. (2001). Preventive interventions for couples. In H. Liddle, D. Santisteban, R. Levant, & J. Bray (Eds.). *Family psychology intervention science*. Washington, DC: APA Publications.
12. Contact Jim Deming, state Department of Social Services, at 714-480-6411 or Dennis Stoica, Orange County Marriage Resource Center, at Dennis@OCMarriage.org or 562-407-0340.
13. Santillanes, L. (2003, April 7). Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians Consortium. Personal communication. For more information, contact Laura Santillanes at 760-397-0455 or lsantillanes@tribal.tanf.com.
14. For further information, contact Danelle Young, Manager, Office of Self Sufficiency, Department of Human Services, at danelle.young@state.co.us.
15. For further information, contact Sandra Spears, Institute for Families, School of Social Work, Denver University, at 303-871-4174.
16. For further information, contact Nancy Lucero at the Denver Indiana Family Resource Center, nlucero@difrc.org.
17. For information, contact Robert P. Hall, Executive Director, Delaware Ecumenical Council on Children and Families, 302-225-1040.
18. The curriculum used in these workshops was a blend of the Relationships Enhancement (RE) program curricula and C-PREP (Christian PREP). For more information, contact Andrea Hughes, President, Abundantly Living Services, 202-268-3449 or ayed@lycos.com.
19. Karen Murphy (2003, April 8). Department of Children and Families. Personal communication.
20. Karney, B.R., Garvan, C.W., & Thomas, M.S. (2003). *Family formation in Florida: 2003 baseline survey of attitudes, beliefs, and demographics relating to marriage and family formation*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, Department of Psychology.
21. Hicks, M. (2003, February). Florida State University. Personal communication. Contact Professor Mary Hicks at mhicks@mail.fsu.edu.
22. For more information, contact Lyndee Odom (850-487-8120) or Jeff Johnson (850-414-2592) in the Department of Children and Families.
23. For more information, contact John Gottman, johng@u.washington.edu, or gottman@gottman.com.
24. PAIRS, Practical Application of Relationships Skills, is a relationships skills program developed by Lori Gordon. It has been

- adapted for couples of different faiths and high school students. See www.pairs.com.
25. See www.pairs.com.
 26. For more information about this curriculum, contact Millie Ferrer at mferrer@mail.ifas.ufl.edu.
 27. Gunter, D. (2002, August). Georgia Economic Support Services. Personal communication.
 28. Yarborough, D. (2003, May 15). Co-Chair, Healthy Families-Nampa coalition. Personal communication. Also, see May 9, 2003, press release issued by the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. For more information, contact Dr. Doug Yarborough at grace@nampa.net or Tammy Payne, Project Manager, Idaho Department of Welfare, 208-442-9975.
 29. Reynolds, V. (2002, August). Indiana Family Support Services Administration. Personal communication.
 30. Contact Andrew Stoner, Governor's Executive Assistant for Human Services, at astoner@gov.state.ia.us.
 31. Contact Becky Antle (502-852-2917) or Dr. Bibhuti Sar (502-852-3932), both at the School of Social Work, University of Louisville.
 32. Barkley, R. (2002, August). Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children, Policy Development Office. Personal communication.
 33. Fagan, P.F. (2001, March 26). *Encouraging marriage and discouraging divorce*. Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation. Available at www.heritage.org/research/Family/BG1421.cfm.
 34. See www.smartmarriages.com/legislation.html#governor's.
 35. The National Science Foundation and the Smith Richardson Foundation have funded a study of the implementation of the law as well as a comparison of couples who choose the covenant marriage option with those who did not. For more information, contact Professor Steven Nock, Department of Sociology, University of Virginia, 804-924-6519, SLN@Virginia.edu. One of the implementation study's preliminary findings was that no funding was provided to train county clerks who were responsible for offering the information about the covenant marriage option. See also Spaht, K. (1998). Louisiana's covenant marriage: Social analysis and legal implications. *Louisiana Law Review*, 59, 63-130.
 36. For information about the national survey, see <http://crrw.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies/>. The LA survey was conducted by Maximus Inc. The report was released in January 2004. Visit www.state.la.us/tanf/fragfam.htm.
 37. For further information, contact John McInturf at jmcinturf@dss.state.la.us.
 38. Masure, R. (August, 2002). Maine Bureau of Family Independence. Personal communication.
 39. Contact: Terri W. Hopkins, Office of Community Initiatives, Department of Human Resources at 410-767-7393 or thopkins@dhs.state.md.us.
 40. Jones, J. (2002, December-2003, February). Executive Director, Center for Fathers and Workforce Development, Baltimore. Personal communications.
 41. Sorensen, E. (2003, January 10). Urban Institute. Personal communication.
 42. Governor's Advisory Commission on Responsible Fatherhood and Family Support. (1998, June). *Dads make a difference: Action for responsible fatherhood*. Boston, MA: Department of Revenue, Child Support Enforcement, pp. 6-11.
 43. Claytor, R. (2003, May 10). Director, Fatherhood Initiative. Personal communication. For more information, contact Richard Claytor, at 617-626-4171 or richard.claytor@state.ma.us.
 44. O'Brien, M. (2002, August). Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance, Policy, Procedure and Management Unit. Personal communication.
 45. Gibson, S. (2003, April, 7). Michigan Family Independence Agency. Personal communication; Zylstra, A. (2002, December 6). Family Independence Agency, Kent County. Personal communication. Contact zylstraa@michigan.gov.
 46. For more information, contact Carol Vander Wal, Project Director, at info@ggrcmarrriagepolicy.org.
 47. The initiative changed its name in October 2002 from the Greater Grand Rapids Community Marriage Policy. The chairman of the initiative, Bill Hardiman, was mayor of Kentwood, the largest suburb in Kent County. In 2002, he was elected to the state senate. See www.ggrcmarrriagepolicy.org.
 48. See National Center for Fathering, www.fathers.com, or call 800-593-DADS. To contact the Responsible Fatherhood Initiative

- visit www.mdhs.state.ms.us/cs_resp.html, or call 800-421-0762.
49. Butler, V. (2002, August). Mississippi Department of Human Services. Personal communication.
 50. For information, contact Jennifer Baker, Director, Marriage and Family Institute, Forest Institute, at 417-823-3423.
 51. Staton, J. (2003, May 20). Marriage Works Learning Center (www.marriageworksmon-tana.com). Personal communication. For further information, contact Diana Reitz-Stacy, Families First, at 401-721-7690 or Bette Hall, Department of Public Health and Human Services, at bhall@state.mt.us.
 52. For information, contact Chris Hanus, Office of Protection and Safety, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, at 402-471-9308.
 53. See www.gencourt.state.nh.us/legislation/2002/HB1299.html. Also contact state Representatives Barbara French at 603-428-3366 and Barbara Richardson at 603-239-8346.
 54. For further information, contact Sharon Tucker Brown, Executive Director, First Baptist Community Development Corporation, at 732-249-5476.
 55. Office of Family Assistance, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (February, 2003). *TANF fifth annual report to Congress*. Washington, DC: Author, p. 158. For more information, contact David Devitt, Regional Operations Manager, state Department of Human Services, at 505-437-9260, ext. 128, or david.devitt@state.nm.us. Also contact Dr. Anne Vail, Chair, Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, New Mexico State University, at avail@nmsu.edu.
 56. For information, contact Keith Alford, Department of Child and Family Studies, Syracuse University, at 315-443-5550.
 57. For information, contact Catherine Lawrence, Project Director, School of Social Welfare, University of Albany, clawrence@albany.edu.
 58. Carrledge, C. (2002, August). North Dakota Department of Human Services, Office of Economic Assistance. Personal communication.
 59. Storrs, M. (2003, January). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Personal communication.
 60. Bender, S. (2003, March 21). Executive Director, Cleveland Marriage Coalition. Personal communication. Contact at 216-321-5274 or sandrabender@ameritech.net.
 61. See www.hec.ohio-state.edu/famlife/family/ for more information.
 62. For more information about the Columbus Marriage Coalition, contact Ted Futris, Extension Specialist, OSU, at 614-688-4169 or futris.1@osu.edu.
 63. For more information, see Myrick, M., & Ooms, T. (2002). *What if a governor decided to address the M-word? The use of research in the design and implementation of the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative*. Paper presented at the American Association of Public Policy and Management annual conference in Dallas, November 7, 2002. Available from rooms@clasp.org.
 64. By January 2004, approximately 1,100 workshop leaders and 260 high school teachers had been trained. More than 15,000 people had attended workshops.
 65. Johnson, C.A., Stanley, S.M., Glenn, N.D., Amato, P.R., Nock, S.L., Markman, H.J., et al. (2002). *Marriage in Oklahoma: 2001 baseline statewide survey on marriage and divorce*. Oklahoma City: Bureau for Social Research, Oklahoma State University. Available at www.okstate.edu/bes/bsr/index.html.
 66. For information, contact Margaret De Vault, Programs Manager, Post-Adoption Services, DHS/Child Welfare, at 405-522-2467.
 67. See Johnson et al., 2002, pp. 11, 21.
 68. Butcher, P. (2002, August). Oklahoma Department of Human Services. Personal communication.
 69. Stell, J. (2002, August). Oregon Department of Human Services. Personal communication.
 70. See O'Crowley, P. (2003, November 23). *Program nudges parents toward marriage*, Newhouse News Service, *The Seattle Times*.
 71. For further information, contact James Stark, Executive Director, FCAA, 724-430-3011.
 72. See www.smartmarriages.com.
 73. See www.pairs.com.
 74. See www.fatherhood.org/pa.htm.
 75. Bean, G. (2002, August). Pennsylvania Office of Welfare Reform Initiative. Personal communication.
 76. Storrs, M. (2003, January). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,

- Administration for Children and Families. Personal communication.
77. See www.smartmarriages.com/south.carolina.marriage.html.
78. Kennedy, G. (2004, February). Program Coordinator, Department of Social Services. Personal communication. For more information, contact Gilda Kennedy at 803-898-7436 or gkennedy@dss.state.sc.us.
79. Gardner, S.P. (2001). Evaluation of the "Connections: Relationships and Marriage" curriculum. *Journal of Family and Consumer Science Education*, 19(1). For more information, contact Professor Scott Gardner, Cooperative Extension, South Dakota State University, at 605-688-5956.
80. Storrs, M. (2003, January 10). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Personal communication.
81. See www.smartmarriages.com/tennessee.legislation.html.
82. For more information, contact Denise Brandon, Associate Professor, University of Tennessee Extension Service, at dbrandon@utk.edu.
83. See www.firstthings.org/green/whatis.html.
84. Coomer, D. (2002, August). Tennessee Department of Human Services, Family Assistance Division. Personal communication.
85. Hayes, M. (2003, February 6). Manager, Collaborations, Fatherhood and Family Initiatives, Office of the Attorney General. Personal communication. For further information, contact Michael Hayes at 512-460-6218 or michael.hayes@cs.oag.state.tx.us.
86. The Texas Fatherhood Initiative is an affiliate of the National Fatherhood Initiative. For more information, contact John Chacon, Executive Director of the NFI's Southwest Region Office, at 512-453-5056, or tfi2000@austin.rr.com.
87. See www.cppp.org/tfi/about.
88. For information on Marriage Week USA, see www.utahmarriage.org/index.cfm?id=2328d9asdf. The Commission's website is www.utahmarriage.org.
89. Johnson, et al., 2002.
90. Schramm, D., Marshall, J., Harris, V., & George, A. (2003, October). *Marriage in Utah: Baseline statewide survey on marriage and divorce*. Salt Lake City, UT: Utah Department of Workforce Services. Available at www.utahmarriage.org.
91. For more information, contact Thomas Lee, PhD, Utah State University, at toml@ext.usu.edu.
92. See Gardiner, K.N., Fishman, M.E., Nikolov, P., Glosser, A., & Laud, S. (September 2002). *State policies to promote marriage. Final report*. Falls Church, VA: The Lewin Group, Inc. Available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/marriage02/>.
93. Clark, R. (2003, January). Director, Virginia Fatherhood Campaign. Personal communication. Also see www.vahealth.org/fatherhood.
94. Babineaux, J. (2003, January 16). Executive Director of PER, Inc. Personal communication. See also www.PEPinc.org. Contact Babineaux at 757-265-3566 or jbabineaux@cox.net.
95. For further information, contact Todd Areson, Division of Child Support, at 804-692-1463.
96. Krasky, J. (2002, December). Personal communication. For information, contact Jason Krasky, Marriage Builders Director, Families Northwest, at jasonk@familiesnorthwest.org. For information about Families Northwest and its multi-sector, 10-year strategic plan, see www.familiesnorthwest.org.

Appendices

Appendix I: Method and Primary Sources

Information about couples and marriage policy and programming is highly fragmented and dispersed. In most states, no single office, organization, or individual monitors developments in this arena. Therefore, this report has been compiled from a variety of published secondary sources and websites and supplemented by Internet inquiries and phone calls to verify and update information. The four major sources are described below. Additional references and citations are provided in the endnotes.

This report is built on the foundation laid in 2002 by the Lewin Group report, *State Policies to Promote Marriage*. Produced under contract with the federal government, it was the first report on this subject, serving as an important baseline.¹ Using secondary sources, the Lewin report inventories a very wide range of policies, legislative proposals, and non-governmental programs related directly and indirectly to marriage.

For information on state TANF policy, we relied initially upon the State Policy Documentation Project (SPDP), a database of state TANF policies between 1997 and 1999, compiled by CLASP and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (www.spdp.org). This was supplemented by a useful 2001 report from the Congressional Research Service, *Welfare Reform: TANF Provisions Related to Marriage and Two-Parent Families*,² as well as phone interviews with federal officials and TANF officials in numerous states.

Another valuable resource was the Coalition for Marriage, Family, and Couples Education website (www.smartmarriages.com), which includes a directory of programs, information about the organization's annual conference, "Smart Marriages," and an archive of news articles and postings about legislation and marriage-related developments in states and communities.

A range of important marriage-related activities in states did not meet the criteria for this study—that is, they were not new initiatives specifically designed to promote marriage, discourage divorce, or strengthen two-parent families that included some level of government involvement. For example, a growing number of marriage-related services are being offered by the faith-based and nonprofit sectors with no government involvement. The following types of marriage-related activities are *not* included in this report, but we list them here for those interested in couples and marriage policy more generally (see the endnotes for sources of additional information):

- ❖ Basic state marriage laws and divorce-related statutes.³
- ❖ State laws protecting domestic partnerships or allowing or disallowing gay and lesbian unions or marriages.⁴
- ❖ Marriage "penalties" and "bonuses" in state tax policies.⁵
- ❖ Public assistance programs (e.g., Medicaid, Food Stamps, and housing programs) that may *indirectly* encourage or strengthen marriage.⁶

- ❖ State vital statistics (e.g., marriage and divorce rates) that provide the ability to monitor trends at state and county levels.⁷
 - ❖ Teen pregnancy prevention programs that seek to prevent non-marital childbearing.⁸
 - ❖ Schools or communities that offer character education, abstinence education, and comprehensive sex education curricula that may incorporate a minor focus on marriage.⁹
 - ❖ Community Marriage Policies® (CMP), in which faith leaders sign an agreement to strengthen marriages and reduce a community's divorce rate. CMPs have been established in about 160 communities in 38 states.¹⁰
 - ❖ The more than 2,000 domestic violence programs across the country that provide a variety of services to women and families at risk of domestic abuse, as well as associated public information and awareness activities.¹¹ Forty-one states have certified that they have implemented the TANF Family Violence Option, which allows states to waive program requirements for victims of domestic violence.¹²
5. For more information on federal and state tax policies and their relation to family formation, see Congressional Budget Office. (1997, June). *For better or for worse: Marriage and the federal income tax*. Washington, DC: Author.
 6. For more information on state Medicaid policy and how it relates to family formation, see the Lewin Report.
 7. For more information on state vital statistics, see the Lewin Report, visit the National Center for Health Statistics website at www.cdc.gov/nchs/, or visit a specific state government or health department website.
 8. For more information, visit the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy website at www.teenpregnancy.org.
 9. For more information on abstinence-until-marriage education, go to the Lewin Report. Also see Devaney, B., Johnson, A., Maynard, R., & Trenholm, C. (2002, April). *The evaluation of abstinence education programs funded under Title V Section 510: Interim report*. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.
 10. Community Marriage Policy is a registered trademark of Marriage Savers. For more information, visit www.marriagesavers.org/aboutmarriagesavers.htm.
 11. For a list of state coalitions, contact the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, www.ncadv.org. For other useful information on domestic violence, see the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, which operates the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, at www.pcadv.org. Also see McHardy, L.W., & Hofford, M. (1998). *Family violence: Emerging programs for battered mothers and their children*. Reno, NV: National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.
 12. The Family Violence Option gives each state the option to certify in its state plan that it has established standards and procedures to screen and identify individuals to determine if they have a history of domestic violence, to refer them for counseling and supportive services, and to waive program requirements, as appropriate, based on safety and fairness concerns. See Administration for Children and Families. (2003, February). *TANF Fifth Annual Report to Congress*. Washington, DC: Author, Table 12:12, p. XII-351.

Endnotes

1. Gardiner, K.N., Fishman, M.E., Nikolov, P., Glosier, A., & Laud, S. (September 2002). *State policies to promote marriage. Final report*. Falls Church, VA: The Lewin Group, Inc. Available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/marriage02/index.htm>. Referred to hereafter as the Lewin report.
2. Falk, G., & Tauber, J. (2001). *Welfare reform: TANF provisions related to marriage and two-parent families*. Document No. RL31170. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.
3. Up-to-date information on marriage and divorce law can be found at www.law.cornell.edu/topics/.
4. For more information, go to Alternatives to Marriage Project at www.unmarried.org or the Human Rights Campaign at www.hrc.org.

Appendix II: Summary of State Efforts to Strengthen Marriage

State	Statewide Marriage Promotion Programs	Changes in State Marriage and Divorce Laws					Programs
		Eliminated Higher Eligibility Requirements for Two-Parent Families	Partially Eliminated Higher Eligibility Requirements for Two-Parent Families	Eliminated Higher Eligibility Requirements for Two-Parent Families	Partially Eliminated Higher Eligibility Requirements for Two-Parent Families	Eliminated Higher Eligibility Requirements for Two-Parent Families	
Alabama				X			
Alaska							
Arizona*	X		X	X		X	
Arkansas	X		X				
California				X			
Colorado	X			X			
Connecticut				X			
Delaware							
District of Columbia				X			
Florida*	X	X		X	X	X	
Georgia				X			
Hawaii							
Idaho				X			
Illinois				X			
Indiana				X			
Iowa	X						
Kansas							

* = "High activity" state. See p. 11 for more information.

** = Partially eliminated higher requirements. See state entry.

*** = See state entry.

No Action = State has not taken any action to modify or eliminate higher eligibility requirements for two-parent families.

and Two-Parent Families

Activities, and Services				TANF & Child Support Policy Changes			
	Military Marriage-Related Programs	State Cooperative Extension Programs	Multi-Sector Community Initiatives	Keep 2-Parent and Single-Parent Families the Same	Keep 2-Parent 2-Parent State Program	Marriage Incentives	Child Support Arrears Forgiveness
		X		X	X	X	
	X			X			
	X			**			
				X			
				**	X	X	
				X			
				X	X		
			X	X	X		
				No Action			
		X		X	X		
				**	X		
	X			X	X		
				X			
				X	X		
				**	X		
				X			
	X			X			

Appendix II: Summary of State Efforts to Strengthen Marriage

Changes in State Marriage and Divorce Laws				Programs,			
Kentucky				X			
Louisiana*	X		X	X		X	
Maine				X			
Maryland		X				X	
Massachusetts						X	
Michigan*				X		X	
Minnesota		X		X			
Mississippi						X	
Missouri				X			
Montana				X			
Nebraska				X			
Nevada							
New Hampshire				X			
New Jersey				X			
New Mexico				X			
New York				X			
North Carolina							

- * = "High activity" state. See p. 11 for more information.
 ** = Partially eliminated higher requirements. See state entry.
 *** = See state entry.
 No Action = State has not taken any action to modify or eliminate higher eligibility requirements for two-parent families.

and Two-Parent Families (continued)

Activities, and Services				TANF & Child Support Policy Changes			
Child Marriage Related Programs	Comprehensive Marriage Programs	Marriage-Related Community Initiatives	Parent Support Programs	Parent Training Programs	Child Support Enforcement Programs	Child Support Arrears Repayment	
X			**				
			X				
			**				
			X	X		***	
			**				
		X	X				
			X	X			
			X		X		
X			X				
			X				
			X	X			
			X	X			
			**				
			X	X	X		
			X				
X			X				
X			X				

Appendix II: Summary of State Efforts to Strengthen Marriage

Changes in State Marriage and Divorce Laws						Programs,	
North Dakota							
Ohio				X		X	
Oklahoma*	X	X		X	X		
Oregon							
Pennsylvania				X	X	X	
Rhode Island							
South Carolina	X			X			
South Dakota					X		
Tennessee		X		X			
Texas	X			X	X	X	
Utah*	X			X	X		
Vermont							
Virginia*				X		X	
Washington				X			
West Virginia							
Wisconsin							
Wyoming							

* = "High activity" state. See p. 11 for more information.

** = Partially eliminated higher requirements. See state entry.

*** = See state entry.

No Action = State has not taken any action to modify or eliminate higher eligibility requirements for two-parent families.

and Two-Parent Families (continued)

Activities, and Services				TANF & Child Support Policy Changes			
	Military Marriage-Related Programs	State Cooperative Extension Programs	Multi-Sector Community Initiatives	Treat 2-Parent and Single-Parent Families the Same	Have Separate 2-Parent State Program	Marriage Incentives	Child Support Arrears Forgiveness
				No Action	***	X	
		X	X	X			
	X	X		**	***	X	
				**			
				**			
				X	X		
	X			X			
				No Action	***		
		X	X	No Action	X	X	X
	X			X	X	X	
		X		X	X		
				X			X
				X	X		
			X	X			
				X		X	
				X			
				X			

Appendix III: Key Contacts in the Seven “High-Activity” States

State	Name	Title	Organization	Phone	E-mail
Arizona	Mark Anderson	Senator	State Senate	602-926-3160	manderso@azleg.state.az.us
	Jerry Hancock	SSBG Community Planning Coordinator	Department of Economic Security	602-542-6159	jhancock@azdes.gov
Florida	Evelyn Lynn	Senator	State Senate	850-487-5033	lynn.evelyn.web@flsenate.gov
	Jerry Regier	Secretary	Dept of Children & Families	850-487-1111	jerry.regier@myflorida.com
	Richard Albertson	Chairman	Commission on Marriage and Family Support	850-668-3700	richalbert@aol.com
	Karen Murphy	Financial Administrator	Economic Self Sufficiency, Dept. of Children & Families	850-487-2187	karen_murphy@dcf.state.fl.us
	Matthew D. Munyon	Executive Director	Commission on Marriage and Family Support	850-488-4952, ext. 133	mmunyon@ounce.org
Louisiana	Sharon Weston Broome	Speaker Pro Tempore	House of Representatives	225-342-8385	larep29@legis.state.la.us
	Dana Reichert	TANF Director	Division of Administration	225-342-7000	dreiche@doa.state.la.us
	Laura Pease	Family Support Services Manager	Dept. of Social Services	225-342-2514	lpease@dss.state.la.us
	Katherine Spaht	Professor	School of Law, Louisiana State University	225-578-8331	kspaht@lsu.edu
Michigan	Bill Hardiman	Senator	State Senate	517-373-1801	senbhardiman@senate.michigan.gov
	Doug Hart	Representative	State House	517-373-0218	dist073@house.mi.gov
	Patricia Caruso	Grant Manager	Michigan Independence Agency	517-373-9889	carusop@michigan.gov
	Mark Eastburg	Director	Pine Rest Family Institute, Grand Rapids	616-455-5279	mark.eastburg@pinerest.org

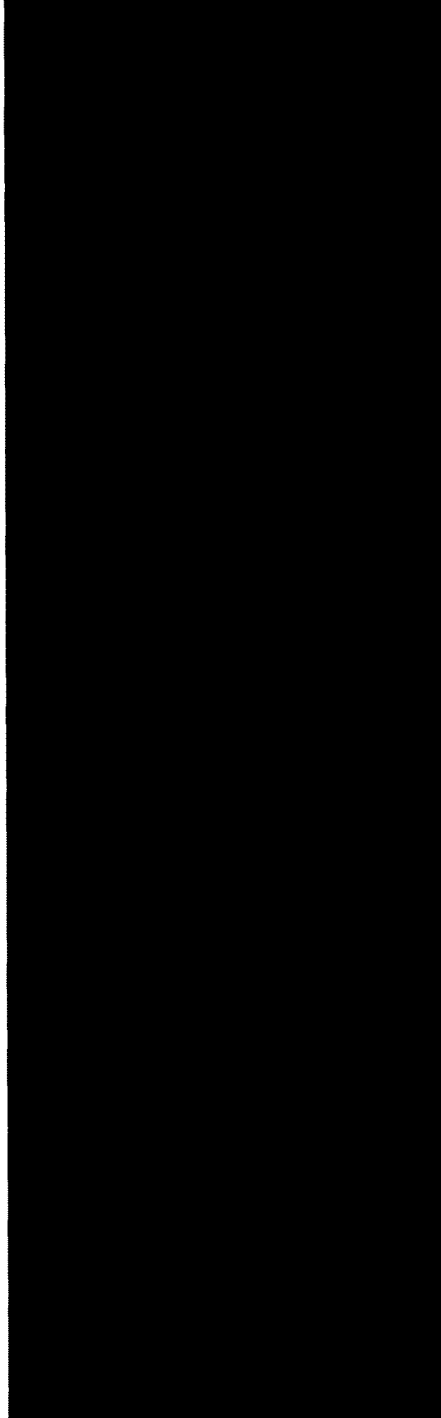
(as of February 2004)

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Oklahoma	Howard Hendrick	Director	Department of Human Services	405-521-3646	howard.hendrick@okdhs.org
	Mary Myrick	President	Public Strategies Inc., Oklahoma City	405-848-2171	mary@publicstrategies.com
Utah	Melanie Reese	Director	Governor's Commission on Marriage	801-538-1533	mreese@utah.gov
	Glen Jenson	Co-Chair	Commission on Marriage, Utah State University		glenj@ext.usu.edu
	Alan Hawkins	Professor	School of Family Life, Brigham Young University	801-422-7088	hawkinsa@byu.edu
Virginia	Barbara Parker	Program Director	Partners in Prevention, Division of Child and Adolescent Health, Department of Health	804-864-7753	barbara.parker@vdh.va.gov
	Todd Areson	Manager	Program Research and Contracts Division, Division of Child Support	804-726-7412	todd.areson@dss.virginia.gov
	Ron Clark	Director	Virginia Fatherhood Campaign, Department of Health	804-864-7703	ron.clark@vdh.va.gov

Note: In the state profiles (p. 23), these seven "high-activity" states are designated with asterisks.

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THEODORA OOMS
DIRECTOR, COUPLES AND MARRIAGE
POLICY RESOURCE CENTER

June 25, 2004

Chairman Charles E. Grassley
Attn: Mollie Zito and Bob Merulla
Committee on Finance
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Grassley,

I write to respond to the written question you sent me as a follow up to my testimony at the May 5th hearing of the Subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy entitled "The Benefits of a Healthy Marriage."

Your question was:

"Since states can, should and presumably are, providing services to improve the financial and education situation of low income parents with their TANF block grant—what is the harm in having a separate funding stream specifically designed to improve healthy marriage through pre-marital education, counseling, marriage education, divorce reduction, and marriage mentoring programs?"

Neither in my oral or written testimony did I say there was any harm in funding the marriage-related services that are listed in the TANF reauthorization bill. In fact, I wrote in my testimony that "marriage education may be useful, but it is not enough." Let me explain what I mean in some more detail:

- The evidence strongly suggests that for a large proportion of unmarried parents—a third or more—marriage and relationship education services will not be effective unless they are offered along with a package of other services that these young couples need, such as employment services for the fathers, assistance with child support debts, housing, and money management classes.
- In addition, economic stress is a cause—as well as an effect—of relationship problems. The Fragile Families research and other studies show that economic insecurity and relationship problems go hand-in-hand as explanations of why unmarried parents forego marriage (and eventually most break-up). These problems push and pull each other.

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Their interlocking nature has major implications for healthy marriage programs recruitment, retention, and impact—and should be addressed directly by these programs.

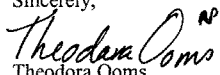
In my testimony, I also offered a number of cautions related to any implementation of the proposed healthy marriage grants—particularly if they are too narrowly defined. Let me expand upon two of them:

- The challenge of recruitment. Dozens of “responsible fatherhood” programs (designed for unmarried, non-custodial fathers) have found that it is extremely difficult to get low-income unmarried fathers to attend any formal program unless they believe it will help them get a job and/or help them deal with their child support debts or other issues such as substance abuse. Once the fathers begin to receive help with these aspects of their lives, they often will then participate in peer support and counseling services designed to help them improve their family relationships and become more involved as fathers. These fathers simply would not walk in the door of any program which advertised itself as only offering relationships or premarital or marriage classes. (This apparently is also true of many unmarried mothers.)
- The issue of retention and sustainability. Even if unmarried parents do attend a class or workshop and make some progress in learning relationship skills, if they make no progress in the other problems in their lives their relationship gains are likely to be very short lived. The loss of a job or transportation to work, eviction from their apartment, a recurrence of depression or drug use, the birth of an unplanned child, episodes of violent behavior, or other family crisis will place huge stress on their relationship, which is very likely to break up as a result.

It is true that TANF block grant funds are flexible and can be used to fund services “to improve the financial and education situation of low income parents.” And several states are using limited amounts of TANF resources to fund programs that assist low-income fathers in a few communities. However in most communities TANF funds are not available for employment, training services, or other services to the *fathers* of children receiving TANF. Thus healthy marriage grantees are very unlikely to be able to refer low-income fathers to these kinds of services.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your question. I would be happy to provide any additional information that you require.

Sincerely,



Theodora Ooms
Senior Policy Analyst
Center for Law and Social Policy

Testimony of
 Scott M. Stanley, Ph.D.
 Co-Director, Center for Marital and Family Studies
 University of Denver

Testimony before the
 Committee on Finance, Subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy
 United States Senate

Hearing on
The Benefits of a Healthy Marriage

Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 215
 Wednesday May 5th, 2004

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I appreciate this opportunity to share with you a glimpse of what is happening regarding marriage in the United States. I believe we stand at the door of an unprecedented opportunity for strengthening this foundational family relationship upon which so much of the future of our children and our society rests.

My name is Scott Stanley. I am the co-director of the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver, where my colleague Dr. Howard Markman and I have worked for over two decades from a scientific perspective to better understand what factors put couples at risk for marital distress and divorce, and what steps can be taken to help couples achieve their goals for stable, happy, and healthy marriages. This research program, begun by Howard Markman, has been supported by the National Institute of Mental Health since 1980. I am also one of two senior advisors to the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative. The ambitious and strategic efforts in Oklahoma are generating knowledge about broad-based dissemination of marriage services (among the many innovative steps they are taking), and is providing much insight to efforts around the nation.

In my written comments, I will cover a significant amount of ground. The major points detailed in the body of my testimony are these:

- There is a rich and sustained discussion about marriage among policy experts and social scientists from very diverse philosophical and political backgrounds. This discussion has moved well beyond superficial differences in ideology to a serious focus on problems that real couples and families face in developing and sustaining stability in their marriage relationships. Further, a deep consensus has emerged among social scientists about the beneficial effects of healthy marriages for children and adults.
- Healthy marriages can be defined in a variety of ways. One way to readily grasp their nature can be framed in three types of safety, roughly defined as emotional safety in day-to-day interactions, freedom from fear of harm, and security about a future that makes

investing in the relationship worthwhile. Further, as evidenced by the recent work of the nationally recognized scholars of the Research Advisory Group for the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative, models for how to track societal progress in strengthening marriages are definable and practical.

- While most discussions about “marriage education” assume a very narrow definition of what that might include, I will argue that there are, in fact, a wide range of educational activities that can be seen as furthering the goal of helping more people achieve their desires of forming and sustaining healthy marriages.
- Decades of development, practice, and research lay a strong foundation for optimism that marriage education (and marital therapy) encompasses various and effective tools designed to help people be successful in their aspirations in marriage. While there is a strong research base upon which to build further, there is also a clear need for more program implementation, refinement, and evaluation among those in poverty.
- The defining elements of true, research-based approaches for helping people in their goals of achieving healthy and lasting marriages are that they be empirically informed, empirically tested (or testable), and regularly refined based broadly upon ongoing research in the field of marriage and family. Within such a model, one acts on what is known and one takes action to know more over time.

Why Marriage and Why Now?

Over the past decade, an amazing convergence has developed around the belief that there is something of special value to marriage. While this convergence may, on the surface, seem a union of strange bedfellows, a marriage movement of sorts has taken hold, not because one ideology about marriage has overwhelmed another, but because influential minds have found productive ways to meet in the middle for discussions based on a level of respect and agreement about the value of stable and *healthy* marriages. For example, many liberals and conservatives have been working together in efforts to take reasonable steps to help more people who desire marriage to succeed in their aspirations for it.

In my view, liberals have tended to increase their focus on marriage because of the influence of important and clear trends in social science data—much of it funded by national institutions of the federal government such as The National Institutes of Health (e.g., NIMH, NICHD) and The National Science Foundation. As a result of decades of accumulated data, many family scientists from the fields of sociology, psychology, and economics have concluded that children and adults, on average, experience the highest levels of overall wellbeing in the context healthy marital relationships.¹ Of course, there are a great many single parents and step-families doing a wonderful job of providing what their children need to succeed in life. Nevertheless, the evidence has accumulated showing advantages for children being raised by their married parents.

Conservatives have rallied to the marriage agenda from a more ideological basis of concern, fueled by data on the trends in divorce, out-of-wedlock births, and generalized family (and extended family) fragmentation. Further, a vast amount of government expenditures is directly

related to the need to deal with the effects of these trends—a concern to liberals and conservatives alike, and one that has led various states to consider or launch efforts to address these complex problems.²

It would be hard to overstate the amount of progress that has been made in various social science and policy venues (e.g., conferences, working groups on federal evaluation projects) with regard to the quality and tone of the discussions between groups with historically very different views. There are exceptions to be sure, but there is a high degree of convergence developing around the view that marriage is important and worth thoughtful efforts to strengthen. I think this convergence may be the single most important trend related to marriage in the past 10 years. As people grapple with real problems affecting real people, it has become harder to tell the conservatives from the liberals, and vice versa. Real progress can be made under such conditions.

In addition to accumulating evidence that there is something uniquely beneficial about marriage, it is clear that most people in the U.S. aspire to be married, and be married for life.³ This interest in marriage holds regardless of race, religion, and income; although there are some important variations among groups, such as it being less likely that, without intervention, African Americans in poverty will marry or remain married than other groups. The reasons for such differences are very complex.

Recent research from the large, multi-city Fragile Family research project garnered great attention because of the finding that couples having children out-of-wedlock tended to be far more positive in their views about marriage than most people thought.⁴ Of course, it is also well understood that, without some supports and intervention, most of these couples will not end up married; the barriers for marriage among the most disadvantaged are considerable.⁵

While most citizens have the dream of life-long marriage, many if not most do not achieve this goal.⁶ As divorce rates grew, successive generations became wary of marriage, desiring it while fearing it. Many people have a crisis in confidence about its viability, and, therefore, have sought alternatives such as cohabitation, which is falsely believed by younger people to reduce the risks of relationship dissolution and pain.⁷ The evidence has accumulated showing that these alternatives are associated with even higher levels of risk on a variety of dimensions,⁸ providing less stable contexts for raising children.

If there is generally strong evidence that marriage is desired by most and generally beneficial, the question arises, “what kinds of marriages provide clear benefits and which do not?” There are many ways to answer this question, but the concept that has taken greatest hold in the context of public policy discourse is that of healthy marriage.

What is Healthy Marriage?

“Healthy” marriage has become the language of common ground. While the term “healthy” is somewhat clinical and limited for purposes of describing such a complex and rich relationship, the term has significant political utility because it clarifies what reasonable public policy goals

about marriage promotion and support are and are not about. Healthy marriage, by definition, does not include marriages that are dangerous or chronically damaging.

My colleague Howard Markman and I at the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver have been expanding the theory that underlies our prevention approach along the lines of what we call safety theory.⁹ In this model, sound and healthy marriages have three fundamental types of safety:

- 1) **Safety in interaction:** being able to talk openly and well (enough) about key issues, with the strongest expressions of such safety including emotional safety and support
- 2) **Personal Safety:** freedom from fear of physical or emotional harm and intimidation
- 3) **Safety in commitment:** security of mutual support, teamwork, and a clear future together

Based on a wide range of research as well as experience working with people from various cultures around the world, it appears to us that these themes are basic and universal. To provide more detail, I will draw on thought from a recent paper of mine.¹⁰

Interaction Safety. There is a tremendous amount of evidence that relationships that are characterized by chronic negative interaction are damaging to adults and the children living with them. Negative interaction includes patterns such as frequent escalation of conflict, criticism, invalidation, withdrawal, demand-withdraw, contempt, and so forth.

- Negative patterns of interaction strongly differentiate happy from unhappy couples.¹¹
- Negative patterns of interaction are one of the best discriminators of which couples will go on to experience chronic distress, break up, or divorce, and which will succeed.¹²
- Negative patterns of interaction among adults put children at greater risk for a variety of negative outcomes, including mental health problems, decrements in school performance, and various forms of acting out behavior.¹³ This may be the most clearly agreed upon single fact in the family science literature.
- Negative patterns of interaction are associated with negative mental health outcomes for adults, such as depression and anxiety,¹⁴ and also reduced work productivity.¹⁵

There is therefore compelling evidence that chronic, negative interaction and poorly managed conflict places adults and children at risk. A healthier marriage would be characterized by lower levels of such negativity. An unhealthy marriage would be marked by higher, chronic levels. Beyond negative interaction being a hallmark of an absence of interaction safety, positive dimensions such as supportiveness and friendship foster a day-to-day sense of positive connection in a marriage—moving a marriage from merely healthy to great.

Personal Safety. Domestic violence puts people—and especially women and children—at greater risk for mental health problems, physical health problems, and death.¹⁶ Domestic violence and aggression can include physical threats and harm as well as psychological abuse

and intimidation. Healthy marriages do not include such dangerous and debilitating behaviors.

Interventions to foster healthy marriages could be expected to help reduce domestic violence by any of several means, such as (1) educating young people about the dangers of aggression, and how to avoid aggressive relationships and behaviors; (2) reducing the likelihood of ongoing violence in relationships where poorly managed conflict has spilled over to physically aggressive contact that is, nevertheless, not the type of domestic violence that is most dangerous and least likely to change; and (3) helping women at risk realize a need to leave or avoid relationships with the most serious and dangerous types of aggression.¹⁷ Research is becoming ever clearer that, while all forms of domestic violence can be dangerous, some forms are far more dangerous and more likely to last than others.

The healthy marriage concept clearly implies that one outcome of good relationship education occurs when a woman in a dangerous relationship learns she has better options, while learning about steps she can take to increase safety for herself and any children involved. Metaphorically, a goal of marriage education should be to help people in burning houses leave, and to help people considering entry into smoldering buildings to gain the strength and support to flee.

Commitment Safety. Marriage can be fundamentally construed as a long-term investment, and in many ways, functions like one. It is the expectation of longevity that makes the day-to-day investment rational.¹⁸ People require a sense of security about the future of the relationship in order to fully invest in the present for that future. This is the nature of commitment in marriage, in which some options are given up in favor of the richer possibilities of building a life together.

In contrast, relationships with no clear sense of a future favor pressure for performance in the present (because there is no guarantee that the partner will stay), with score-keeping about levels of effort and investment, and anxiety about continuance, being the logical outgrowth. Simply put, couples do best when they have a clear sense of couple identity and a long-term view. This does not mean that it makes sense for all couples to have a future. Some relationships are destructive and would be better ended than continued. Yet, informed opinion is that the average couple with reasonable potential in marriage will do best if they are able to maintain a clear commitment that provides the protective benefits of having a secure sense of a future together. These are the conditions of family stability that also give children the most secure base for their own futures.

There is growing empirical evidence that it is this element of a commitment to a future that is most strongly linked to healthy types of sacrifice or mutual giving among partners.¹⁹ Further, we have preliminary but compelling evidence that the degree to which males will sacrifice for female partners, without a sense of personal loss and ensuing resentment, is strongly related to how committed they are to a long-term future.²⁰ In fact, the relationship between commitment to a future and sacrifice appears to be strong for men and weak in women—a finding warranting further research. This, along with data from various studies, has led me to hypothesize that women may give their best to men as long as they are attached to them while men may not give their best to women unless they have committed to a future. If this is, in fact, generally true, it holds dramatic implications for understanding inequities in what men versus women get out of less committed forms of relationships than marriage. Unhealthy marriages can be damaging to

women, but it is also becoming clearer that women are too often on the short end of differential levels of commitment and investment in relationships with men outside of marriage.

While many other details and nuances of healthy marriages can be, and are, delineated by various marriage and family experts, these elements of safety can be seen as foundational to what a healthy marriage provides. That also means that educational or therapeutic programming designed to foster such dynamics, where appropriate, hold promise for helping more couples to achieve stability and happiness resulting in obvious benefits for their children.

In close parallel, the national marriage scholars comprising the Research Advisory Group for the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative recently discussed ways to empirically define healthy marriage in the context of government programming and policy, suggesting that progress toward a goal of increasing healthy marriages could be tracked with existing survey methods along these lines²¹:

- The percentage of children living with their biological or adoptive parents who are also in healthy marriages defined by simple measures of relationship quality on several dimensions already reasonably well measured in the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative Baseline Survey²²:
 - Moderate to high relationship satisfaction
 - Lower levels of negative interaction
 - Lower levels of divorce potential (thinking and talking about divorce)

Healthy marriages would be characterized by reasonable levels of marital satisfaction, though the levels would not have to be the highest levels to argue that the marriage was healthy. This assumption is well founded on Paul Amato's (of Pennsylvania State University) concept of the "good enough" marriage. These are marriages in which adults and children derive most of the major benefits of marriage even though the adults are, at least at present, not highly satisfied.²³ While these marriages have chronic vulnerability, and are therefore not as "healthy" as they could be, they provide clear benefits as long as the marriages remain stable (and do not encounter any major destabilizing events).

What Is "Marriage" Education?

Part of the work that Howard Markman and I (and numerous colleagues) have done over the past 25 years includes basic research on the risks for marital failure, research on positive and protective factors in marriage, and research on commitment and how it functions in relationships. We have also spent considerable energy developing an empirically based, educational model for couples designed to help them reduce their risks and increase skill and confidence to achieve their goals in marriage. That program is called PREP, which stands for the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program. PREP fits in the context of a broad range of efforts designed to help people develop core attitudes and behaviors associated with marital success.

Over the past 10 years, there has been increased activity in private (e.g., professional counselors, religious organizations) and public (e.g., government service settings) sector efforts to help more people through what has become loosely described as "marriage education." There has even arisen a large, annual conference where people of varied backgrounds have been congregating to

share approaches, solutions, and dialogue on how to help people who choose to be married to be successful in it.²⁴

It is unfortunate and limiting that the term “marriage education” conjures up such a narrow image of what is meant and what is possible in the public discourse about efforts to strengthen marriages. In my view, true “marriage” education can take a wide range of forms, all of which can be understood as supporting the broad goal of helping people succeed in this endeavor.

I would add that there have been decades of research in the closely related field of marital counseling²⁵, which can play an important role in more intense efforts to help couples who have viability yet high risk of distress or dissolution.

All of the following can be forms marriage education. Each would plausibly increase societal good by increasing, over time, the percentage of healthy marriages, and, thereby, the percentage of children raised in that context:

- Helping someone better understand the benefits of marriage is marriage education.
- Helping someone develop realistic expectations about marriage is marriage education, including an understanding that relationships take work, but also that lasting marriages are possible.
- Helping someone understand key risk factors for marital and relationship distress, in general, and their relationship in particular, is marriage education.
- Working with couples who are planning marriage, or who are already married, is marriage education.
- Working with a single person can be marriage education: e.g., someone who may not be interested in marriage for now but who could use help distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy relationships, and what sort of relationship to consider as a foundation for a good marriage.
- Teaching information that leads someone to break up with a dangerous partner can be marriage education.
- Teaching people how to manage conflict more constructively, even if their primary focus is not currently marriage, is relationship education and often part of marriage education.
- Helping someone identify additional resources to support healthy relationships can be marriage education.

In national discussions about government initiatives and programs designed to foster healthy marriages, too many people picture only a scenario where couples receive instruction in some kind of class setting. This is certainly a common form of marriage education, and one on which we have focused a great deal of our work in developing and testing PREP. But marriage education does not have to assume an existing marriage or even an existing relationship. For example, educating high school students about key facts related to marriage, mate selection, and risk factors can be easily seen to be marriage education, even if there is no marriage on the horizon for the bulk of the students in the coming few years.

Another misunderstanding about marriage education, especially in the context of government initiatives, is represented in the fear that some have of government case workers pressuring non-married recipients of means-tested government benefits to get married out of some belief that more marriage among highly disadvantaged people would solve all the ills of poverty. I know a great many people from all kinds of political and philosophical background who are part of ongoing national and state discussions about what might be done, and I can honestly say that I do not know anyone who thinks this simplistically about the challenges facing low income individuals and couples. The problems are very complex, as will be the best solutions. The good news, maybe the best news of all, as I said earlier, lies in the quality of the discussions now taking place in various circles.

A specific example highlights one truly good outcome along the lines of healthy marriage, but one not consistent with the caricature sometimes painted in debates on this issue. Consider a woman who has struggled with poverty, and who happens also to be residing with a dangerous and abusive male. As part of her experience in TANF, she may take part in relationship/marriage education in which she learns more about healthy vs. dangerous relationships patterns in such a way that changes occur her own beliefs and expectations about what is acceptable for her and her children. She may decide that her present relationship is unacceptably dangerous, learn more about how to get support and help to become safe, and take steps to move on from that relationship in ways that improve her future outcomes. Sometimes, relationship and marriage education will and does result in the end of a relationship, not movement toward marriage.

True marriage education can occur at multiple stages in life, from high school education about reasonable expectations, to young adults learning about high and low risk relationships and behaviors, to helping people make better choices when thinking about a mate, to helping already partnered couples gain a better chance in succeeding.

Does Marriage Education Work, and For Whom Does It Work?

I have laid out a broad definition of what marriage education can encompass. Not all variations of what is possible have been attempted on a broad basis nor are they fully tested. On the other hand, there are a great many studies over a number of decades that demonstrate promising and positive findings from a wide range of marriage and relationship education efforts with couples—findings summarized in numerous papers and reviews.²⁶ There is evidence of gains in communication, improvements in relationship satisfaction, and, in some studies, a lower likelihood of relationship dissolution. The most consistent and robust findings suggest that couples can be helped to communicate less negatively and more positively, and that such effects can be very long lasting. Given that conflict and negativity are highly associated with deleterious effects on adults and children (as discussed earlier), this is important.

Such studies lay out an empirical foundation for believing in the value of broad-based efforts to make such experiences available to more couples.

Other, more conceptual, arguments can also be put forth regarding the value of marriage education.²⁷

1. **Education about marriage and family relationships can help people learn about key risks early enough to take action to lower them.** For example, long before becoming deeply involved with someone, a person can learn more about what types of patterns in relationships suggest trouble later. Likewise, a couple considering marriage in their future can learn strategies that will help them identify and perhaps lower their risks prior to marriage. If they find that they cannot lower their risks, marriage education can help them be more deliberate in their thinking about their choices.
2. **Education on marriage and family relationships can help people understand the benefits of healthy marriage as a foundation for family life.** There is a vast amount of evidence that marriage, as an institution, is beneficial provided marriages are reasonably healthy. However, there is also evidence that young people, especially teenage girls, are not aware of this, being increasingly likely to believe that legal marriage confers no particular benefits over cohabitation.²⁸ This trend is especially concerning given the growing theory and empirical evidence that men, in contrast, see marriage and non-marriage very differently, and are the most inclined to give their best to their partners and families in the context of marriage.²⁹
3. **Education on marriage and family relationships can help make people aware of other resources that may be of use, now or in the future, for a range of difficulties they may face.** This may be one of the greatest potential benefits of soundly conducted relationship and marriage education. In our work with preventive education, we have come to believe that well conceived and delivered educational opportunities can lay the seeds for future help-seeking. We have recently begun to assess this outcome in our initial studies of PREP within the Building Strong and Ready Families Initiative of the U. S. Army. Short term findings show couples reporting an increased awareness of other Army resources for helping their families cope with various issues.³⁰ In our work with the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative, we have devised a handout for all participants which provides information about other types of services that may be of use (such as in the areas of substance abuse, mental health, financial hardship, and domestic violence), along with contact information for how to seek out such services.

While many studies exist and encouraging studies abound, there are many things that we do not know that ongoing and future studies will address.

- We know much about premarital and marital education efforts with couples in relatively committed relationships. Indeed, most outcomes studies have been conducted with either couples who are planning marriage or who are already married. We know less about such efforts with non-married couples, and especially non-married couples with ambiguous or low levels of commitment.
- We have the most data on effectiveness with middle class, white couples, and relatively less data on how lower income and non-white couples respond.
- We have a great deal of data on couples, in general, and comparatively little data on the

long-term effects of teaching individuals how to make good relationship choices in the future.

While there is a lack of formal evaluation research on relationship and marriage education with the economically disadvantaged, or those from various racial or cultural groups, there are pertinent data as well as a great deal of experience and anecdotal reports by educators working in diverse settings which can guide current efforts. The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative, for example, represents an extensive and strategic effort to foster healthy marriages across a range of systems, sectors, providers, policies, and clients. It is a living laboratory, in which thoughtful people are grappling with how best to serve people from various backgrounds and opportunities. As a result, extensive experience is being gained from efforts to effectively reach low income recipients of government services, middle class couples, religiously involved couples, high school students, married individuals about to return home from prison, parents of youth in diversion programs, and so forth. Couples from very diverse racial backgrounds such as white, African American, Native American, and Hispanic (English speaking or Spanish speaking) are being reached, with much being learned from these efforts.

Empirically, we know that people who have historically been less likely to participate in relationship/marriage education express high interest in doing so. For example, in the statewide baseline survey conducted in Oklahoma (which formed a model being used in other states now), respondents were asked: "Would you consider using relationship education, such as workshops or classes to strengthen your relationship?" The data showed that, as expected, recipients of government services for economically disadvantaged people were less likely to be married, yet, not as we expected, were slightly *more* likely to say they were interested in such services (71%) than those who had never received such government supports (64%).³¹ Further, young people were particularly likely to say they would be interested in such services.

Of course, interest in relationship education can exist without it necessarily translating into actual attendance. However, these data suggest that it would be misguided to infer disinterest in relationship education among those who are economically disadvantaged when the historical lack of participation in such services may be fundamentally more due to a lack of access than a lack of interest. Services in accord with this interest are generally lacking in the U. S., except where communities are making a concerted effort to make such services available.

There is a belief among experts who study lower income families that marriage education efforts will be most effective when³²: (1) they are provided with a variety of wrap-around services to meet multiple needs; (2) more intensive and ongoing services are made available to those who have greater problems; (3) there is a clear understanding of who the clients are, and how their circumstances can be best addressed in the educational context; and (4) serious efforts are made to reduce the barriers to initial and ongoing participation in such services, such as the need for transportation or childcare. Theodora Ooms and Pam Wilson suggest that the degree of modification in approach from existing programs likely depends a great deal on whether one is working with lower income couples who have some economic stability at those lower levels versus those who are suffering substantial and sustained economic hardship, wherein more services and supports may be crucial in an overall programmatic approach to helping them succeed.³³ Based on years of experience in various settings (and in various countries), Howard

Markman and I believe this is a very sound conclusion.

In our ongoing work disseminating and evaluating marriage education in the context of the U. S. Army, we have had the opportunity to test short-term outcomes of our program for couples (PREP) with a sample that is relatively quite diverse (racially and economically) compared to most studies in this field. I quote at length from guidelines we have developed for those working with low income clients:

To be clear, Army couples are not like some of the low income clients that providers may work with in their settings. They have somewhat higher than average educations (high school and up), have more structure in their lives, have a steady income even if low, and have many kinds of support systems available. Young Army couples tend not to be in poverty, but, nevertheless, have lower levels of income than middle and upper class couples who have been the most typical participants of marriage education and research. Further, in our evaluation work in the Army, over 50% of the samples were made up of couples where one or both partners were racial minorities—a much greater percentage than found in most marriage research.

While the initial evaluations with the Army have been very simple in nature (e.g., relatively simple pre to post to a one month follow-up evaluation), the data are very useful for examining if there are differences in short-term response to the program that are moderated by racial and income differences. This is because the Army couples, while not being representative due to the fact of being in the Army, are otherwise a very diverse group of couples. While we do not want to over generalize these findings since Army couples are not a representative group, they are still useful and unlike other data currently available in the field of marriage and relationship education.

The findings from the Army evaluation are among the strongest we have seen in any studies of PREP on self-report measures over the short-term. Overall, couples taking the program reported reductions in negative interaction, increases in confidence, an increased ability to use time outs when upset, an increase in their ability to talk effectively about Army life issues, and so forth. In a second study, these same gains were replicated along with significant findings on new variables such as an increased ability to stay focused when discussing problems, an increased ability to maintain fun and friendship, and a trend for reductions in depressive symptoms among those who had felt depressed in the prior 6 months. Further, the couples reported an increased connection with other couples and an increased awareness of other resources that may be of use in helping their families. This latter finding have particular relevance to work with lower income clients where linking them with other services and resources may be crucial. We have come to believe that outcomes such as increasing awareness and use of other community services, and increasing community connections, are crucial goals in efforts aimed at helping disadvantaged groups.

With regard to income levels, in the Army sample, we have been able to compare couples where their household incomes were under \$25,000 with those whose incomes were greater. There were no differences in responses on various measures of effectiveness of

the program for couples above and below that income level. With regard to racial diversity, the results from the Army studies thus far show that minority couples derived just as much benefit from taking PREP as non-minority couple, with similar gains on all key variables. These couples were also just as likely to report high satisfaction with their experience in the training.

As stated above, there is much more we can (and will) learn in the coming years about meeting the needs of those who have been underserved and understudied in this field. Yet, I and my colleagues have very high confidence that many existing methods will prove valuable, and that new and improved methods will be forthcoming. Data from evaluations and feedback from front line providers will prove crucial in guiding efforts to tailor and fine tune strategies for the future.

What Are Best Practices In Healthy Marriage Education?

I will close my testimony by describing what Howard Markman, I, and many colleagues consider crucial in the interplay between science and practice in marriage education. Existing approaches to helping people in their relationships, and marriage aspirations, have varying degrees of these elements. Some have none and a few have all.³⁴ I offer the following schema as an exemplar of the strongest kind of foundation upon which to build and refine interventions for individuals and couples over time.

Research based approaches are strongest, in our view, when they are *empirically informed*. By this we mean that, to the extent possible, the information and strategies are based on the growing body of sound research on marital and family health. Not every point in any approach can be tested for individual effect, and many powerful, common sense principles are unlikely to ever be studied by social scientists, but we do think that approaches will generally be the strongest when the goals and strategies are consistent with existing, replicated, scientifically based knowledge.

Approaches can also be *empirically tested*. PREP, for example, has been studied intensively, including long-term outcome studies by six different research teams in four different countries. The term that has come to be used most often for being empirically tested is “evidence based.” Approaches vary in their basis of evidence for promoting positive results—some are no doubt effective yet have not such evidence, some are effective and also have a body of encouraging findings behind their history, and some approaches may lack both effectiveness and evidence.³⁵ And, of course, there are empirically informed and tested approaches where there may be little formal evaluation of effects with a new target audience. Nevertheless, even in those circumstances—and perhaps especially in such circumstances—care can be taken to build the content of an approach based on sound social science findings.

Finally, strong, scientifically based models, are, in our view, *regularly refined* based on the latest research. We live in a time of unprecedented intensity and pace in the growth of a knowledge base about relationships. Approaches can (and some are) built in the present around sound findings, but new studies and understandings are steadily emerging in many relevant fields. It is ideal for approaches to be designed so that regular updates are possible and reoccurring.

This model of understanding the role of empiricism gives us great optimism for the future of

efforts to help couples and families. We do not know everything we would like to know, but a great deal is known today, and what is known is certainly enough to continue this work with confidence. As we take action to help others, we can build on the confidence of present approaches while refining strategies over time based on ongoing research and evaluations.

Thank you for this chance to provide testimony to the U. S. Senate about something as important to this country as marriage.

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**Testimony of Dominick Walker on behalf of CHARICE DIGGS AND
DOMINICK WALKER (Center for Fathers, Families and Workforce
Development (CFWD) Program Participants)**

*Testimony before the Senate Finance Committee/Subcommittee on Social
Security and Family Policy Hearing on "The Benefits of a Healthy
Marriage" - Wednesday, May 5, 2004*

Charice and I believe marriage is a good thing. We intend on getting married. We talked about getting married before we found out Charice was pregnant. And when we found out we were going to have a baby we talked about it even more. We have told our family about our intentions. It is kind of scary but not really. With all of the divorce around we wonder if we will make it to the end. Are we doing the right thing? We know it is the right thing but will we make it?

Participating in the 50/50 Parent Program helped our relationship a lot. We have learned to talk about how we are feeling without hurting one another. Instead of getting angry over things, now we discuss them. It really helped our communication.

Our biggest challenge is the finances. We don't have our own house. We don't have transportation. We don't even have the money to have a wedding. I think Charice deserves a nice wedding.

I see us getting married one day soon. We have a good relationship. I think being married will set a positive example for our son, Zion. I grew up without my father. So that is why I want even more to be actively involved

in his life. We should be together as a family. We know how separated
parents effect children. We are in love. We have a son. We have too many
reasons to be together and not enough to be apart.

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**Comments by the American Association for Marriage & Family Therapy
Committee on Finance, Subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy
Hearing on "The Benefits of Healthy Marriage"
May 5, 2004**

**Promoting Healthy Marriages by making
Marriage Counseling a Tax-Deductible Expense**

The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) commends the Senate Finance Committee for convening a hearing on the benefits of healthy marriage. AAMFT is the national organization representing 23,000 marriage and family therapists, the only mental health profession required to have education and training in marital therapy and counseling. In their daily work these therapists help to build and maintain healthy marriages and are personally aware of the costs to society when children are raised in the context of marital dysfunction or an overburdened parent.

In this comment letter, we would like to expand on a topic that has received little attention in the testimony provided thus far. We address a very specific but attainable federal policy change that would assist the national effort to increase healthy marriage.

Background

While the federal government is developing and expanding policies to promote healthy marriages and families, existing law continues to discourage such efforts. One unfortunate example is the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) decision not to recognize marriage counseling as an eligible health care tax deduction.

Presently, the IRS will not allow taxpayers to deduct marriage or family counseling from their federal taxes, which deters individuals and couples from accessing this service. The IRS made this decision in a Public Ruling of July 1975, determining that marriage counseling was not a deductible medical expense under the Internal Revenue Code:

"In the instant case, the counseling was not for the prevention or alleviation of a physical or mental defect or illness, but rather to help improve the taxpayers' marriage. Accordingly, the counseling fees paid by the taxpayers are not medical expenses within section 213 of the Code, but are personal expenses within the meaning of section 262 and, therefore, nondeductible."
Rev Rul 75-319 (1975) 1975-2 CB 88.

Discussion

The federal government's interpretation of marriage counseling fails to consider the breadth of the issue. Marriage and family counseling has been proven to provide significant health and mental health benefits to individuals and families. Moreover, failure to address marital and family discord has resulted in demonstrable physical and psychological damage, with costly results. A recent study in the *Psychological Bulletin* entitled Marriage and Health: His and Hers describes the relationship between marriage and good health:

This review focuses on the pathways leading from the marital relationship to physical health. Evidence from 64 articles published in the past decade, particularly marital interaction studies, suggests that marital functioning is consequential for health: negative dimensions of marital functioning have indirect influences on health outcomes through depression and health habits, and direct influences on cardiovascular, endocrine, immune, neurosensory, and other physiological mechanisms. (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001)

It is estimated that one half to two thirds of all marriages in the United States will experience disruption due to separation or divorce (Castro Martin & Bumpass, 1989; Norton & Moorman, 1987). Although divorce and marital conflict are not always viewed as negative (Gottman, 1993) they can have a major impact on the health and well-being of all family members (Bray & Hetherington, 1993).

Congress and the federal government have already developed policies encouraging families to stay together. Presently, welfare reform proposals incorporate marriage and family strengthening provisions. Further, legislation to eliminate the marriage tax penalty is moving through Congress. While these efforts are appropriate, more can and should be done to help support and strengthen families.

A recent Heritage Foundation study concluded that marriage and family therapy does strengthen marriages and keep families together, and should be considered in health policy discussions. The report was looking at this issue in the context of the Bush Administration's welfare reform plan, but it is equally applicable to tax policy. The Heritage report, Marriage and Welfare Reform: The Overwhelming Evidence That Marriage Education Works, had compelling findings:

- An extensive review of the literature on the effectiveness of marital counseling in preventing separation and divorce found dozens of studies demonstrating that counseling was effective in reducing conflict and increasing marital satisfaction.
- A 1993 meta-analysis of 71 marriage and family counseling studies found that couples who participated in marriage counseling were better off than 70 percent of couples that did not participate in counseling.

As the Heritage authors note, "The collapse of marriage is a predominant factor behind high rates of child poverty, welfare dependence, and a host of other social problems."

Separated and divorced adults have the highest rates of acute medical problems, chronic medical conditions, and disability (Verbrugge, 1979). Divorced men are at increased risk for suicide, admission to mental hospitals, vulnerability to physical illness, and becoming victims of violence; separated and divorced women are at increased risk for depression and increased utilization of medical services (Bloom, Asher, & White, 1978; Dorian et al., 1982; Zeiss, Zeiss, & Johnson, 1980). Children in families characterized by marital conflict or divorce are at greater risk for a variety of behavioral and emotional problems, including oppositional behavior, aggression, and symptoms of depression and anxiety (Bray & Hetherington, 1993; Emery, 1982; Jouriles, Farris & McDonald, 1991). **In sum,**

divorce and marital conflict are associated with multiple family problems that negatively affect the well-being of family members (Bray & Jouriles, 1995).

Recommendation

Federal tax policy should be changed to allow couples and families that undertake marriage and family counseling to be able to deduct those expenses from their federal income tax. While the deduction may result in some lost federal revenue, the amounts would be minimal because few people exceed the 7.5% income tax deductibility threshold. Further, any costs would be more than offset by decreased spending for health and other social service programs.

Proposed Language

Modify **26 USC 213 (d)(1)** of the Definitions section to provide a new category of covered "medical care":

"(d) Definitions [Caution: For taxable years beginning in 2003, for limitations under this subsection regarding eligible long-term care premiums includible in the term "medical care," see § 3.16 of *Rev. Proc. 2002-70*, which appears as *26 USCS § 1* note.]. For purposes of this section--

- (1) The term "medical care" means amounts paid-
(E) for marital or family therapy and counseling provided by licensed professionals acting within their state scope of practice



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Testimony of the Family Violence Prevention Fund On Welfare Reform and Marriage Promotion Initiatives May 17, 2004

For more than two decades, the Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF) has worked to end violence against women and children around the world. Instrumental in developing the landmark Violence Against Women Act passed by Congress in 1994, the FVPF has continued to break new ground by reaching new audiences including men and youth, promoting leadership within communities to ensure that violence prevention efforts become self-sustaining, and transforming the way health care providers, police, judges, employers and others address violence. The FVPF was also a partner in the The CalWORKs Project, a collaborative project of the California Institute for Mental Health (CIMH), Children and Family Futures (CFF) and the FVPF. Project partners conducted research and evaluation and provided technical assistance to California counties providing mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence and employment services to participants of CalWORKs-California's TANF program.

As Congress considers reauthorization of welfare, it is imperative that any welfare bill consider the particular and often urgent needs of welfare recipients who are victims of domestic violence. Research demonstrates that domestic violence is prevalent among Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) recipients and that TANF is vital in helping women to escape abuse. We urge you to ensure that TANF reauthorization responsibly address domestic violence and enhance the safety and self-sufficiency of all TANF recipients. Given the high numbers of TANF recipients who are victims of abuse, it is imperative that the TANF program make safety a primary concern and provide families, whatever their structure, the economic resources and options they need to provide for the well-being of all family members. We are convinced that the proposed marriage promotion programs in the House and Senate TANF bills could jeopardize the safety of battered women and their children.

Many Women in the TANF program are Victims of Violence

Violence is not an exception to the rule for poor women; it is reality. Studies consistently show that at least 50 to 60 percent of women receiving welfare have experienced physical abuse by an intimate partner at some point during their adult lives, compared to 22 percent of the general population. In fact, in a recent study of two California counties, Kern and Stanislaus, welfare recipients had lifetime abuse rates of 80 percent and 83 percent, respectively.ⁱ A significant number of women receiving welfare also report a history of physical and sexual abuse in childhood.^{ii iii iv} It would be irresponsible for Congress not to fully address the reality of violence in the lives of women who receive welfare.

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The experience of Oklahoma, the leader among states in spending public dollars for marriage promotion, is instructive. In a survey of Oklahoma families, referred to in congressional testimony by the Director of Public Welfare in that State, it was discovered that almost half (44%) of the state's divorced women cited domestic violence as a reason for their divorce,^v and more than half (57%) of Oklahoma's divorced welfare mothers cited domestic violence as a reason for their divorce.^{vi} Oklahoma is not unique; women who receive welfare consistently report high rates of domestic violence.

Domestic violence contributes to women's poverty and helps create serious obstacles that prevent women, many of whom are mothers, from achieving safety and self-sufficiency. In addition to domestic violence, many welfare recipients face other barriers to employment, including: access to educational and job training opportunities; lack of child care; housing instability; lack of transportation; mental and physical health problems; disabilities; and substance abuse.^{vii viii} Given this reality, battered women who receive TANF should have access to a broad range of supportive services to address both the violence in their lives and any other barriers to safety that they may face. Precious TANF funds should be spent not on promoting potentially dangerous marriages, but rather on providing the supports and services that will truly help to lift battered women and their children out of poverty.

For battered women and their children, remaining with or marrying an abusive partner is not the solution to economic insecurity. Abusive partners have a negative impact on women's ability to find and maintain employment. They often sabotage women's efforts to become more financially self-sufficient by preventing women from working, attending interviews, or studying. By starting fights or inflicting visible injuries before key events, abusers also may prevent women from attending job interviews or going to work. Abusers may also threaten to kidnap the children or fail to provide promised child care or transportation.^{ix} Some abusive partners may try to stop women from working by calling them frequently during the day or coming to their place of work unannounced. In fact, research indicates that about 50 percent of battered women who are employed are harassed at work by their abusive partners.^x

However, we know that most battered women work or want to work *if they can do so safely*. In fact, many women use welfare and work as a way to escape an abusive relationship.^{xi} The TANF program can and should play a vital role in supporting battered women who are seeking to overcome barriers to employment so they can find or maintain work and become economically self-sufficient. What we know about victims of domestic violence who receive welfare suggests that, rather than promoting marriage, which may actually endanger battered women and their children, the TANF program should support education and training for welfare recipients. Given that many women use welfare and work as a way to escape an abusive relationship, quality education and training programs can substantially increase recipients' chances of securing employment that will lift them out of poverty. Marriage promotion programs, on the other hand, may actually decrease the likelihood that women will be able to find well-paying and sustainable employment by encouraging them to remain with abusive partners. Congress should recognize that welfare recipients, including those who are victims of violence, achieve greater economic security and safety when they are given the opportunity to gain new skills and knowledge, while receiving supportive services that help them address the violence in their lives.

Unintended Consequences for Battered Women and their Children

Marriage promotion programs raise myriad concerns about the health and safety of battered women and their children. We are deeply concerned that marriage promotion programs will be coercive in nature. Marriage promotion initiatives could stigmatize single parents or stigmatize divorce, thereby making it more difficult for some women to leave violent relationships or encouraging them to remain with abusive partners. In addition, participation in marriage promotion programs may be, or may be perceived to be, linked to the receipt of TANF benefits and other services. This means that an individual's decision to participate in these programs may not be fully informed or optional. No one should be pushed into making a decision that could adversely affect his or her safety and health.

We also remain unconvinced that marriage promotion programs are a good investment of TANF funds. We are particularly concerned that scarce public funds will be diverted from desperately needed economic supports, child care and job training into questionable programs that are unlikely to help reduce poverty. We do not believe that marriage promotion programs will support the goal of reducing poverty and increasing the safety and well-being of recipients and their families.

Research on Child Outcomes

Marriage promotion programs, which have been touted as a way to improve outcomes for children, may in fact have the opposite effect. Battered women are not the only victims of abuse; their children are affected as well. In a national survey of more than 6,000 American families, 50 percent of the men who frequently assaulted their wives also frequently abused their children.^{xii} It is estimated that anywhere between 3.3 million and 10 million children witness domestic violence annually and research demonstrates that exposure to violence can have serious negative effects on children's development.^{xiii} In fact, new findings drawn from the Simmons Longitudinal Study, one of the longest-running and most respected mental health studies ever conducted, show that growing up in a traditional two-parent marriage may not be beneficial for children if the marriage has conflict or abuse. At the annual meeting of the National Society for Social Work and Research in January, researchers running the 25-year Simmons study of nearly 400 Massachusetts residents reported that family conflict and violence take "a heavy toll" on the mental health of children. The researchers said it affects them even more than marital disruption, divorce or separation.

Researchers found that males exposed to family conflict and violence over the years were significantly more likely than other males to have suicidal thoughts, be depressed, have emotional and behavioral problems, be drug dependent, or have post-traumatic stress disorder. Girls from violent homes had higher rates of alcohol problems and lower grades when they graduated from high school than girls who did not experience conflict or violence in their homes.^{xiv} These findings show that growing up in a violent home takes a terrible toll on children and teens, and can cause serious, long-lasting harm.

According to the American Psychological Association, recent research utilizing more sophisticated methodology than previous studies shows that, while children of divorced parents overall have more adjustment problems than children of intact families, the differences between these two groups is smaller and less pronounced than previously believed. In fact, the majority

of children of divorce fall within the normal range of adjustment on standardized measures. Research indicates that marital conflict rather than divorce or post-divorce conflict is a more important predictor of child adjustment. For example, children in high-conflict marriages are more likely to experience behavioral and academic problems including, but not limited to, disobedience, aggression, delinquency, poor self-esteem, antisocial behaviors, and depression. Young adults who experienced a high level of marital conflict during childhood are more likely to experience depression and psychological disorders than young adults from low-conflict families.^{xv} This suggests that the relationship between divorce and child outcomes is more about the conditions that led to the divorce than the divorce itself.

In addition, a new study from Cornell University has found that growing up with a single parent does not have a negative effect on the behavior or educational performance of children. The study looked at 1,500 12- and 13-year-old children from white, black and Hispanic families. The researchers found that the most important factors in determining child outcomes were the mother's level of education, income level, and the quality of the home environment, not the mother's marital status.^{xvi} This and other research clearly shows that marriage promotion programs may actually endanger children who grow up in violent homes and negatively impact their development by encouraging women to remain in violent relationships.

Marriage Does Not Address the Root Causes of Women's Poverty

Common sense tells us that two incomes are better than one and thus more likely to move people off welfare. But a closer look at the facts shows that marriage is not a simple solution to poverty. First, forming a two-parent family does not guarantee economic security. Forty percent of all families living in poverty are two-parent families.^{xvii} Thus, two-parent families are not immune to poverty or the economic stresses single parent families face. Second, due to death and divorce, marriage does not ensure women's economic security. Approximately 40 percent of marriages end in divorce^{xviii} and 12 percent end due to the husband's death. Among women currently on welfare, about 40 percent are married or were married at one time; 18.4 percent are married; 12.3 percent are separated; 8.3 percent are divorced; and about 1 percent are widows.^{xix} A significant number of divorces and separations are due to domestic violence. Given this, there is no indication that marriage alone would provide security, economic or otherwise, for families on welfare. Indeed, there is no simple causal relationship between single motherhood and poverty.

The reasons that women, more than men, experience an economic downfall outside of marriage include: primary care giving responsibility for children (which, due to lack of quality, affordable, accessible child care makes unemployment or underemployment almost inevitable); lack of education and job training; discrimination in the labor market; and domestic violence. Without addressing the factors that keep women from being economically self-sufficient, marriage promotion programs hold little hope of improving the economic situation of families who receive welfare.

On the other hand, a policy that invests in education, training and work supports would empower women to achieve true economic security. In 2000, only 1.2 percent of single mothers with a college degree who worked full-time year round lived in poverty. Less than eight percent of

single mothers with some college working full-time lived in poverty.^{xx} Education, not marriage, is the best strategy for lifting families out of poverty.

Unfortunately, marriage promotion programs included in the House and Senate TANF bills take the wrong approach to improving the economic status of families on welfare. Economic security is more likely to lead to successful marriage than is marriage likely to lead to economic security. The outcomes of the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) support this conclusion. MFIP reached welfare-eligible single and two-parent families and focused on participation in employment services for long-term welfare recipients combined with financial incentives to encourage and support work. These work supports include child care, medical care, and rewarding work by helping the family to develop enough earning power to survive financially without cash assistance before cutting off their benefits. A study comparing the economic progress of those in the standard AFDC welfare program with MFIP participants found that only 14 percent of AFDC recipients compared with 25 percent of families in the MFIP program were out of poverty within 2¼ years and the MFIP families had on average \$1400 more in annual income. After 36 months MFIP participants were 40 percent more likely to be married than participants in the standard AFDC program, and nearly 50 percent less likely to be divorced after five years. The MFIP program shows that allowing families to combine welfare and work, and providing work supports to help individuals become economically secure, will strengthen marriage and reduce divorce.^{xxi}

In sum, we urge Congress to:

Support education and training for TANF recipients

Quality education and training programs can substantially increase recipients' chances of securing employment that will lift them out of poverty. Given that many women use work as a way to escape an abusive relationship, TANF programs should support education and training opportunities that will help recipients find well-paying jobs. In addition, Congress must understand that any increase in required work hours or state work participation rates will have a negative affect on education and training programs. In welfare reauthorization, Congress must recognize that welfare recipients achieve greater economic security and safety when they are given the opportunity to gain new skills and knowledge. Investments in education, training and work supports can both empower women to achieve economic security (thereby economically empowering couples as well) and strengthen marriages.

Strengthen the Family Violence Option

The Family Violence Option (FVO) should be expanded to include all 50 states and should contain requirements that each state certify that it has trained caseworkers who can screen individuals for domestic violence, or that it contracted with domestic violence experts who will conduct the screenings. All states should be required to give oral and written notice to individuals who have been sanctioned or are at risk of being sanctioned for violating welfare program requirements that those requirements may be waived if domestic or sexual violence has contributed to non-compliance. Congress should also fund demonstration projects to develop and disseminate best practices in addressing domestic violence as a barrier to economic security.

TANF program must address domestic violence as a primary concern in the lives of women and children who receive welfare. Given the large numbers of TANF recipients who are victims of violence, the TANF program must responsibly address the safety of battered women and their children. As we have shown, welfare and work are powerful tools in helping battered women leave abusive relationships, particularly when women have access to supportive services such as education, job training, mental health services, and child care. In contrast, marriage promotion programs run the risk of endangering battered women and their children and these programs do not address the root causes of poverty for families on welfare. Rather than supporting an untested marriage promotion program, TANF reauthorization should help families on welfare who are experiencing domestic violence while supporting the safety and self-sufficiency of all TANF recipients.

Sincerely,



Esta Soler
President
Family Violence Prevention Fund

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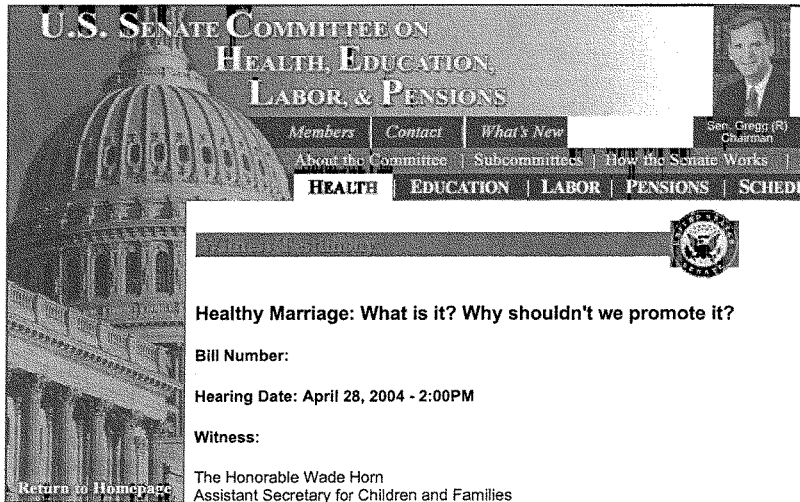
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Healthy Marriage: What is it? Why shouldn't we promote it?

Bill Number:

Hearing Date: April 28, 2004 - 2:00PM

Witness:

The Honorable Wade Horn
Assistant Secretary for Children and Families
Department of Health and Human Services

Testimony:

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for calling this afternoon's hearing on the president's healthy marriage initiative and for giving me the opportunity to share the Administration's work on this very important issue. I appreciate the subcommittee's interest in promoting healthy marriages and your continued efforts to improve the health and well-being of children and families throughout our nation.

For thousands of years, healthy marriages have been the legacy of healthy families. President Bush, like members of the subcommittee, has focused on family formation and healthy marriages with an important purpose in mind: to enhance the well-being of children. As the President has stated: "My Administration is committed to strengthening the American family. Many one-parent families are also a source of comfort and reassurance, yet a family with a mom and dad who are committed to marriage and devote themselves to their children helps provide children a sound foundation for success. Government can support families by promoting policies that help strengthen the institution of marriage and help parents rear their children in positive and healthy environments."

Why should government be in the business of supporting the formation and stability of healthy marriages? Because the research literature is now replete with studies showing that children raised in stable, healthy marriages are less at risk for a host of negative developmental outcomes compared to children raised in unstable, unhealthy and dysfunctional married households. We know, for example, that children raised in healthy married households are less likely to be poor, less likely to fail at school, and less likely to have an emotional or behavioral problem requiring psychiatric treatment, compared to

those who are not. Moreover, as adolescents, they are less likely to commit crime, develop substance abuse problems or to commit suicide. Healthy marriages, it appears, are the best environment for rearing healthy children.

And it is not just children who benefit from healthy marriages. Research shows that adults in healthy marriages are happier, healthier and accumulate more wealth compared to those who are not. And communities with high rates of healthy marriages evidence fewer social pathologies, such as crime and welfare dependency, compared to those with low rates of healthy marriages.

Unfortunately, too many children today are growing up without the benefit of parents and grandparents in healthy, stable marriages. Indeed, more than half of all children today will spend some or all of their childhood in homes without a mom and dad in a healthy, stable marriage.

The Healthy Marriage Initiative

That is why President Bush proposed his healthy marriage initiative. He, like so many others, sees the good that often comes from healthy marriages. The President recognizes the importance of helping couples who choose marriage for themselves access services, on a voluntary basis, where they can develop the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages for the benefit of children, adults and society.

The good news is that in a remarkably short period of time, we have moved past the question of whether government ought to be involved in supporting healthy marriages to the question of how government should be involved in supporting healthy marriages. This shift from the question of "whether" to the question of "how" is an exceedingly important one – for it is not possible to seek solutions to a problem until, and unless, that problem is called by its correct name. Yes, there are many problems worth attending to. But strong and healthy marriages are as good as bedrock for strong and healthy societies. There are few things I know for certain, but here is one: A critical mass of healthy marriages help all societies to function well, and without that critical mass, they will forever be seeking new programs and services to cope with the ever increasing social problems that result from its absence.

What Government Ought Not to Do

One of the most important lessons we've learned when explaining the government's role in promoting and strengthening healthy marriages is to first talk about what the government ought not to do.

First, government ought not to force anyone to get married. One very important America tradition is the belief in limited government. One of the areas in which government ought to be limited is the decision about whether or not a person should get married. That decision should remain completely up to the individual, ideally in consultation with the individual's family. Government ought not to get into the business of interfering with that personal decision-making.

Second, government ought not – intentionally or otherwise – implement policies that will trap anyone in an abusive relationship. Domestic violence is, tragically, a terrible reality for far too many couples today. Marriage does not cure domestic violence. All too often, it exacerbates it. Whatever policies we implement, none of them should – either directly or indirectly – contribute in any way to this terrible problem.

Third, government ought not to promote marriage by withdrawing supports for

single-parent families. I know of no evidence that says that child well-being is improved by withdrawing supports for single parents. Promoting healthy marriage ought to be about affirming healthy marriage, not denigrating single people. President Bush has said "Single mothers do amazing work in difficult circumstances, succeeding at a job far harder than most of us can possibly imagine. They deserve our respect and they deserve our support." He's right. Supporting healthy marriages cannot come at the expense of supporting children living in other family structures. All children are unique gifts from God, and each one – every one – deserves our support and encouragement, no matter what their family arrangement.

Finally, government ought not to promote marriage by being afraid to mention its name. There is something unique about the marital relationship that distinguishes it from other types of relationships. Preparing couples for marriage, therefore, is different from preparing them for other types of relationship arrangements. Relationship education, for example, is a good thing, and I support it. I would certainly favor helping individuals develop all sorts of good relationship skills. But marriage is fundamentally different from other types of relationships. As such, we ought not to shy away from using the word "marriage" if it is, indeed, marriage we seek to promote.

What Government Ought to Do

What, then, should government do? Here are three principles that I believe should underlie government's role in supporting marriage.

First, we ought to make it clear that government is in the business of promoting healthy marriages. The fact is healthy marriages are good for children; dysfunctional and abusive marriages are not. Hence, government, as a strategy for improving the well being of children, ought to be in the business of promoting healthy marriages.

Second, government should not merely seek to be neutral about marriage. Governments are – and should be – neutral about lots of things. Take ice cream preference, for example. Government has no business promoting one flavor of ice cream over another because there is no evidence that individuals, couples, children, families or communities benefit from the choice of one flavor of ice cream over another. Hence, government is neutral when it comes to a personal preference for vanilla or strawberry ice cream.

But government is not neutral about lots of things – like home ownership or charitable giving – precisely because it can be shown that home ownership and charitable giving contribute to the common good. Hence, government provides incentives – primarily in the way of tax incentives – for home ownership and charitable giving. In much the same way, government, while not forcing anyone to marry, can – and should – provide support for healthy marriages precisely because it can be shown that healthy marriages contribute to the common good. As such, removing disincentives for marriage is fine – but that would only achieve neutrality. When it comes to something as important to society as healthy marriages, government cannot afford to simply be neutral.

Third, while we don't know as much as we would like to know about how to promote healthy marriages, that shouldn't be used as an excuse to do nothing. While it is true that we don't have perfect knowledge when it comes to designing initiatives to support healthy marriages, we do know something. We do know, for example, that what separates stable and healthy marriages from unstable and unhealthy ones is not the frequency of conflict, but how couples manage conflict. Couples who are able to listen to each other with respect,

communicate effectively and problem-solve conflict in healthy ways, report higher levels of marital satisfaction and are less likely to divorce than those who are not able to do so. The good news is that through marriage education, we can teach these skills and in so doing, increase the odds that couples will form and sustain healthy marriages – to the benefit of their children, themselves and society.

And new research is constantly shedding more light on our path. For example, research is dispelling the myth that couples – and especially low-income couples – no longer are interested in marriage as a life goal. Survey after survey shows that most young people continue to aspire to healthy, stable marriage. Even unmarried parents continue to aspire to marriage. According to researchers at Princeton and Columbia Universities, more than half of unmarried parents when asked at the time their child is born out-of-wedlock indicate that they are actively considering marriage – not some time to somebody, but to each other. Yes, we have much to learn – but government ought not to be paralyzed by imperfect knowledge. For in the words of the Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev: "If we wait for the moment when everything, absolutely everything is ready, we shall never begin."

What the Bush Administration is Doing

With these three principles in mind, the Bush Administration has undertaken the following bold initiatives to support the formation and stability of healthy marriages.

First, President Bush has proposed increased funding for marriage education services as part of the re-authorization of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. Specifically, the President has requested spending \$240 million annually to support innovative efforts to integrate supports for healthy marriage into existing government-sponsored welfare programs. Half of the money – \$120 million – would be for a competitive matching grant program where states, territories and federally recognized tribes could develop innovative approaches to support healthy marriages. Expenditures would be matched dollar-for-dollar and federal TANF funds could be used to meet the matching requirement.

With these funds, states, territories, federally recognized tribes and tribal organizations, local governments, and community and faith-based organizations could conduct public education campaigns about the benefits of healthy marriages and how marriage education can help couples build healthy marriages; offer pre-marital education and marriage enrichment programs to help couples, on a voluntary basis, develop the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages; and provide targeted outreach to troubled marriages so that couples do not have to view divorce as the only alternative when they experience marital distress. The goal in all of these efforts will be on increasing the number of children growing up in healthy married households. Why? Because healthy marriages are good for kids, unhealthy marriages are not.

The other half of the money – another \$120 million per year – would be available for research, demonstrations and technical assistance efforts focused primarily on healthy marriages and family formation.

Second, we are working to integrate support for healthy marriages into our existing array of social service programs. We have, for example, begun to integrate marriage education programs into our child welfare system, providing marriage education to couples as a way to reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect, for example, as well as providing marriage education to

couples who adopt to help ensure the success of that adoption. We also have provided funding for the development of curriculums that include effective ways of the promoting of healthy marriages for schools that teach social work. And we've begun to integrate support for healthy marriages into services currently being offered through the child support enforcement system.

When it comes to promoting healthy marriages, we don't believe in a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Different groups of people need different types of help. That's why we also are targeting funds to help particularly vulnerable populations form and sustain healthy marriages. For example, we have added marriage education to the range of social services we offer to couples who come to America as refugees.

Each of these initiatives is not about subtraction – but addition. They are about adding supports for healthy marriages into our publicly financed service delivery system – a system that for far too long has been afraid to even speak the word "marriage."

Finally, we also are seeking to integrate messages about the importance of healthy marriages into programs that seek to discourage teen pregnancy. The good news is that teen pregnancy is down in America. The not-so-good news is that the rate of out-of-wedlock childbearing for women in their 20's is increasing. While we have given the clear message that, all things being equal, teenagers should avoid becoming fathers and mothers, we are less clear about telling them that they also should avoid becoming a mother or father until after they are married. We need to help our young better understand not just the value of waiting until they are "older" before becoming a parent, but also the value of waiting until they are married.

Of course, if our young people are going to avoid becoming parents before marriage, the best way for them to accomplish that is to be sexually abstinent until marriage. That is why President Bush also has proposed dramatic increases in funding for abstinence education programs. For as the President has said, "When our children face a choice between self-restraint and self-destruction, government should not be neutral. Government should not sell children short by assuming they are incapable of acting responsibly. We must promote good choices." He's right, of course. Good choices early on pave the way for healthy families in the future. If we succeed in implementing this vision, we will succeed in strengthening marriages and families for years to come.

But, some critics ask, is this really the function of government? Isn't supporting healthy marriages too intrusive a role for advocates of limited government to propose? Good question and we have a good answer. To the extent to which we are successful in promoting healthy marriages, we will be successful in reducing the risk of many of the social ills that impede the healthy development of children, families, and, indeed nations. And if we are successful in preventing many of the social ills that impede the healthy development of children and families, we will also obviate the need for other more costly – and more intrusive – interventions.

We know, for example, that children who grow up in unhealthy marriages and experience family breakup are more likely to be abused and neglected. A compassionate society doesn't stand idly by and tolerate children being abused and neglected, so we have a child welfare system, including the investigation of reports of abuse and neglect, and a foster care system to take care of children who are abused and neglected. But if we are successful in helping couples form and sustain healthy marriages, fewer children will be

abused or neglected, and as a result there will be less need for child welfare services in the first place.

Indeed, as Assistant Secretary for Children and Families, I oversee 65 different social programs at a cost of nearly \$47 billion dollars each year. Go down the list of these programs -- child welfare, child support enforcement, programs for runaway youth, anti-poverty programs -- the need for each of these programs is either created or exacerbated by the breakup of families and marriages. If we are ever going to prevent the need for these services, we must begin preventing these problems from happening in the first place. One way to accomplish that is to help couples form and sustain healthy marriages.

The Importance of Leadership

The reason we have come so far in promoting healthy marriage in America is because of the leadership and commitment of President Bush. The President understands that the cry of the hearts of so many children is for their families and for the important role fathers can play in their lives. And he understands that the one important way to answer that cry is to become serious about renewing marriage.

During his first year in office, President Bush said this about the need to renew fatherhood by strengthening families:

"None of us is perfect. And so no marriage and no family is perfect. After all, we all are human. Yet, we need fathers and families precisely because we are human. We all live, it is said, in the shelter of one another. And our urgent hope is that one of the oldest hopes of humanity is this, to turn the hearts of children toward their parents, and the hearts of parents toward their young."

Turning the hearts of children to their parents, and the parents to their young is, indeed, the great hope of our efforts to strengthen marriages in America. I know it is the great hope of members of this subcommittee as well.

Thank you.

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Background

No. 1741
March 26, 2004



Published by The Heritage Foundation

Understanding the President's Healthy Marriage Initiative

Robert E. Rector and Melissa G. Pardue

The erosion of marriage during the past four decades has had large-scale negative effects on both children and adults. It lies at the heart of many of the social problems with which the government currently grapples. The beneficial effects of marriage on individuals and society are beyond reasonable dispute, and there is a broad and growing consensus that government policy should promote rather than discourage healthy marriage.

In response to these trends, President George W. Bush has proposed—as part of welfare reform reauthorization—the creation of a pilot program to promote healthy and stable marriage. Participation in the program would be strictly voluntary. Funding for the program would be small-scale: \$300 million per year. This sum represents *one penny* to promote healthy marriage for every *five dollars* government currently spends to subsidize single parenthood. Moreover, this small investment today could result in potentially great savings in the future by reducing dependence on welfare and other social services.

The Importance of Marriage

Today, nearly one-third of all American children are born outside marriage. That's one out-of-wedlock birth every 35 seconds. Of those born inside marriage, a great many children will experience their parents' divorce before they reach age 18. More than half of the children in the United States will spend all or part of their childhood in never-formed or broken families.

Talking Points

- Despite the overwhelming evidence of the benefits of marriage to families and society, by the very nature of its means-tested programs, the welfare system has penalized and discouraged marriage for more than four decades.
- The President's Healthy Marriage Initiative would spend just one penny to promote strong marriages for every five dollars the government currently spends to subsidize single parenthood.
- The initiative would provide individuals and couples marriage-skills and relationship-skills training and would include experimental reductions in the financial penalties against marriage that are currently contained in all federal welfare programs.
- All participation in the President's marriage program would be voluntary.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/research/family/bg1741.cfm

Produced by the Domestic Policy Studies Department

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Ave., NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.



The collapse of marriage is the principal cause of child poverty in the United States. Children raised by never-married mothers are seven times more likely to live in poverty than children raised by their biological parents in intact marriages. Overall, approximately 80 percent of long-term child poverty in the United States occurs among children from broken or never-formed families.

It is often argued that strengthening marriage would have little impact on child poverty because absent fathers earn too little. This is not true: The typical non-married father earns \$17,500 per year at the time his child is born. Some 70 percent of poor single mothers would be lifted out of poverty if they were married to their children's father. This is illustrated in Chart 1, which uses data from the Princeton Fragile Families and Child Well-being Survey—a well-known survey of couples who are unmarried at the time of a child's birth. If the mothers remain single and do not marry the fathers of their children, some 55 percent will be poor. However, if the mothers married the fathers, the poverty rate would drop to 17 percent. (This analysis is based on the fathers' actual earnings in the year before the child's birth.)¹

The growth of single-parent families has had an enormous impact on government. The welfare system for children is overwhelmingly a subsidy system for single-parent families. Some three-quarters of the aid to children—given through programs such as food stamps, Medicaid, public housing, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and the Earned Income Tax Credit—goes to single-parent families. (See Chart 2.) Each year, government spends over \$150 billion in means-tested welfare aid for single parents.²

Growing up without a father in the home has harmful long-term effects on children. Compared with similar children from intact families, children raised in single-parent homes are more likely to become involved in crime, to have emotional and behavioral problems, to fail in school, to abuse drugs, and to end up on welfare as adults.³

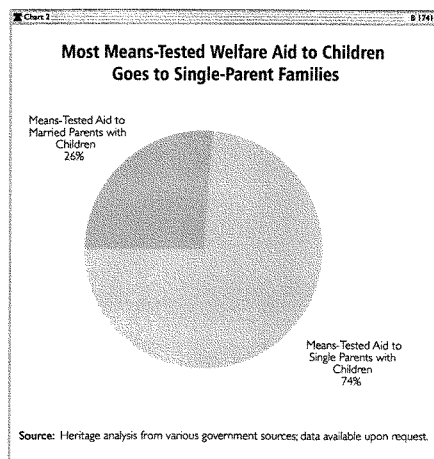
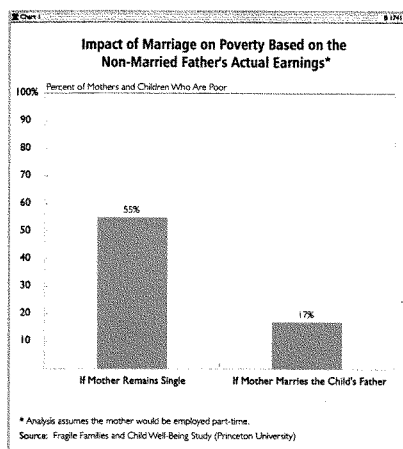
Finally, marriage also brings benefits to adults. Extensive research shows that married adults are happier, are more productive on the job, earn more, have better physical and mental health, and live longer than their unmarried counterparts. Marriage also brings safety to women: Mothers who have married are half as likely to suffer from domestic violence as are never-married mothers.⁴

The Growing Consensus on Promoting Healthy Marriage

The overwhelming evidence of the positive benefits of marriage for children, women, and men has led to a large and growing consensus that government policy should strengthen marriage—not undermine it. William Galston, former Domestic Policy Adviser in the Clinton White House, has stated: "Marriage is an important social good, associated with an impressively broad array of positive outcomes for children and adults alike Whether American Society succeeds or fails in building a healthy marriage culture is clearly a matter of legitimate public concern."⁵

Former Vice President Al Gore has proclaimed, "We need to be a society that lifts up the institution of marriage."⁶ Mr. Gore and his wife have concurred with the Statement of Principles of the Marriage Movement, which declares:⁷

1. For more information on this point, see Robert E. Rector, Kirk A. Johnson, Patrick F. Fagan, and Lauren R. Noyes, "Increasing Marriage Will Dramatically Reduce Child Poverty," Heritage Foundation Center for Data Analysis Report No. CDA03-06, May 20, 2003.
2. Robert Rector, "The Size and Scope of Means-Tested Welfare Spending," testimony before the Committee on the Budget, U.S. House of Representatives, August 1, 2001.
3. Patrick Fagan, Robert Rector, Kirk Johnson, and America Peterson, *The Positive Effects of Marriage: A Book of Charts* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, April 2002), at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Features/Marriage/index.cfm>.
4. Robert E. Rector, Patrick F. Fagan, and Kirk A. Johnson, "Marriage: Still the Safest Place for Women and Children," Heritage Foundation Background No. 1732, March 9, 2004.
5. *Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-one Conclusions from the Social Sciences*, Institute for American Values, New York, 2000, p. 6.
6. Scott Shepard, "Gore Outlines Reforms to Make Absent Fathers More Responsible," Cox News, June 3, 2000, at http://www.cox-news.com/2000/news/cox/060300_gore.html (December 9, 2002).



We believe that America must strengthen marriages and families. . . . Strong marriages are a vital component to building strong families and raising healthy, happy, well-educated children. Fighting together against the forces that undermine family values, and creating a national culture that nurtures and encourages marriage and good family life, must be at the heart of this great nation's public policy.⁸

Will Marshall, of the Progressive Policy Institute, and Isabel Sawhill, widely respected welfare and family expert at the Brookings Institution, recently issued a paper entitled "Progressive Family Policy for the 21st Century." Marshall and Sawhill repudiate "the relativist myth that 'alternative family forms' were the equal of two-parent families," citing a growing body of evidence showing that—in aggregate—children do best in married, two-parent families. They argue that "a progressive family policy should encourage and reinforce married, two-parent families because they are best for children."⁹

Policy Background

Despite the overwhelming evidence of the benefits of marriage to families and society, the sad fact is that, for more than four decades, the welfare system has penalized and discouraged marriage. The U.S. welfare system is currently composed of more than 70 means-tested aid programs providing cash, food, housing, medical care, and social services to low-income persons. Each year, over \$200 billion flows through this system to families with children. While it is widely accepted that the welfare system is biased against marriage, relatively few understand how this bias operates. Many erroneously believe that welfare programs have eligibility criteria that directly exclude married couples. This is not true.

Nevertheless, welfare programs do penalize marriage and reward single parenthood because of the inherent design of all means-tested programs. In a means-tested program, benefits are reduced as non-welfare income rises. Thus, under any means-tested system, a mother will receive greater benefits if she remains single than she would if she were married to a working husband. Welfare not only serves as a substitute for a husband, but it actually penalizes marriage because a low-income couple will experience a significant drop in combined income if they marry.

For example: A typical single mother on Temporary Assistance to Needy Families receives a combined welfare package of various means-tested aid benefits worth about \$14,000 per year. Suppose the father of her children has a low-wage job paying \$16,000 per year. If the mother and father remain unmarried, they will have a combined income of \$30,000 (\$14,000 from welfare and \$16,000 from earnings). However, if the couple marries, the father's earnings will be counted against the mother's welfare eligibility. Welfare benefits will be eliminated (or cut dramatically), and the couple's combined income will fall substantially. Thus, means-tested welfare programs do not penalize marriage *per se* but, instead, implicitly penalize marriage to an employed man with earnings. The practical effect is to significantly discourage marriage among low-income couples.

This anti-marriage discrimination is inherent in all means-tested aid programs, including TANF, food stamps, public housing, Medicaid, and the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) food program. The only way to eliminate the anti-marriage bias from welfare entirely would be to make all mothers eligible for these programs regardless of whether they are married and regardless of their husbands' earnings. Structured in this way, the welfare system would be

7. The Marriage Movement consists of a coalition of organizations that have joined together to encourage and strengthen marriage. The Statement of Principles details the current "marriage crisis," refutes arguments against marriage, defines marriage, explains the importance of marriage and the costs of divorce, describes several ongoing pro-marriage movements, and outlines a call to action for government entities, married couples, and others. See <http://www.marriagemovement.org/html/report.html> (December 16, 2002).

8. Former Vice President Al Gore and Tipper Gore, signed letter to "Supporters of The Marriage Movement, c/o Institute for American Values," from the Gore Campaign 2000, July 1, 2000.

9. Will Marshall and Isabel Sawhill, "Progressive Family Policy in the 21st Century," presented at the Maxwell Conference on Public Policy and the Family, Syracuse University, October 24–25, 2002.

marriage-neutral: It would neither reward nor penalize marriage.

Such across-the-board change, however, would cost tens of billions of dollars. A more feasible strategy would be to experiment by selectively reducing welfare's anti-marriage incentives to determine which penalties have the biggest behavioral impact. This approach is incorporated in the President's Healthy Marriage Initiative.

President Bush's Initiative to Promote Healthy Marriage

In recognition of the widespread benefits of marriage to individuals and society, the federal welfare reform legislation enacted in 1996 set forth clear goals: to increase the number of two-parent families and to reduce out-of-wedlock childbearing. Regrettably, in the years since this reform, most states have done very little to advance these objectives directly. Out of more than \$100 billion in federal TANF funds disbursed over the past seven years, only about \$20 million—a miniscule 0.02 percent—has been spent on promoting marriage.

Recognizing this shortcoming, President Bush has sought to meet the original goals of welfare reform by proposing a new model program to promote healthy marriage as a part of welfare reauthorization. The proposed program would seek to increase healthy marriage by providing individuals and couples with:

- Accurate information on the value of marriage in the lives of men, women, and children;
- Marriage-skills education that will enable couples to reduce conflict and increase the happiness and longevity of their relationship; and
- Experimental reductions in the financial penalties against marriage that are currently contained in all federal welfare programs.

All participation in the President's marriage program would be voluntary. The initiative would utilize existing marriage-skills education programs that have proven effective in decreasing conflict and increasing happiness and stability among couples. These programs have also been shown to be effective

in reducing domestic violence.¹⁰ The pro-marriage initiative would not merely seek to increase marriage rates among target couples, but also would provide ongoing support to help at-risk couples maintain healthy marriages over time.

The plan would not create government bureaucracies to provide marriage training. Instead, the government would contract with private organizations that have successful track records in providing marriage-skills education.

The President's Healthy Marriage Initiative is often characterized as seeking to increase marriage among welfare (TANF) recipients. This is somewhat inaccurate. Most welfare mothers have poor relationships with their children's father: In many cases, the relationship disintegrated long ago. Attempting to promote healthy marriage in these situations is a bit like trying to glue Humpty-Dumpty together after he has fallen off the wall. By contrast, a well-designed marriage initiative would target women and men earlier in their lives when attitudes and relationships were initially being formed. It would also seek to strengthen existing marriages to reduce divorce.

Typically, marriage promotion programs would provide information about the long-term value of marriage to at-risk high school students. They would teach relationship skills to unmarried couples before the woman became pregnant with a focus on preventing pregnancy before a couple has made a commitment to healthy marriage. Marriage programs would also provide marriage and relationship education to unmarried couples at the "magic moment" of a child's birth and offer marriage-skills training to low-income married couples to improve marriage quality and reduce the likelihood of divorce.

The primary focus of marriage programs would be preventative—not reparative. The programs would seek to prevent the isolation and poverty of welfare mothers by intervening at an early point before a pattern of broken relationships and welfare dependence had emerged. By fostering better life decisions and stronger relationship skills, marriage programs can increase child well-being and adult

10. Patrick F. Fagan, Robert W. Patterson, and Robert E. Rector, "Marriage and Welfare Reform: The Overwhelming Evidence That Marriage Education Works," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 1606, October 25, 2002.

happiness, and reduce child poverty and welfare dependence.

Program Specifics

The President's Healthy Marriage Initiative has been included in the two major TANF reauthorization bills. One of these is the Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act of 2003 (H.R. 4) that was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in May 2002 and again in February 2003. The Healthy Marriage Initiative has also been included in the Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone (PRIDE) bill introduced by Senator Charles Grassley (R-IA) in the U.S. Senate.

The proposal would create two separate funds to promote marriage. In the first, \$100 million per year would be provided in grants to state governments for programs to promote healthy marriage. Participation in this funding program would be voluntary and competitive. States would neither be required to participate nor guaranteed funds. Instead, they would compete for funding by submitting program proposals to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The states with the best proposals would be selected to receive funds. States receiving funding would be required to match federal grants with state funds. In the second fund, another \$100 million per year would be allocated in competitive grants to states, local governments, and non-government organizations.

Both funding pools could be used for a specified set of activities consistent with the overarching strategy of promoting healthy marriage. These activities would include:

- Public advertising campaigns on the value of marriage and the skills needed to increase marital stability and health;
- Education in high schools about the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting;
- Marriage education, marriage-skills instruction, and relationship-skills programs—which may include parenting skills, financial management,

conflict resolution, and job and career advancement for non-married pregnant women and non-married expectant fathers;

- Pre-marital education and marriage-skills training for engaged couples and for couples or individuals interested in marriage;
- Marriage-enhancement and marriage-skills training for married couples;
- Divorce-reduction programs that teach relationship skills;
- Marriage mentoring programs that use married couples as role models and mentors in at-risk communities; and
- Programs to reduce the disincentives to marriage in means-tested aid programs, if offered in conjunction with any of the above activities.

Much of the debate about marriage-strengthening will center on this list of allowable uses of the marriage funds. Opponents of the President's initiative will seek to broaden the list to include activities that have little or no link to marriage. The effort to broaden the program to include standard government services such as job training, day care, and contraceptive promotion (all of which are already amply funded through other programs) would dissipate the limited funds available and render the program meaningless.¹¹

Criticisms of the President's Plan

The President's Healthy Marriage Initiative has been criticized on a number of grounds. Each of these criticisms is inaccurate.

- **Individuals will be forced to participate in the program.** Critics charge that welfare mothers would be forced to participate in marriage education. In fact, all participation would be voluntary. Services would be provided only to individuals or couples interested in receiving them.¹²
- **The program will increase domestic violence.** Critics charge that the program would increase

11. Robert E. Rector, Melissa G. Pardue, and Lauren R. Noyes, "Marriage Plus: Sabotaging the President's Efforts to Promote Healthy Marriage," *Heritage Foundation Backgrounder* No. 1677, August 22, 2003.

12. The Bush Administration has always been clear that individuals' participation in the program would be completely voluntary. The Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone (PRIDE) Act, introduced by Senator Grassley, contains specific language clarifying that point. See Section 103, p. 154 of the PRIDE legislation.

domestic violence by coercing or encouraging women to remain in dangerous relationships. In fact, marriage and relationship-skills training has been shown to reduce, not increase, domestic violence.¹³ Such programs help women steer clear of dangerous and counterproductive relationships.¹⁴ Moreover, domestic violence is less widespread among low-income couples than is generally assumed. For example, three-quarters of non-married mothers are romantically involved with the child's father at the time of the non-marital birth: Only 2 percent of these women have experienced domestic violence in their relationship with the father.¹⁵ In general, domestic violence is more common in cohabiting relationships than in marriage: Never-married mothers, for example, are twice as likely to experience domestic violence than are mothers who have married.

- **Marriage-skills programs are ineffective or unproven.** Critics charge that marriage-skills programs are ineffective. The facts show exactly the opposite: Over 100 separate evaluations of marriage training programs demonstrate that these programs can reduce strife, improve communications skills, increase stability, and enhance marital happiness.¹⁶
- **The program will bribe couples to marry.** Critics charge that the marriage program will bribe low-income women to marry unwisely. This is not true. As noted, all means-tested welfare programs such as TANF, food stamps, and public housing contain significant financial penalties against marriage. The marriage program would experiment with selectively reducing these penalties against marriage.
- **The program is too expensive.** The President proposed spending \$300 million per year on his model marriage program (\$200 million in federal funds and \$100 million in state funds). This sum represents *one penny* spent to promote healthy marriage for every *five dollars* spent to subsidize single parenthood.¹⁷ This small investment would also help to avert future dependence on welfare.
- **The public opposes marriage promotion.** Critics claim that the public opposes programs to strengthen marriage. In fact, the state of Oklahoma has operated a marriage program similar to the President's proposal for several years. Most Oklahomans are familiar with this program; 85 percent of the state's residents support the program, and only 15 percent oppose it.¹⁸
- **The shortage of "marriageable men" makes marriage unlikely for most low-income women.** Critics argue that marriage is impractical in low-income communities because men earn too little to be attractive spouses. This is not true. As noted, nearly three-quarters of non-married mothers are cohabiting with, or are romantically involved with, the child's father at the time of the baby's birth. The median income of these non-married fathers is \$17,500 per year. Some 70 percent of poor single mothers would be lifted out of poverty if they married the father of their children.¹⁹
- **Low-income women are not interested in marriage.** Critics charge that low-income women are not interested in marriage and marriage-skills training. However, at the time of

13. Fagan et al., "Marriage and Welfare Reform: The Overwhelming Evidence that Marriage Education Works."

14. Some critics seem to assume that marriage programs would encourage women to marry abusive boyfriends or would try to use marriage to improve an abusive relationship. No marriage program would do this, because all of them rest on the premise that marriage is inappropriate when significant physical abuse exists.

15. Rector et al., "Increasing Marriage Will Dramatically Reduce Child Poverty."

16. Fagan et al., "Marriage and Welfare Reform: The Overwhelming Evidence that Marriage Education Works," p. 7.

17. Rector, "The Size and Scope of Means-tested Welfare Spending."

18. Christine A. Johnson et al., *Marriage in Oklahoma*, Oklahoma State University, Bureau for Social Research, June 2002, p. 31.

19. Rector et al., "Increasing Marriage Will Dramatically Reduce Child Poverty." Data are taken from the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study at Princeton University, at <http://cfcw.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies>. See also Wendy Sigle-Rushton, "For Richer or Poorer," Center for Research on Child Well-being, Princeton University, *Working Paper* 301-17FF, 2001.

their child's birth, more than 75 percent of non-married mothers say they are interested in marrying their child's father. In Oklahoma, 72 percent of women who have received welfare say that they are interested in receiving marriage-skills training.²⁰

- **Increasing male wages through job training is the key to increasing marriage.** Some argue that the key to getting low-income parents to marry is to raise the father's wages. This notion is inaccurate for several reasons.

First, unmarried fathers already earn, on average, \$17,500 per year at the time of their child's birth.

Second, data from the Fragile Families Survey show that male wage rates have very little to do with whether or not an unmarried father marries the mother of his child. Instead, the most important factors in determining whether or not couples marry after a child's birth are the couples' attitudes about marriage and their relationship skills.²¹ These are the precise attitudes and behaviors that would be targeted for change in the President's Healthy Marriage Initiative.

Third, the federal government already operates seven separate job-training programs and spends over \$6.2 billion per year on job training.²² Since the beginning of the War on Poverty, overall spending on job training has exceeded \$257 billion.²³ This spending has had no apparent effect on increasing marriage in the past: There is no reason to believe it would do so in the future.

Fourth, most government training programs are ineffective in raising wage rates. For example, a large-scale evaluation of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) showed that the program

raised the hourly wage rates of female trainees by only 3.4 percent and those of male trainees by zero.²⁴

Finally, under H.R. 4, and the PRIDE bill, job training may be provided, if needed, to individuals participating in marriage-skills and marriage-enhancement programs. However, any job training must be linked to marriage-skills training. To add job training as a stand-alone spending category within a "marriage" funding stream would cripple any future marriage program by diverting substantial funds into traditional job-training activities that have little to do with marriage.

- **Encouraging marriage at an early age is counterproductive.** The age at which women give birth out of wedlock is often underestimated. The issues of out-of-wedlock childbearing and teen pregnancy are generally confused: They are not the same. Most women who give birth outside marriage are in their early twenties. Only 10 percent of out-of-wedlock births occur to girls under age 18; 75 percent occur to women who are age 20 and older.

The focus of the Healthy Marriage Initiative would be on encouraging couples to form stable, committed relationships and to marry before pregnancy and childbirth occur. In many cases, this would involve delaying childbearing until couples were older and more mature. Thus, the goals of promoting healthy marriage and of postponing childbearing to a mature age are harmonious and mutually supportive. However, simply encouraging a delay in childbearing without increasing the incidence of healthy marriage would have only marginal benefits and would not be wise policy.

20. Johnson, *Marriage in Oklahoma*, p. 35.

21. Based on forthcoming analysis by The Heritage Foundation using data from the Princeton Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Survey.

22. Vee Burke, *Cash and Noncash Benefits for Persons with Limited Income: Eligibility Rules, Recipients and Expenditure Data, FY 1998–FY 2000*, November, 19, 2001, p. 221.

23. This figure represents federal job training expenditures from 1965 to 2000 in constant 2000 dollars.

24. Howard Bloom et al., *National JTPA Study Overview: Title II-A Impacts on Earnings and Employment at 18 Months*, Abt Associates Inc., January 1993.

- **Government should fund more pregnancy-prevention and contraceptive programs rather than marriage promotion.** Some urge that marriage promotion funds should be diverted to contraceptive programs on the grounds that, once women have had children out of wedlock, they are less likely to marry in the future. But the government already spends over \$1.7 billion per year on pregnancy prevention and contraceptive promotion through programs such as Medicaid, TANF, Adolescent Sexual Health, and Title X.²⁵ Overall, current funding for contraception/pregnancy-prevention dwarfs the proposed funding for marriage promotion. Diverting limited marriage funds to even more contraceptive programs would clearly cripple any marriage initiative.

However, as noted, the President's Healthy Marriage Initiative would promote the goal of preventing non-marital pregnancy in another broad sense. Marriage programs would encourage women to enter healthy marriages before becoming pregnant. In many cases, this would involve encouraging women to avoid pregnancy until they become more mature and more capable of sustaining a viable, healthy relationship. However, this approach would differ greatly from simply handing out contraceptives.

- **Promoting marriage is none of the government's business.** There are some who argue that, while marriage is a fine institution, the decision to marry or not to marry is a private decision in which the government should not be involved.²⁶ This argument is based on a misunderstanding of the government's current involvement in the issue of single-parenthood, as well as a misunderstanding of the President's Healthy Marriage Initiative.

First, the government is already massively involved when marriages either fail to form or break apart. Each year, the government spends

over \$150 billion in subsidies to single parents. Much of this expenditure would have been avoided if the mothers were married to the fathers of their children. This cost represents government efforts to pick up the pieces and contain the damage when marriage fails. To insist that the government has an obligation to support single parents—and to control the damage that results from the erosion of marriage—but should do nothing to strengthen marriage itself is myopic. It is like arguing that the government should pay to sustain polio victims in iron lung machines but should not pay for the vaccine to prevent polio in the first place.

Second, the government is already heavily (and counterproductively) involved in individual marriage decisions, given that government welfare policies discourage marriage, by penalizing low-income couples who do marry and by rewarding those who do not. The President's Healthy Marriage Initiative would take the first steps to reduce these anti-marriage penalties.

Third, under the President's initiative, the government would not "intrude" into private matters concerning marriage, since all participation in the marriage promotion program would be voluntary. Nearly all Americans believe in the institution of marriage and hope for happy and long-lasting marriages for themselves and their children. Very few wish for a life marked by a series of acrimonious and broken relationships. The President's program would offer services to couples seeking to improve the quality of their relationships. It would provide couples seeking healthy and enduring marriages with skills and training to help them to achieve that goal. To refuse services and training to low-income couples who are actively seeking to improve their relationships because "marriage is none of the

25. See Melissa G. Pardue, Robert E. Rector, and Shannan Martin, "Government Spends \$12 on Safe Sex and Contraceptives for Every \$1 Spent on Abstinence," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 1718, January 14, 2004.

26. For example, Senator Max Baucus has stated that he would oppose even modest funds to promote healthy marriage because "marriage is not something the government should interfere with." Senator Max Baucus, "Remarks on Welfare Reform Reauthorization," National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support, March 5, 2002.

government's business" is both cruel and short-sighted.

Finally, the government has a long-established interest in improving the well-being of children. For instance, the government funds Head Start because the program will ostensibly increase the ability of disadvantaged children to grow up to become happy and productive members of society. It is clear that healthy marriage has substantial, long-term, positive effects on children's development: Conversely, the absence of a father or the presence of strife within a home both have harmful effects on children. If government has a legitimate role in seeking to improve child well-being through programs such as Head Start, it has a far more significant role in assisting children by fostering healthy marriage within society.

Conclusion

More than 40 years ago, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan—at that time, a member of President Lyndon Johnson's White House staff—wrote poignantly of the social ills stemming from the decline of marriage in the black community. Since that time, the dramatic erosion of marriage has afflicted the white community as well. Today, the social and economic ills fostered by marital collapse have exceeded Senator Moynihan's worst expectations.

Tragically, when Senator Moynihan's prescient report on marriage and the family was released in the early 1960s, it was met with a firestorm of abuse. So vitriolic was the attack against Moynihan that a virtual wall of silence came to surround the issues he raised. For 30 years, nearly all public discussion about the importance of marriage, and the role that government policy played in either supporting or undermining it, was muffled. Meanwhile, marriage declined and out-of-wedlock childbearing soared. When Moynihan wrote his report in the early 1960s, 7 percent of all American children were born out of wedlock; Today, the number is 33 percent. To any objective observer, the link between the erosion of

marriage and high levels of child poverty and welfare dependence was obvious, but for decades, this topic was scrupulously avoided in public discussion.

In the early 1990s, the wall of silence surrounding the marriage issue began to crumble. In his 1993 State of the Union address, President Bill Clinton spoke forcefully of the harm wrought by the decline of marriage in America.²⁷ His remarks echoed those of Moynihan 30 years earlier. By the late 1990s, most responsible individuals, on both the left and the right, had acknowledged the importance of marriage to the well-being of children, adults, and society. Most affirmed the need for government policies to strengthen marriage.

In response, President Bush has developed the Healthy Marriage Initiative: the first positive step toward strengthening the institution of marriage since the Moynihan report four decades ago. The proposal represents a strategy to increase healthy marriage—carefully crafted on the basis of all existing research on the topic of promoting and strengthening marriage.

The President's Healthy Marriage Initiative is a future-oriented, preventive policy. It will foster better life-planning skills—encouraging couples to develop loving, committed marriages before bringing children into the world, as opposed to having children before trust and commitment between the parents has been established. The marriage program will encourage couples to reexamine and improve their relationships and plan wisely for the future, rather than stumbling blindly into a childbirth for which neither parent may be prepared. The program will also provide marriage-skills education to married couples to improve their relationships and to reduce the probability of divorce.

Ideally, pro-marriage interventions for non-married couples would occur well before the conception of a child. A second—less desirable, but still fruitful—point of intervention would be at the time of a child's birth: a time when the majority of unmarried couples express an active interest in marriage. By providing young couples with the tools needed to

27. In his January 1994 State of the Union address, President Clinton forcefully lamented the decline of marriage, warning, "The American people have got to want to change from within if we're going to bring back work and family and community. We cannot renew our country when within a decade more than half of the children will be born into families where there has been no marriage."

build healthy, stable marriages, the Marriage Initiative would substantially reduce future rates of welfare dependence, child poverty, domestic violence, and other social ills.

There is now broad bipartisan recognition that healthy marriage is a natural protective institution that, in most cases, promotes the well-being of men, women, and children: It is the foundation of a healthy society. Yet, for decades, government policy has remained indifferent or hostile to marriage. Government programs sought merely to pick up the pieces as marriages failed or—worse—actively undermined marriage.

President Bush seeks to change this policy of indifference and hostility. There is no group that will gain more from this change than low-income single women, most of whom hope for a happy, healthy marriage in their future. President Bush seeks to provide young couples with the knowledge and skills to accomplish their dreams. The Senate would be wise to affirm their support for marriage by passing welfare reform reauthorization and enacting the President's Healthy Marriage Initiative.

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POLICY BRIEF

APRIL 16, 2002

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MARRIAGE AND PUBLIC POLICY: WHAT CAN GOVERNMENT DO?

By Maggie Gallagher, affiliate scholar, Institute for American Values

A growing consensus confirms that divorce and unmarried childbearing generate high costs to children and taxpayers, including higher rates of poverty, welfare dependency, crime, school failure, Medicaid costs, mental illness, and child abuse. Even small reductions in rates of divorce and unmarried childbearing would carry a big payoff for children and for taxpayers.

Research suggests that two kinds of government programming can be helpful in reducing these costs: 1) Programs to reduce unmarried childbearing (both by increasing the proportion of pregnant couples who decide to marry and by educating teens to delay pregnancy until marriage) and 2) Programs to reduce unnecessary divorce in at-risk couples and communities.

Recommendation: Fund vouchers and referrals for community and faith-based premarital education programs for cohabiting (or dating) parents interested in marriage. Cohabiting families are more likely to split up and are four times as likely to be on welfare. The vast majority of cohabiting couples are interested in marriage. Premarital education programs may increase relationship satisfaction, reduce negative interactions, and reduce divorce, in the early years of marriage. Premarital education also appears to reduce the likelihood that married couples experience domestic violence.

Recommendation: Add an explicit marriage message to all government-funded teen pregnancy programs. Girls and young women with positive attitudes towards unmarried childbearing are five times more likely to become young unwed mothers. Most Americans of all ethnic and social groups believe that teenagers should strive to delay childbearing until they are married. Yet the majority of teens currently approve of unmarried childbearing, putting them at high risk of unwed pregnancy. A new generation of teen pregnancy programming should

adopt an explicit marriage message: delay pregnancy until you are grown, educated *and married*.

Recommendation: Fund community and faith-based marriage counseling, marriage mentoring, and marriage education programs for at-risk couples and communities. Studies show marriage counseling helps about half of all couples, moving about one-third out of the distressed range. Benefits to highest-risk couples may be even greater. A study of alcoholics found that marriage therapy reduced the incidence of male violence

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Suggested Citation: Maggie Gallagher, 2002.
Marriage and Public Policy: What Can Government Do?
(New York, NY: Institute for American Values)

from 48 percent to 16 percent. Expanding the network of marriage supports in poor communities is likely to strengthen marriage and reduce divorce in at-risk couples.

Recommendation: Design and evaluate divorce education programs to reduce unnecessary divorce. A surprisingly high proportion of divorcing couples are ambivalent about their divorce decision. In one major study, one-year after the divorce at least one spouse in three-quarters of divorcing couples reported second thoughts. Less than a third of divorcing parents appear to be in high-conflict or violent marriages. Thus, research suggests a substantial minority of couples filing for divorce may be candidates for successful reconciliation. Government-funded pilot projects testing a variety of strategies and establishing effective divorce education programs could have a profound impact divorce rates, at relatively low cost.

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MARRIAGE AND PUBLIC POLICY: WHAT CAN GOVERNMENT DO?

By Maggie Gallagher, affiliate scholar, Institute for American Values

A growing consensus of family scholars confirms that marriage matters: both adults and children are better off living in communities where more children are raised by their own two married parents.¹ Both adults and children live longer, have higher rates of physical health and lower rates of mental illness, experience poverty, crime and domestic abuse less often, and have warmer relationships, on average, when parents get and stay married.

High rates of family fragmentation generate substantial taxpayer costs as well. According to a report by over one hundred family scholars and civic leaders released in 2000: "Divorce and unwed childbearing create substantial public costs paid by taxpayers. Higher rates of crime, drug abuse, education failure, chronic illness, child abuse, domestic violence and poverty among both adults and children bring with them higher taxpayer costs in diverse forms: more welfare expenditure; increased remedial and special education expenses; higher day-care subsidies; addition child-support collection costs; a range of increased direct court administration costs incurred in regulating post-divorce or unwed families; higher foster care and child protection services; increased Medicaid and Medicare costs; increasingly expensive and harsh crime-control measures to compensate for formerly private regulation of adolescent and young-adult behaviors; and many other similar costs. While no study has yet attempted precisely to measure these sweeping and diverse taxpayer costs stemming from the decline of marriage, current research suggests that these costs are likely to be quite extensive."²

This growing consensus on the importance of marriage has led to new efforts to generate public policies that may help reduce rates of unmarried childbearing and divorce. This policy brief, which offers an introductory review of the research on marriage and public policy, is part of a larger NFI report on ways that public policy can strengthen marriage, reduce divorce and unmarried childbearing.

WHAT CAN GOVERNMENT DO?

Give the high costs of unmarried childbearing and divorce, what could government do? While there are a variety of ways public policy may influence rates of divorce and unmarried childbearing (including the tax treatments of marriage and family, divorce law, Medicaid provisions and other dimensions of the welfare system), this preliminary memo focuses on smaller, less expensive interventions that might be implemented by HHS.

Interventions to increase the proportion of children raised by their own two married parents fall into two large categories: targeted provision of services (such as offering referrals or vouchers to faith-based or community marriage education services to at-risk couples) and broader public information campaigns designed to change attitudes about the importance of marriage, especially the importance of delaying childbearing until marriage. An effective marriage plan is likely to involve elements of both.

TWO STRATEGIES, FOUR PROGRAMMING AREAS

Strategy One: Reducing Unmarried Childbearing

Why are so many more American children born out of wedlock? One of the most important reasons for the large increase in unmarried childbearing over the last 30 years is the large drop in the likelihood that a single pregnant woman will marry before the child's birth.³ By the early 90s, single, pregnant women in their early twenties were about twice as likely to pick unwed motherhood over marriage as they had been in the early 1970s.⁴ Most of the increase in unwed childbearing in the 1990s was not to solo mothers, but to cohabiting couples. About forty percent of births outside of marriage are to cohabiting couples.⁵

According to new research from the Fragile Families study, the vast majority of unmarried mothers in urban neighborhoods are interested in marriage at the time

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of the baby's birth. Only 19 percent of all unmarried mothers (and 3 percent of cohabiting unwed mothers) say there is no chance they will marry their baby's father. Thirty-seven percent of all unwed mothers of newborns (and 50 percent of cohabiting mothers of newborns) say that they are almost certain they will marry.⁶ Yet relatively few such parents do marry, and cohabiting families are especially fragile: cohabiting biological parents of newborns are much less likely to remain together than married parents of newborns even after controlling for economic hardship, family background, relationship history and many other variables.⁷ Cohabiting families are twice as likely as married couples to be poor and more than four times as likely to be on welfare.⁸

How might government programming increase the likelihood that interested unwed parents end up in a successful marriage?

a. Funding marriage preparation and education services

Demonstration or pilot projects can nurture a network of community and faith-based marriage education and preparation services for new parents who say that they are interested in marriage.

Are these programs effective? Research suggests that marriage preparation programs may increase relationship satisfaction, reduce negative interactions, and reduce divorce, at least in the early years of marriage.⁹ In an American sample, married couples who had received PREP, a premarital education program developed by Howard Markman and Scott Stanley at the University of Denver, were only half as likely to have divorced five years later as a control group. Premarital education also appears to reduce the likelihood that married couples experience domestic violence.¹⁰

These kind of premarital education programs (such as PREP, PAIRS,¹¹ Couple Communication,¹² Relationship Enhancement¹³) are relatively inexpensive. Clergy and lay leaders appear to be at least as effective as trained psychologists in administering many kinds of skills-based training.¹⁴ The emerging trend in these programs (which are available in secular and religious versions) is to emphasize the importance of sacrifice and commitment, and the need for for-

giveness, reconciliation and acceptance as part of a loving marriage, as well as good communication skills.

Pilot programs or demonstration projects with rigorous research evaluations would provide two enormous potential benefits: 1) increase our understanding of best practices in this field and 2) broaden the existing research base to include low-income and ethnically diverse samples. Demonstration projects and evaluations that accomplished these two goals would not only help guide future government programming they would encourage private community and faith-based groups to pursue their own marriage education, providing the key, but expensive evaluation research out of the reach of most private groups.

How can government policy serve at-risk couples interested in marriage? There are many potential points of referral for such programs from initial welfare, food stamp and Medicaid applications, Head Start, home-visit programs and paternity identification programs. Such services need not and should not be coercive. For example, case workers who visit hospitals to encourage paternity identification could also ask new parents whether they are interested in marriage, and if so, whether or not they would like vouchers or referrals to community or faith-based premarital education services.

Marriage preparation programs may encourage and strengthen marriage in three different ways: 1) by signaling to young parents and parents-to-be that the community perceives marriage as an important protection for them and their children; 2) by stimulating the growth of a supportive network of faith-based and other community marriage programs that can serve couples through the life cycle; and 3) to provide at-risk couples with strategies and skills for handling conflict that increase relationship satisfaction, reduce violence, and may reduce future divorce risk.

b. Adding a marriage message to teen-pregnancy prevention

Currently, teen pregnancy prevention programs educate teenagers on the need to delay childbearing—but delay until when? Research confirms that in terms of the best outcomes for parents and children, teens should delay pregnancy until they are

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grown, educated *and married*.

Yet very little teen pregnancy programming now carries this marriage message. Teen pregnancy programs routinely imply to teenagers that the only issue is age: they should wait until they are 20 and/or finish their education before having children. Marriage is not usually mentioned (except to warn teens about the dangers of marrying too young).¹⁵ Adults may hear these warnings against early childbearing as an implicit warning against unwed childbearing, but teenagers often do not. (Abstinence education programs do carry a marriage message: marriage is the only appropriate context for sexuality.) All government-funded teen pregnancy prevention programs (whether or not they include contraceptive information) should be required to carry a related but distinct message: teens should strive to delay pregnancy until they are grown, educated *and married*.

Research shows that deferring childbearing until marriage is important for building warm, effective family relationships. Children raised in intact marriages have on average warmer relationships with both mothers and fathers.¹⁶ Single mothers (including cohabiting mothers) have elevated rates of depression¹⁷ and poverty,¹⁸ and other stressors that can interfere with warm and effective parent-child relationships. Children raised outside of intact marriages are at increased risk of many serious problems, including infant mortality, child abuse, school dropout, poverty, suicide, juvenile delinquency, and substance abuse.¹⁹

Would making the marriage message explicit help teen pregnancy programs be more effective? There are strong reasons for believing so. For years, teen pregnancy programs failed to make a dent in teen pregnancy rates. Then in the early Nineties, teen pregnancy rates declined, as a new generation of more effective public-private partnerships to prevent teen-pregnancy spread. What happened?

Research evaluations revealed the difference between effective and ineffective teen pregnancy programs. *Effective programs explicitly told teens it was a bad idea to have a baby while a teenager.* Every other strategy no matter how ideologically or theoretically appealing (including better access to contraceptives, values-clarification, or strategies to increase school-commitment) failed. By contrast, many

diverse sorts of programs built around a strong anti-teen pregnancy message were successful at reducing teen pregnancy rates.²⁰

Similarly, research shows that the attitudes and values of teens are an important predictor of early, unwed pregnancy.²¹ In one study, girls and young women who had positive attitudes towards unmarried childbearing are five times more likely to become young unwed mothers.²² When it comes to preventing unwed childbearing (whether through sexual abstinence or effective contraception), developing a strong commitment to avoiding pregnancy is key. Only girls and young women who are firmly committed to avoiding unwed pregnancy actually succeed in doing so. Yet attitude surveys suggest the majority of teens currently approve of unmarried childbearing, putting them at high risk of both teenage and unwed pregnancy.²³

This research suggests government policy can set a relatively clear and measurable goal for a new generation of teen pregnancy programming: to increase the proportion of young women who, when asked, 'would you personally consider deliberately conceiving an out-of-wedlock child?' answer firmly: No.

Our success at turning around the teen pregnancy crisis suggests an opportunity: Adding a marriage message to teen pregnancy programs would likely have a measurable effect on the proportion of children born outside of marriage. If we would like teenagers to wait until they are grown, educated, *and married* before getting pregnant, our best bet is to tell them so and tell them why.

Strategy Two: Divorce Prevention

High rates of divorce and unmarried childbearing tend to go hand-in-hand. In communities where marriage appears unlikely to succeed, young women see little reason to postpone childbearing until marriage. As Fragile Families researcher Maureen Waller put it, "[M]ost unmarried parents hope to marry. At the same time, unmarried parents perceive marriage as a risk, and they frame the decision not to marry in terms of minimizing the high likelihood of divorce."²⁴

Efforts to reduce unmarried childbearing that ignore the high rates of divorce in low-income communities are unlikely to succeed over the long run. If one goal of public policy should be to help

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more at-risk low-income married couples succeed at marriage, what kind of interventions are likely to prove helpful?

a. Vouchers for low-income marriage counseling and marriage education

Research suggests that marriage counseling and marriage education may help many couples improve relationship satisfaction and avoid divorce.²⁵ A recent review of the literature found behavioral marriage therapy improved the marital satisfaction for about half of couples. About one-third of these couples moved from the distressed to the normal range, and sixty percent maintained these gains at six-month follow up.²⁶

Many different (but not all) kinds of marriage counseling appear to be effective.²⁷ Many marriage counselors use eclectic approaches, drawing on elements of behavioral (“skills-based”) marriage therapy along with emotion-focused, insight-oriented and cognitive strategies. New research has focused on the importance of integrating acceptance²⁸ and forgiveness (or reconciliation)²⁹ into marriage counseling and marriage education.

Effective marriage interventions share at least one common trait: Marriage counselors or educators who play an active role in helping couples improve satisfaction and avoid divorce.³⁰ New research suggests that with time, many unhappy marriages improve even without outside intervention.³¹ One important function of marriage counseling or marriage education, then, may be to offer distressed couples hope,³² delaying the divorce decision long enough for marriage problems to dissipate, or for couples to put problems into perspective. If providing hope and support for staying married is one key therapeutic variable, faith-based and community marriage educator may be as effective as therapists and counselors.

Is there any reason to believe that marriage counseling and/or marriage education might be helpful in low-income, at-risk populations many of whom face the additional stresses of poverty, high-crime, unemployment, substance abuse issues, and discrimination? While marriage counseling has been a mostly middle-class activity, there are indications in the research literature that marriage interventions may be at least as effective in high-risk as in middle-class populations.

A burgeoning literature finds benefits to behavioral or other marriage interventions in high-risk circumstances including alcoholics³³, drug users³⁴, domestic violence³⁵ and depression.³⁶ For example, a study of 88 male alcoholics and their wives found that the proportion of wives reporting any violence by husband dropped from 48 percent before a special alcohol-focused behavioral marriage therapy to 16 percent two years later. Reports of severe violence dropped from 24 percent before therapy to 2.7 percent. Levels of violence among alcoholics who remained sober dropped to a level not significantly different than a demographically matched comparison group.³⁷

Creating and infrastructure of marriage counseling and marriage education in low-income and at-risk communities shows significant promise for reducing divorce and improving relationships even among high-risk couples. Faith-based or community marriage education and counseling programs would expand the support available to married couples in low-income communities, benefiting not only the specific recipients but others in the community as well. Referrals (or vouchers) for couples interested in marriage counseling, marriage mentoring, or marriage education could be offered through Head Start, unemployment offices, drug rehab centers, child support enforcement, and TANF offices, fatherhood programs, youth shelters, child care centers, disability programs for parents of children, refugee resettlement programs, refugee support organizations, community and faith-based marriage organizations.

b. Divorce education/mediation designed to reduce unnecessary divorce

Court-connected divorce mediation and education programs are now commonplace. A recent survey found that half of U.S. counties have court-connected divorce education programs. In many jurisdictions divorce education programs are mandatory.³⁸ However the goals of existing divorce education and mediation programs are too limited. Most programs aim at 1) reducing acrimony and/or encouraging co-parenting in divorcing families and 2) reducing rates of litigation.

Divorce mediation has been shown to lead to dramatic reductions in litigation, especially around the time of divorce.³⁹ Research suggests that divorce edu-

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cation can reduce parents' negative behaviors after divorce (although generally not enough to improve the psychological adjustment of children).⁴⁰

Can appropriate mediation or divorce education programs help some divorcing couples reconcile? Judges in western Michigan are currently seeking to launch such a pilot program. If some forms of divorce education or mediation are more conducive to reconciliation, the social and legal costs of divorce could be substantially reduced at relatively little extra costs (since court-connected mediation and education programs are already commonplace and often self-funding). Money for research and evaluation of such pilot programs should be a high priority.

Some have argued that any divorce intervention will prove futile in altering the behavior of people determined to split. Certainly in some cases, divorce or separation may be inevitable, or the best alternative. But are *all* couples who file for divorce absolutely determined or locked in the kind of angry conflict that makes divorce the best or only realistic alternative?

Research suggests otherwise. Well into the divorce process, a surprisingly high proportion of divorcing couples are ambivalent about their divorce decision. In one major study of divorcing couples, one-year after the divorce at least one spouse in three-quarters of divorcing couples reported second thoughts.⁴¹ Various state polls confirm that even many years later, a significant proportion of divorced people believe their divorce may have been a mistake. In New Jersey, for example, 46 percent of divorced people reported that they wished that they and their ex-spouse had tried harder to work through their differences.⁴² In one Minnesota poll, 40 percent of currently divorced people say they have at least some regrets about their divorce.⁴³ Sixty-six percent of currently divorced Minnesotans answered yes to the question "Looking back, do you wish you and your ex-spouse had tried harder to work through your differences?"⁴⁴

Qualitative research suggests that even among married couples who eventually choose to divorce, divorce was not necessarily inevitable or the best outcome: "At the same time that they listed complaints, however, divorcing people easily reported good things about their marriage. They liked having someone at home, someone to talk to about their day. They described camping trips, holidays and birthdays, the dream of having one's own family and

home. They loved their children. They described feelings of security, safety, and comfort . . . It seemed that many outcomes were possible in nearly every marriage that I learned about. The partners might have stayed together, for example. Or the noninitiating partner might have been the one to call the marriage off."⁴⁵ The majority of divorces today appear to be taking place in relatively low-conflict marriages. Less than a third of divorcing parents appeared to be in violent or high-conflict marriages.⁴⁶ One nationally representative study found that even absent any known intervention about a third of physically separated married couples successfully reconcile.⁴⁷

Thus, research suggests a substantial minority of couples filing for divorce may be candidates for successful reconciliation. Timing of interventions may be crucial. Standard divorce education programs, for example, appeared to be more effective if parents attended within a few weeks of filing rather than at a later period. In a pilot study of the influence of divorce education, 12.5 percent of parents attending a program within 3 weeks of the initial court hearing relitigated within two years, compared to 60 percent who attended a program at a later date. A replication study found a similar effect of timing of the intervention.⁴⁸

Government-funded pilot projects testing a variety of strategies and establishing best practices for meeting all three of these goals (reducing acrimony, litigation, and unnecessary divorce) could have a profound impact divorce rates, at relatively low cost. Court-connected programs are often self-funding, and can generally be spread by family court judges, or appended to existing court-connected divorce education programs. Evaluation research to establish effective practices, by contrast, is outside the reach of many local communities and private organizations.

CONCLUSION

Can government policy help strengthen marriage and reduce unmarried childbearing and divorce? Research suggests a variety of promising, non-coercive strategies to help young parents interested in marriage succeed, to educate young Americans on the importance of delaying childbearing until marriage, and to provide new support for at-risk couples in low-income communities. Marriage interventions work by signaling

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the importance of marriage, by helping build a wider infrastructure of marriage supports in at-risk communities, and by offering young parents the encouragement, hope, and skills that help make marriages succeed.

Even small reductions in rates of divorce and unmarried childbearing would carry a big payoff down the road: for children, who suffer when mothers and fathers fail to forge a good-enough marital bond; for taxpayers, who currently pay enormous costs for programs addressing problems generated (in part) by high rates of family fragmentation: including child support enforcement, TANF, Medicaid, food stamps, foster care, criminal justice programs, drug abuse, teen mothers, special education, drop-out prevention.

Government is deeply involved in the family lives of poor single parents and their children. Government actively instructs youths in the value of contraceptives, sexual abstinence, education, jobs, and delaying childbearing until the post-teen years. In this context, the absence of any government effort to support marriage

does not represent neutrality. Instead the message conveyed by the looming absence of the M-word in programs serving low-income couples and communities is: the government does not believe that marriage matters. Balancing supports and programming for single parents with a powerful marriage message is the minimum obligation a government concerned about the well being of poor children should assume. Absent such an effort, marriage and the powerful advantages it conveys to children and adults are likely to remain another middle-class entitlement, increasing dependency and economic inequality.

Americans are an optimistic people. We believe social problems demand solutions. The new consensus that marriage is a powerful protector of children has led to new calls to spread the benefits of marriage more equally. If public education, community and faith-based marriage interventions can help more youth avoid unwed childbearing, and more at-risk couples succeed in making their marriage dreams come true, it would be pound-foolish to remain content with the status quo.

FOOTNOTES

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27. Humanistic therapies (based on empathic listening by the counselor) were notably ineffective. See William R. Shadish et al., 1993. "Effects of Family and Marital Psychotherapies: A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 61(6): 992-1002.
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TESTIMONY OF
LEGAL MOMENTUM
ON WELFARE REFORM AND MARRIAGE INITIATIVES

SUBMITTED TO
Committee on Finance
U.S. SENATE

Subcommittee Hearing on the Benefits of Healthy Marriage

May 5, 2004

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**TESTIMONY OF LEGAL MOMENTUM ON
WELFARE REFORM AND MARRIAGE INITIATIVES**

Legal Momentum (formerly NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund) appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony on the issue of TANF Reauthorization and building stronger families.¹ We adhere to our long held belief that anti-poverty efforts must focus on initiatives that will empower individuals to become economically self-sufficient and permanently free them from poverty.

Legal Momentum is a leading national not-for-profit civil rights organization with a 31-year history of advocating for women's rights and promoting gender equality. Among Legal Momentum's major goals is securing economic justice for all. Throughout our history, we have used the power of the law to advocate for the rights of poor women. We have appeared before the Supreme Court of the United States in both gender discrimination and welfare cases, and have advocated for protection of reproductive and employment rights, increased access to child care, and reduction of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Our testimony today focuses on why, from a policy perspective, government involvement in personal issues of family formation would not reduce poverty, but would create a dangerous precedent for the individual liberty of all Americans. Emphasis on marriage and family formation sidesteps the underlying causes of poverty, particularly the poverty of women and children -- such as lack of job training and education, ongoing sex and race discrimination, violence and lack of child care. At a time of huge budget deficits and high unemployment it is irresponsible to spend over a billion dollars on untested, unproven marriage promotion programs. Further, government involvement in highly personal decisions such as marriage is a departure from our most basic principles; a threat not just to poor women, but to all citizens who believe that liberty entails making fundamental personal decisions without governmental interference. In addition, because of the prevalence of violence among women forced to turn to public assistance, promotion of marriage can raise particular and severe dangers. Finally, the amount of money currently being spent on marriage promotion by the Department of Health and Human Services is enormous, over \$100 million. The programs currently being funded have not been reviewed or tested to see if they are useful or successful. Common sense dictates treading cautiously in this area and waiting for the results of the programs already funded before throwing another \$1.6 billion at promotion of marriage among the poor.

Poll after poll shows that most Americans are against the government's involvement in individual decisions regarding marriage and oppose use of scarce public dollars to promote marriage. This is not surprising as Americans value their personal privacy and their right to make personal decisions free of government intrusion, and most adults who have experience with intimate relationships are rightfully skeptical that the government can or should try to influence them. Opposing use of scarce public dollars for this purpose is not the same as being "anti-marriage," but rather recognizes that there are some issues that should not involve government. In addition, it is important for those in Congress to remember that there are currently more non-marital families than married families in America. These include single, separated, divorced, widowed, cohabitating, gay and lesbian, and extended families, among others. Members of Congress are elected by members of these families as well as by those in traditional nuclear families and should care about supporting the well-being of all families, regardless of how they are constituted.

I. Federal and State Marriage Proposals

Both Federal and State initiatives with respect to marriage are alarming in their invasion of personal privacy and, at the same time, raise serious questions about the effective use of scarce government funds, the competence of government to administer programs dealing with intimate decisions such as marriage, and the very real possibility that marriage promotion programs will be administered in a way that discriminates against women. (A Federally funded marriage promotion program in Allentown, Pennsylvania did just that, offering employment skills training to the men but not the women in that program.) We are particularly concerned that scarce public funds will be diverted away from desperately needed economic supports, child care and job training into questionable programs unlikely to have any positive effect in reducing poverty.

Federal Initiatives: Current law allows but does not require states to use Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds for marriage promotion and for initiatives aimed at decreasing out of wedlock births. Proposals to reauthorize the TANF program (the House passed H.R. 4 and the Senate Finance Committee bill, PRIDE) include significant funding for marriage promotion initiatives. Although there is no new TANF funding for economic support in either bill, they both authorize \$100 million a year in specifically dedicated federal TANF funding for a Marriage Promotion competitive grant program. States would be required to match the \$100 million and would be allowed to use their basic federal TANF allocation to do so, thus potentially diverting an additional \$100 million of TANF funds from economic support to marriage promotion. Both bills also authorize an additional \$100 million a year for new TANF demonstration project funding to “be expended primarily” on “Healthy Marriage Promotion Activities.” Finally, both bills create a fatherhood program funded at \$20 million (in H.R. 4) a year “to promote and support involved, committed, and responsible fatherhood, and to encourage and support healthy marriages.”

Both bills also add new requirements that in order to participate in TANF, states must have a program to “encourage the formation and maintenance of healthy 2-parent married families” and must set “specific, numerical, and measurable performance objectives” for promoting such families. This language suggests that in order to qualify for any TANF funding, states might have to set numerical goals for increasing the state marriage rate and reducing the state divorce rate.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is already spending a great deal of money on marriage promotion – over \$77 million in contracts and over \$25 million in grants. Grant money has been taken from appropriations for the Child Support Enforcement Program (\$2.4 million),² from the Refugee Resettlement Program (\$9 million),³ from Child Welfare Programs (\$14 million),⁴ from the (Native American) Social And Economic Development Strategies Program (SEDS) (\$40 million),⁵ from the Assets For Independence Demonstration Program (\$16 million),⁶ and from the Developmental Disabilities Program (\$3 million).⁷

It is difficult to see why Congress should even consider hundreds of millions of dollars in new funding for marriage promotion before the results of the Administration’s evaluation projects are in. It is surely putting the cart before the horse to start a major new social program when the program’s potential effects are largely unknown and demonstration projects to identify and evaluate the effects are just getting off the ground. Last year, the Administration awarded contracts to several prominent national organizations to conduct large marriage promotion test projects with rigorous evaluation methodologies: Mathematica Policy Research, (\$19 million over nine years for the Building Strong Families demonstration and random-assignment evaluation project; MDRC (and other secondary contractors) \$38.5 million over nine years for the Supporting Healthy Marriages demonstration and

random-assignment evaluation project); and RTI International and the Urban Institute (\$20.4 million over seven years for evaluation of community wide initiatives to promote healthy marriage).⁸ Until the results of these projects are known, Congress should not even consider marriage promotion funding.

Even ignoring that the test results are not yet in, it is still difficult to see why Congress should consider additional marriage promotion funding when there seems to be no need for it. As detailed in the attached Legal Momentum memorandum on “HHS Marriage Promotion Activities”, the Administration has already committed tens of millions of dollars in existing funding to marriage promotion, and takes the position that there is no limit on the funding that it can make available for marriage promotion under its child support demonstration project authority.

HHS has also issued a “Compendium” of approaches for achieving “marriage promotion” goals, which is a likely indicator of the recommendations it would make to states for spending marriage promotion funds were such spending to be required. This Compendium suggests that states consider completely unproven and coercive methods, such as paying a \$2,000 cash bonus to poor couples who marry and reducing welfare payments to poor couples who choose not to marry. (“Strengthening Healthy Marriages: A Compendium of Approaches,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (August 2002), available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/region2/index.htm>.) The Compendium includes marriage promotion organizations that clearly should not receive large grants of tax dollars. Some of these organizations recommend reducing the divorce rate by restricting the right to divorce. Some teach that the husband should be the leader/breadwinner, and the wife the follower/homemaker. Several are for-profit commercial ventures which claim that they can help couples avoid divorce for a substantial fee. It is irresponsible for legislators to enact a program that threatens to divert government money intended to help the poor to fund the untested programs of such organizations.

Even witnesses at the Senate Finance Committee hearings on marriage promotion who spoke in favor of marriage conceded that we don’t yet know what works. Ron Haskins, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institute stated that “we know so little about marriage-promotion programs, especially with poor and low-income families.” Theodora Ooms of the Center on Law and Social Policy stated, “Given the lack of research on marriage related interventions, policy makers should proceed cautiously...” Even the Chairman of this Committee, Senator Charles Grassley of Iowa stated, “Do marriage programs effectively reduce dependence and foster a family’s well-being? We don’t know. There is still a great deal of uncertainty around the effectiveness of marriage promotion programs.”

With such a high degree of uncertainty around what works with respect to marriage promotion, with millions and millions of dollars already being spent on marriage promotion programs, why spend billions more of taxpayer dollars on these programs before the results are in on which may give direction to a whether such initiatives are successful and what types of programs work?

State Initiatives: As noted above, since 1996, states have been free to use TANF dollars to support marriage and two-parent families, although most states have not done so. States have instituted programs that range from a simple waste of public dollars to outright discrimination against struggling single parent families. These examples demonstrate the risks in pushing states to do more to promote marriage. For example:

- In Oklahoma, former Governor Frank Keating earmarked 10 percent of the state’s TANF surplus funds to fund the \$10 million Oklahoma Marriage initiative, which includes pre- and post-marital counseling to Oklahoma families, a marriage resource center, a marriage mentor program, and the

creation of a Marriage Scholars-in-Residence.⁹ The initiative also contains a specific “religious track” under which the state’s religious leaders sign a marriage covenant, thereby committing themselves to encourage pre-marital counseling for couples in their house of worship. A few months after Keating made his proposal, the state hired a pair of “marriage ambassadors” with a \$250,000 a year salary to give “relationship rallies” on school campuses as well as meeting with ministers and set up a research project. Last September the state spent \$16,000 flying in pro-marriage speakers from around the country for a two-day conference. It also developed a workshop called Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) that is offered in schools and community centers.¹⁰ Three years after Oklahoma implemented its marriage promotion programs, the state’s divorce rate has remained unchanged.¹¹

- West Virginia’s state TANF plan adds a \$100 marriage incentive to a family’s benefits if there is a legal marriage in a household where both individuals receive welfare assistance payments. Since West Virginia’s monthly TANF benefit for a family of three is \$328, this \$100 per month bonus makes a significant difference in economic support and gives children in poor married families a significant economic advantage over children whose poor single mothers have been unable or unwilling to marry.

Programs such as those described above divert funds from direct support of poor families or provision of services needed to support employment. Programs like that in West Virginia discriminate directly against poor single parent families. Endorsing or increasing funding for such programs is bad public policy.

II. Welfare Reform Reauthorization Should Not Focus on Marriage

Welfare reform reauthorization should focus on ending poverty. In order to accomplish that goal, we must focus on the barriers to economic self-sufficiency rather than marriage by investing in education, training and work supports to help families and individuals get to a point where they can survive and prosper, whether married or not.

A. The American Public Overwhelmingly Rejects Governmental Involvement in Personal Decisions to Marry. According to the PEW Forum on Religion & Public Life opinion poll, there is broad opposition to government programs aimed at encouraging marriage. Nearly eight in ten Americans (79%) want the government to stay out of this area, while just 18% endorse such pro-marriage programs. While those with a high level of religious commitment are more likely to favor these programs, fully two-thirds (66%) in that category do not want the government to get involved.¹² In addition, Americans also strongly reject any proposal that would divert welfare resources for the poor into marriage promotion programs. A recent poll conducted on behalf of the National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support shows that a mere five percent of those surveyed select marriage promotion as the number-one welfare priority for Congress, while fully 62% cite work support for people moving from welfare to good jobs as the top priority.¹³ Similarly, a poll conducted for the Ms. Foundation found that less than three percent of Americans believe the principal goal of the welfare system should be to promote marriage and discourage out-of-wedlock birth.¹⁴ By contrast, giving people the skills needed to achieve self-sufficiency received the most support. Most recently, a survey conducted for the Annie E. Casey Foundation also found that proposals to promote marriage through welfare programs do not meet with even superficial public support. A solid 64% of those surveyed reject proposals to provide financial bonuses to mothers on welfare who marry the father of their children, and over 70% believe pushing people to get married is the wrong priority for Congress.¹⁵

B. Reauthorization Should Not Coerce Low-Income Women into Giving Up Their Fundamental Rights to Privacy. The Supreme Court has long recognized an individual's right to privacy regarding decisions to marry and reproduce as "one of the basic civil rights of man, fundamental to our very existence and survival."¹⁶ Significantly, this constitutional right equally protects the choice *not* to marry.¹⁷ Reproductive privacy, initially honored as a right of marital privacy,¹⁸ has been firmly established as a protected right of the individual, irrespective of marital status.¹⁹ According to the Supreme Court, "if the right of privacy means anything, it is the right of the individual, married or single, to be free from unwarranted governmental intrusion into matters so fundamentally affecting a person as the decision whether to bear or beget a child."²⁰ Furthermore, the U.S. Supreme Court has specifically rejected the use of the welfare system to try to influence the marriage decisions of a child's parents. In National Welfare Rights Organization v. Cahill, 411 U.S. 619 (1973), a New Jersey welfare provision that limited benefits to families where there were two adults "ceremonially married to each other" was struck down as a violation of the Constitution's Equal Protection Clause. The Court held that penalizing children by restricting welfare benefits to them because of the marital decisions of their parents "is illogical and unjust."

Government programs promoting marriage may invade this right to privacy and may encourage the kind of differential treatment of children in non-marital families that the Supreme Court condemned in NWRO v. Cahill. They certainly pose concerns regarding voluntariness and coercion. It is critical that if Congress insists on funding these programs with tax dollars, that they neither require nor encourage incentives for states to coerce low-income women into trading away their fundamental rights to marry or not to marry. As such, federal mandates on states to set numerical goals are not appropriate. Obviously, voluntariness is key to a non-coercive program, and strong protections regarding non-coercion should be included, although it is hard to conceive of provisions that would genuinely protect voluntariness in a program that supplies a lifeline to desperate families in need of help in supporting their children. Along the same lines, states must not be permitted to discriminate based on marital status or family formation. To that end, TANF reauthorization should include language that prohibits states from treating equally needy families differently based on marital status or family formation. This will correct discriminatory policies and practices against married families, without swinging the pendulum to permit discrimination against single or cohabitating families.

C. The Staggering Prevalence of Domestic Violence Among Women on Welfare Presents an Insurmountable Challenge to "Healthy Marriage" Promotion within TANF. When considering marriage promotion within the context of TANF, Congress must face the reality that violence is one of the main causes of women's poverty. Domestic violence makes women poor and keeps them poor. Violence is not an exception to the rule for poor women; it is an overwhelming reality. Study after study demonstrates that a large proportion of the welfare caseload (consistently between 15% and 25%) consists of current victims of serious domestic violence.²¹ Between half and two thirds of the women on welfare have suffered domestic violence or abuse at some time in their adult lives.²² Moreover, by an overwhelming margin, these women's abusers are most often the fathers of their children.

For these women and their children, marriage is not the solution to economic insecurity. For them marriage could mean death or serious injury; it will almost undoubtedly mean economic dependence on an abuser. In the population as a whole, many battered women are economically dependent on their abusers; 33-46% of women surveyed in five studies said their partner prevented them from working entirely.²³ Those who are permitted to work fare little better. Ninety-six percent reported that they had experienced problems at work due to domestic violence, with over 70% having been harassed at

work, 50% having lost at least three days of work a month as a result of the abuse, and 25% having lost at least one job due to the domestic violence.²⁴ Thus, battered women are overwhelmingly either economically dependent on the abuser or are economically unstable due to the abuse.

Those who would promote marriage in every circumstance sometimes claim that marriage decreases domestic violence. This idea ignores many realities of domestic violence. Most importantly, married victims are less likely to report the abuse. In addition, separation and divorce frequently incite batterers to increase the frequency and level of violence.²⁵

The experience of Oklahoma, clearly the leader in spending public dollars for marriage promotion, is instructive. In a survey of Oklahoma families, referred to in testimony by the Director of Public Welfare in that State when testifying before Congress, it was discovered that almost half (44%) of the state's divorced women cited domestic violence as a reason for their divorce.²⁶ More than half (57%) of Oklahoma's divorced welfare mothers, the prime target of government marriage promotion efforts, cited domestic violence as a reason for their divorce.²⁷ Oklahoma is by no means unique. Around the country, in survey after survey, low income women report high double digit domestic violence rates.

Should the government encourage women to get married or stay married to men who abuse them? Certainly, proponents of government marriage promotion do not intend this. But common sense suggests that this will be the inevitable result of a government "get married and do not divorce" message, especially when success is measured by superficial statistics such as the divorce rate.

Congress itself has repeatedly recognized that domestic violence is a serious national problem and has made efforts to minimize the severe risk to women and children from that violence, most recently by reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act in 2000. But marriage promotion for TANF recipients ignores the reality of domestic violence. It ignores its pervasiveness: assertions that proponents intend to promote only "healthy marriages" lose credibility in the face of the reality that as many as two-thirds of TANF recipients report incidents of domestic violence. Surveys of low-income women in several cities show that two of the four main reasons for not marrying are fear of domestic violence and fear of a power imbalance.²⁸ Requiring marriage promotion programs to consult with domestic and sexual violence experts and child advocates on the development and implementation of policies, procedures, and training necessary to appropriately address domestic and sexual violence and child abuse issues, as specified in PRIDE, will provide some security. But even these safeguards will not make marriage promotion within TANF safe. Furthermore, the House passed version of H.R. 4 lacks even the most rudimentary protections for domestic violence victims; domestic violence is not mentioned in the legislation and, therefore, use of marriage promotion dollars to keep women in abusive marriages or to help persuade them to marry their abuser is a very real threat. Finally, our review of current grant applications to HHS for marriage promotion funds indicates that very few programs include any consideration of domestic violence issues in their applications.

Those who say that marriage promotion will only be done in relationships where there is no violence are clueless about the dynamic of domestic violence and the very clear truth that most women who are victims of violence are ashamed and afraid and extremely unlikely to offer the reveal the violence in their lives to others. Many victims fear the potential consequences of acknowledging the abuse: the stigma of being a domestic violence victim; the very real possibility of losing their children to child welfare agencies; the possibility that disclosure of violence will escalate the abuse. Marriage promotion programs, no matter how "sensitive" to domestic violence on paper, cannot change the fact that those promoting marriage will probably not know about

violence in the relationship they are trying to make legally permanent. Thus, programs that push poor women into marriage with the fathers of their children may inadvertently legitimize abusive situations; similarly, programs that discourage divorce may increase the already deep shame and social pressure to remain with the abuser that women who are married and are being abused often feel. A governmental message to poor women who are violence victims that there is something wrong with being unmarried will make it even more difficult for women who are trying to leave an abusive relationship to do so. The complexity of domestic violence and the danger to women who stay in or formalize abusive relationships make any government-sponsored marriage promotion program extremely problematic.

TANF currently includes a Family Violence Option (FVO) allowing states to confidentially screen for domestic violence, refer to services, and modify or waive program requirements that would be unsafe or unfair to victims of domestic violence. Although nearly all states have adopted some version of the FVO, not all states have done so. With such an overwhelming correlation between violence and poverty, it is both troubling and illogical that Congress would consider mandating marriage promotion and providing significant financial incentives for states to fund marriage promotion while not requiring states to address domestic violence through the FVO. At a minimum, Congress should require all states to screen for domestic violence and refer individuals to services and should invest TANF dollars in case worker training, a study of best practices with respect to addressing domestic violence in TANF, and dissemination of those best practices to all states to help them address this very real barrier to economic security.

D. Marriage Does Not Address the Root Causes of Women's Poverty and Is Not a Reliable Long-Term Solution to Women's Poverty. Common sense tells us that two incomes are better than one and thus more likely to move people off of welfare. But a closer look at the facts shows that marriage is not the simple solution to poverty that it is made out to be.

First, forming a two-parent family does not guarantee economic security. Forty percent of all families living in poverty are two-parent families. Thus, two-parent families are not immune to poverty or the economic stresses single parent families face.

Second, due to death and divorce, marriage does not ensure women's economic security. Approximately 40% of marriages end in divorce²⁹ and 12% end due to the husband's death.³⁰ Among women currently on welfare, about 40% are married or were married at one time: 18.4% are married; 12.3% are separated; 8.3% are divorced; and about 1% are widows. A significant number of divorces and separations are due to domestic violence. In these cases it is futile to claim that marriage would provide security, economic or otherwise. Indeed, there is no simple causal relationship between single motherhood and poverty.

The reasons that women, more than men, experience an economic downfall outside of marriage include: primary care giving responsibility for children which -- without attendant employment protections and due to lack of quality, affordable, accessible child care -- makes unemployment or underemployment inevitable; discrimination in the labor market; and domestic violence. Without addressing the factors that keep women from being economically self-sufficient, marriage and family formation advocates are merely proposing to shift women's "dependence" from the welfare system to marriage. That certainly does not promote individual responsibility, nor is it a policy solution for genuine, reliable, economic security.

On the other hand, a policy that invests in education, training and work supports empowers women to achieve true economic security. In 2000, only 1.2% of single mothers with a college degree who worked full-time year round lived in poverty. Less than eight percent of single mothers with some college working full-time lived in poverty.³¹ This is by far the best poverty reduction statistic; a clear indication of what strategy will work best in lifting families out of poverty.

In fact, the approach to marriage advocated by H.R. 4 and PRIDE has it backwards. Economic security is more likely to lead to successful marriage than is marriage likely to lead to economic security. The outcomes of the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) support this conclusion. MFIP reached welfare-eligible single and two-parent families and focused on participation in employment services for long-term welfare recipients combined with financial incentives to encourage and support work. These work supports include child care, medical care, and rewarding work by helping the family to develop enough earning power to survive financially without cash assistance before cutting off their benefits. A study comparing the economic progress of those in the standard AFDC welfare program with MFIP participants found that only 14% of AFDC recipients compared with 25% of families in the MFIP program were out of poverty within 2-¼ years and the MFIP families had on average \$1400 more in annual income. After 36 months MFIP participants were 40% more likely to be married than participants in the standard AFDC program, and nearly 50% less likely to be divorced after five years. The MFIP program shows that allowing families to combine welfare and work, and providing work supports to help individuals become economically secure, are approaches that will strengthen marriage and reduce divorce.³²

Investments in education, training and work supports can both empower women to achieve economic security (thereby economically empowering couples as well) and strengthen marriages. If Congress takes this approach it can enable individuals to achieve their own goals, without invading their privacy or endangering their families.

Conclusion

The solution to poverty is not to interfere with basic privacy rights of poor women but rather to focus on economic self-sufficiency. Decisions regarding marriage and childbearing are among the most private decisions an individual can make. Congress must not use women's economic vulnerability as an excuse for attempting to control their decisions regarding marriage and childbearing. Fighting poverty and promoting family well-being will depend on positive governmental support for proven policies that support low income parents in their struggle to obtain and retain good jobs, while at the same time providing the best possible care for their children. That in turn is the best way to insure healthy and stable families.

¹ The authors would like to thank Shawn Chang for his invaluable assistance in completing this testimony.

² See HHS 5/9/03 press release "ACF Approves Child Support Demonstrations in Michigan and Idaho," available at http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/acf_news.html; and HHS 7/4/03 press release "ACF Approves Child Support Demonstration In Virginia," available at http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/acf_news.html.

³ 67 Fed. Reg. 45131-45136 (July 8, 2002); 68 Fed. Reg. 34617-34726 (June 10, 2003); 68 Fed. Reg. 43142-47 (July 21, 2003).

⁴ 68 Fed. Reg. 34609-34614 (June 10, 2003).

⁵ 67 Fed. Reg. 59736-59746 (Sept. 23, 2002); 69 Fed. Reg. 8266-8288 (Feb. 23, 2004).

⁶ <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/fy2003ocsfunding/section2a.html>

⁷ 68 Fed. Reg. 41816-41828

⁸ See October 3, 2003 ACF press release "ACF Announces Four New Projects to Study Healthy Marriage," available at http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/news/press/2003/release_101003.htm; Ooms, Bouchet, & Parke, "Beyond Marriage Licenses: Efforts in States to Strengthen Marriage and Two-Parent Families. A State by State Snapshot", Center for Law and Social Policy (April 2004).

⁹ Supra Note 156.

¹⁰ Tyre, Peg. "Oklahoma is fighting its sky-high divorce rate with controversial, state-funded "marriage ambassadors." Newsweek, Feb. 18, 2002, U.S. Edition.

¹¹ Ross, Bobby Jr. "Divorce rate stays steady, study shows" The Daily Oklahoman (2/10/2002). Citing that for every 100 marriage licenses issued in 2001, the state granted 76 divorce petitions.

¹² The PEW Research Center for the People & the Press and the PEW Forum on Religion & Public Life, "American Struggle with Religion's Role at Home and Abroad," News Release, March 20, 2002. at 3.

¹³ Peter D. Hart Research Associates. "TANF/Welfare Survey Findings." National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support Memo, April 12, 2002, at 1.

¹⁴ Ms. Foundation for Women. "Americans Say Welfare Should Provide Self-Sufficiency Skills, Move People Out of Poverty - Not Promote Marriage." (February 6, 2002) at 1.

¹⁵ Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. "Memorandum to Advocates for Low-Income Families."

¹⁶ Skinner v. Oklahoma ex rel. Williamson, 316 U.S. 535, 541 (1942).

¹⁷ Loving v. Virginia, 388 U.S. 1, 12 (1967).

¹⁸ Griswold v. Connecticut, 381 U.S. 479, 495 (1965).

¹⁹ Eisenstadt v. Baird 405 U.S. 438, 453-54 (1972).

²⁰ Id. at 453.

²¹ See Jody Raphael & Richard M. Tolman, Taylor Inst. and the Univ. of Mich. Research Dev. Ctr. on Poverty, Risk and Mental Health, *Trapped by Poverty, Trapped by Abuse: New Evidence Documenting the Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Welfare*, 12 (1997).

²² See Mary Ann Allard, et al., McCormack Inst., *In Harm's Way? Domestic Violence, AFDC Receipt and Welfare Reform in Mass.*, 12, 14 (1997) (64.9% of 734 women); Ellen L. Bassuck, et al., *The Characteristics and Needs of Sheltered Homeless and Low-Income Housed Mothers*, 276 JAMA 640 at 12, 20 (1996) (61.0% of 220 women); William Curcio, *Passaic County Study of AFDC Recipients in a Welfare-to-Work Program: A Preliminary Analysis*, 12, 14 (1997) (57.3% of 846 women).

²³ See United States General Accounting Office, Report to Congressional Committees, *Domestic Violence: Prevalence and Implications for Employment Among Welfare Recipients*, 7 (1998).

²⁴ See Joan Zorza, *Woman Battering: High Costs and the State of the Law*, 25 Clearinghouse Rev. 421 (1991).

²⁵ See Einat Peled, *Parenting by Men Who Abuse Women: Issues and Dilemmas*, Brit. J. Soc. Work, Feb. 2000, at 28.

²⁶ "Marriage in Oklahoma, 2001 Baseline Survey on Marriage and Divorce," at 16, available at http://www.okmarriage.org/pdf/survey_report.pdf

²⁷ Private communication to NOW Legal Defense & Education Fund from Oklahoma official; copy available upon request.

²⁸ Kathryn Edin, Joint Center for Poverty Research Working Papers, What Do Low-Income Single Mothers Say About Marriage?, Aug. 9, 2001, available at http://www.jcpr.org/wpfiles/edin_WP_ediforweb1-31.pdf.

²⁹ The National Marriage Project, *Annual Report: the State of Our Unions: the Social Health of Marriage in America*, 2000 (June 2000), available at <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/NMPAR2000.pdf>.

³⁰ United States Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series No. P20-514, *Marriage Status and Living Arrangements: March 1998 (Update)* (2000), available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/99pubs/p20-514u.pdf>.

³¹ Neil G. Bennett, et. al., National Center for Children in Poverty, *Young Children in Poverty: A Statistical Update*, June 17, 1999, available at <http://cpmnet.columbia.edu/dept/nccp/99uptext.html>.

³² Manpower Demonstration Research Corp. (MDRC), chap. 6, available at <http://www.mdrc.org/Reports2000/MFIP/MFIP-Vol-1-Adult.pdf>.

TESTIMONY OF
STOP FAMILY VIOLENCE
ON WELFARE REFORM AND MARRIAGE INITIATIVES

SUBMITTED TO
Committee on Finance
U.S. SENATE

Subcommittee Hearing on the Benefits of Healthy Marriage

May 5, 2004

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Marriage Diaries

Pending legislation that would reauthorize the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Program includes a proposal by President Bush to spend \$1.5 billion on government marriage promotion programs. This proposal is a waste of taxpayer money that will increase the risk of domestic violence, fail to stop the rise in poverty, and do nothing for the institution of marriage. Women are 40% more likely to be poor than men. And women on welfare need education, job training and child care more than ever to be able to compete in the marketplace. To squander \$1.5 billion on unproven programs urging marriage upon poor women, particularly in this economy, is fiscally foolish and morally reprehensible.

Iowa -- "Women and children cannot be expected to stay in situations where they are hurt and exploited. Promoting more marriage is NOT the answer! In doing this, you are telling women that their government (which is supposed to protect them) would rather see them beaten... than help them achieve a better life. Please continue to help these women and children, as government assistance helped my family."

Of particular concern are the increased risks of domestic violence associated with such a program. The reality is that as many as 60% of women welfare recipients are survivors of domestic violence. These women need economic security so they can escape abuse, not government pressure to remain with their abusers. The Administration claims that it would never pressure someone to marry, or remain with, her abuser. But there are no provisions in the House marriage promotion proposals to ensure that officials will screen out couples in abusive relationships. It is therefore vital that if marriage promotion provisions are ultimately passed, the protections included in the Senate bill be retained and or strengthened and be included in any final welfare reauthorization bill. Trying to escape an abusive relationship can be one of the hardest things for a woman to do, particularly when a woman is financially dependent on her abuser. Women need to hear about how to leave the relationship, not get lectures on how to work through typical marital strife or cash incentives that risk further danger.

Montana -- We must protect women in this country by not forcing marriage upon anyone. [Marriage] is not the solution to poverty or violence. Job skills, child care, and a focus on the person who perpetuates the violence rather than the victims of violence are the only ways that women living in poverty will be able to leave poverty and begin to support themselves.

Government marriage promotion sends the message that the way out of poverty for women is dependence on someone else to act as a breadwinner, rather than economic self-sufficiency. They divert welfare funds from basic economic supports; coercively intrude on private decisions; place domestic violence victims at increased risk; waste public funds on ineffective policies and inappropriately limit state flexibility.

Pennsylvania -- "If I hadn't been able to count on welfare to escape a dangerous marriage I fear my children would be without a mother today! I suffered a lot of abuse before I finally took my children and fled in secrecy. I thank god welfare provided a way for me to leave the torture of a dangerous marriage before I became another death statistic. Getting re-married to get out of poverty is such a simplistic and ignorant solution to such a horrific way of life that for an abused woman and her children it's a condemnation to more of the same."

These *Marriage Diaries* have been collected by the organization Stop Family Violence, and they provide real examples of how critical it is not to coerce women into marriage as a means to move them out of poverty, but rather to provide them with education, job training, child care, domestic violence-related services, and health care – programs that will help move them out of violent relationships, as well as out of poverty. Unproven marriage promotion programs divert precious funds away from what we know works.

Inside, you'll find narratives submitted by women from Arkansas, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Montana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee. These powerful stories (a small sample of the hundreds received from around the United States) show the importance of public assistance -- including education, training, counseling, child-care, food stamps and health care -- in helping women escape domestic violence and become self sufficient. For more information on marriage promotion, as well as diaries from other states, please contact Irene Weiser at iw@stopfamilyviolence.org or visit www.stopfamilyviolence.org.

ARKANSAS

I know this is hard to believe. I couldn't believe it either. On the day of our wedding, my husband-to-be threw me down a flight of steps, and said; "Now you know how it's going to be and who's the boss." Up to that moment in our relationship, he had been perfectly charming. I went through the service and it took six months and many beatings before I got out of the marriage.

IOWA

Growing up, I knew that the relationship between my mother and father wasn't good. He was physically and emotionally abusive to her, and I remember hearing their yelling and him hitting her at night. I remember one morning, I woke up and found her in the bathtub, bruised, and covered in vomit--he had beaten her unconscious and she threw up all over herself. I was 5 years old. He sexually abused my sister and I, and even 20 years later we are both still dealing with the consequences of HIS actions. Mom tried to get help from family on both sides, but they all told her that she needed to keep her mouth shut, [and] be a "better wife." When I was 6 years old they finally got divorced, and the three of us were on our own. Dad was only ordered to pay \$150 per month in child support, which was not nearly enough to cover our needs. My mom was humiliated the day she had to go in and apply for welfare, and cried the first time she used food stamps in the grocery store. That government assistance helped provide childcare and meet our basic needs so that mom could go to work. Welfare gave us enough of a cushion that she could take that leap to self-sufficiency. Over the next year, Mom worked three jobs (simultaneously) and was able to get off of welfare. She was lucky that she already had a college education--jobs would have been a lot scarcer without that.

Women and children cannot be expected to stay in situations where they are hurt and exploited. Promoting more marriage is NOT the answer! In doing this, you are telling women that their government (which is supposed to protect them) would rather see them beaten and their children raped than help them achieve a better life. Please continue to help these women and children, as government assistance helped my family all those years ago.

KENTUCKY

My ex-husband and I had dated for over a year. He was possessive and quick to anger but he was never violent. I didn't know the red flags of domestic violence. When he proposed we decided to have pre-marital counseling to help work on the problems. We were in counseling with a minister at a counseling center and he diagnosed him with manic depression and told me that medication would help and that a lot of people had it and lived fairly normal lives. Looking back now I can see a lot of red flags that he missed. He even married us. One week and one day from the day we got married came the first of many beatings. The counselor sent him to a doctor and he changed his medicine. This started a chain of doctor and hospital stays. After eight months of beatings, doctors and hospitals I had enough. I filed for divorce but later found out I was pregnant. Just to clarify, I was on two birth control methods and only having sex when forced. The law in KY would not let me divorce him while I was pregnant. So I began working with a domestic violence advocate on how to get away safely. He stalked me, beat me, harassed me, [and] threatened me, and the most time he ever got was three days in jail. He tried to kill me in 1997 after I proceeded with the divorce. [Our divorce] was final Nov. 27, 1997. Three days later he came to my home at 3:00am and turned off my electric at the main breaker outside and began a four-hour game of harassing and threatening me, and running from the police. He was finally caught and taken to jail. We went to trial May of 1998 and he was convicted of felony stalking and sentenced to 3 years in jail. He even told the judge that I still belonged to him because he didn't sign the divorce papers. He said he wasn't finished with me. He got released March 1999. I had to

leave my home, family and friends and relocate. It doesn't seem fair that I am still a victim. He gets to go on with his life as before with his friends and family but I can't. My children and I have had to lower our standard of living. I can't pay my bills, I can't afford to get my children the things they need but I make too much to receive assistance. It is not fair. Something needs to be done to change the law. He should be the one in exile, living in a sub-standard environment, not us. This is a condensed version of the hell I went through. The laws are a joke, the assistance offered is not adequate and he has a life I don't. I will never date again. I have absolutely no desire for any kind of relationship, how dare someone suggest marriage!!!! He may as well have succeeded in killing me in 1997. Cindy

⌘

I am a victim advocate for victims of domestic violence. I feel that one reason in Kentucky why women get caught in the cycle of violence is they feel trapped in the relationship with the abuser. If women are married to those individuals, they [become] more trapped. Getting married is not the answer to ending domestic violence--the answer is more services, more education, and better understanding and empathy of society. Women need to feel like they do not need a man to survive in the 21st century!!

⌘

In December of 1990 my fairy nightmare began. I married my sweetheart just months after meeting him. We were on top of the world. The day of the wedding, he turned violent. I remained for 2 and 1/2 years before deciding that I was not going to be able to repair him & live a normal life. Marriage allowed my husband the "authority" to do with me however they chose. Encouraging women to marry is reckless and irresponsible. I have just recently, 10 years after my divorce, found that I have enough confidence and self-sufficiency to marry. Please stop this ludicrous encouragement of [trying to marry] off the welfare lists.
Jennifer

LOUISIANA

"I was married to a man for 8 months, [and] had known him less than a year when we got married. I thought he was my soul mate. I discovered after a few months that he was an alcoholic, and when cocaine was around he 'had' to have some. One night after drinking about half a fifth of whiskey and snorting some coke, he physically threw me out of the house. I didn't go back then, we divorced, but he continued to stalk me and threaten my family and me. After he 'dried out' for several months, our relationship started again. He promised to never drink again. Long story short, he started drinking again and violence became a part of my life. Not only was there the emotional, mental, and financial abuse, there was more physical abuse. I have stared down the barrel of a .357, being promised that he would take my life in a second. I have had that same .357 fired into the concrete floor of our house and had bullet fragments & concrete miss my left eye by less than an inch. I have been beaten, had teeth knocked loose, [and] been told that he would kill me and everyone in my family if that's what it took. The last night I spent in our house, he choked me, screamed in my ear that women didn't deserve respect that they were worthless, except for one thing - sex, had my head slammed into the concrete floor, had my clothes torn off my body, [and] had bruises and scratches on various parts of my body. He then told me to get the ** out of his house and life. I immediately threw on clothes and grabbed my purse - the whole time praying I would get out of the driveway before he could open the safe containing an SK47 and an AK47 along with lots of ammo. By the grace of God I escaped and survived. I am a very low statistic. We had counseling and he would tell the counselor exactly what they wanted to hear, just as he would tell me that he would quit drinking, get a job and start treating me the way I deserved to be treated - like a human. But he never did. Please, please do not tell these women that marriage is the solution for them and their children. Marriage is NOT a solution - it can become the end to the lives of their children and them or it can make those children orphans.
Gail Kilman"

MAINE

"Although I agree that a healthy marriage is a better environment to raise children in then as a struggling single mother living below the poverty level, I don't agree that spending 1.5 billion to campaign this is the answer.

I am a third generation woman of single mothers raising children while living in poverty. I am also a third generation woman who has escaped living the cycle of domestic violence and child abuse. I have worked extremely hard, since I discovered I was pregnant 8 years ago, to escape these many dysfunctional cycles that has plagued my family for generations. I have been able to do this fairly successfully with government-funded programs that help young single mothers who are living in poverty. I have been involved in many programs since the conception of my son 8 years ago.

First starting at a free prenatal class for young, single mothers at the local YWCA. After the birth of my son I became involved in the Teen Center Program, for young, single mothers through the same YWCA. I also took parenting classes, self esteem workshops, a fitness & nutrition class, and I enrolled in the counseling services. Much of this [was] made possible through Medicaid. While involved in this program, I gained the support, encouragement, and self-worth I needed to make a very important decision: to leave my son's abusive father. Before beginning this program I was being medicated with Prozac, which was freely given to me through my physician without any counseling for my suicidal thoughts & anxiety. Shortly after leaving my son's father, I was able to stop taking the Prozac, [and] by this time I was being counseled through the YWCA. I had been depressed and suicidal because of the awful relationship I was involved in. I didn't have a strong, healthy, [and] supportive family [that] I could turn to because they were struggling with their own dysfunctions.

While working with the Teen Center Program I got childcare assistance through Child Care Connections and was able to get myself a job, which was also one of the reasons I stayed so long in my unhealthy relationship, I didn't know if I would be able to support myself. Over the next two years I went to work at a remedial job and went to college. I was able to do this because of a strong financial aid package, and was able to keep my child in daycare because of the childcare subsidy I was receiving. By this time I had also been involved in programs such as WIC and food stamps. With my new college degree I was able to get a very nice job with benefits. The years have passed now, my job has become more and more lucrative and for the first time since MY birth I am not involved in ANY welfare program and I am not receiving ANY funding or assistance from any program. I am 27 years old. But I can be absolutely sure that I would not be the person I am today if it was not for the help of these programs. The reason I write all this is because women who grow up like me need support, encouragement, and self-confidence to create better lives for themselves and for their children. I don't believe the way to achieve those things is through marriage, especially when you are young and leaving a cycle of dysfunction, which is the only life you have ever known. As new adults, out on our own for the first time, we tend to make poor decisions based on the knowledge and experience we have lived with all our lives. We need opportunities to heal & grow as people. I suggest we use that money to fund programs that will help these young women find direction with their lives, help them find the support, encouragement and ultimately self-worth they will need to build successful lives. We are not all fortunate to be born in to homes where love and happiness is plentiful. Some of us, by no choice of our own, are born into homes of great pain, pain of all kinds. We live in fear from day to day, and we make drastic decisions that will do anything to help get us out of these environments. If we want to solve this problem, we need to go to the root. We need to continuously work on ways to help break these cycles of dysfunction. We need to offer support to those people who are fighting hard everyday to find a new way to live their lives."

xi

"Three weeks after I was "married" and five months pregnant, my "husband" severely battered me, throwing me against a wall, kicking my legs, and hitting my back with his closed fist 14 times! Then he got into a karate kicking position [and tried] to kill our unborn son, his FIRST and ONLY child and me! I threw him off balance and fled out into the night. For the next 3 hours into a neighborhood in Redondo Beach, California, that I did NOT know. He

beat me 5 more times before he finally left, including strangling me because I was wrapping our son's first Christmas presents.

After totally depleting my entire inheritance, and abducting our son in Maine and taking him back to California, I had to go on complete welfare, effective 2001. It is only [because of] SSI, Section-8, and Food Stamps that I am beginning to deal with all the PTSD and severe depression his unrelenting abuse caused. Finally, I am just beginning to rediscover the woman and person I was before I met him in 1988 in Maine, and was severely abused by him in California, physically, emotionally, and psychologically; and IN THE COURTS!

However, in CONTEMPT of OUTSTANDING, current CA Superior Visitation Court Orders, I have NOT seen my son now for 11 years, AND I have not had any phone or mail contact with my son now for 3 years.... per the CA Superior Court Visitation Court Order of 1994!

No, marriage is NOT for poor women who are victims of violent batterers!"

MASSACHUSETTS

I have not personally been a victim of domestic violence, but I work at a social service agency that offers, among other things, a domestic violence program and mental health counseling. A cardinal rule that we abide by here is to not offer marriage or couples therapy to couples with a history of domestic violence. There is never any reason for a woman to remain in an abusive relationship. The best thing that a woman in poverty or an abusive situation can do is to get out of it by becoming self-sufficient. With the help of the government and agencies like mine, we can empower abused women to make a life for themselves without the "help" of an abusive partner. The proposed budget for this plan would be much better spent on education, child-care and career counseling.

■

I'm a therapist who currently works in a battered women's shelter; prior to this I did family stabilization (short-term, intensive home-based work w/at-risk youth and their families). While the vast majority of my clients have been poor, single-parent families, the idea that marriage will come to their rescue and to imply in any way that the lack of a legal commitment to a man who is also poor, who is often abusive, and often abusing substances. First of all, good luck even finding the father(s) of the women's children. These are women whose lives are often at risk because these men have been at worst dangerous and violent, at best irresponsible and non-committal. How about starting with teaching boys to be responsible, caring, sensitive, committed partners and teaching girls to be empowered, in control of their own lives, teaching them they have choices? How about starting with quality, honest, sex education that includes information about birth control and HIV protection? How about expanding outreach and mental health services in schools and communities so that the trauma epidemic can be addressed and young people can heal and get in the driver's seat in their lives? What century does Bush think he's living in?

■

I am a social worker in Massachusetts and have been working primarily with low-income Latino women for fourteen years. I know from listening to [the life stories of] many women that domestic violence is rampant in our society. Keeping women in an abusive relationship victimizes children, and is not the answer to poverty in our society. Taking financial resources away from mothers only further ensures that the next generation will continue to live in poverty. Supporting marriages will not solve the problem of poverty. This is my firm belief after spending my entire working career listening to the life stories of women in color living in poverty.

H

"In 1980 I divorced my first husband because he was a violent alcoholic. Back then, there was a program called the W.I.N. Program, I believe in stood for Women In Need. This Program was handled through the local welfare office in Southbridge, Massachusetts. The program allowed me to attend a secretarial program at the MacKinnon Training Center; it reimbursed me for my mileage, provided day care for my 3 yr old son. It also helped restore my self-esteem and self-worth. Before completion of the course, I finished all the necessary curriculum and was hired on a temporary basis at a hospital as a ward clerk to fill in for someone out on maternity leave. I took the position to obtain the experience and to have something on my resume. However at the end of the eight weeks she decided not to return and the job was offered to me. I stayed at the job for five years, during which time I passed the National Unit Secretary Exam. I then went to work for my local school department in the Business Office, starting out as a clerk, I worked there for 16 years and left as the Secretary to the Asst. to the Superintendent, transferring to the Police Department as Records Clerk. By the way, I have been remarried for the past 17 years. I do know that should anything happen to my husband, I can and will be able to take care of my daughter and myself.

So instead of looking to marry off people on welfare, you should be looking to make them productive human beings with a sense of pride and purpose. Those people will then pass on to their children the same sense of pride and purpose making this country a more productive place. I strongly agree that there needs to be welfare reform. However, I take GREAT OFFENSE to the Cupid Project as another male way of insulting and degrading the women of America. Our constitution states, "All men are created equal..." Let us all live by that and provide single/divorced parents male or female with the assistance and education to support their families-- instead of just marrying them off and making them a MAN'S responsibility."

MONTANA

Hi, my name is Maggie Bagon and I fled an abusive marriage. Even though I had a restraining order against him after he fractured my skull, he still continued to stalk me and threaten to kill me on a continuous basis. The police stated that [the] threats were nothing and unless he did something they would not interfere. I moved back to Montana where I had friends who promised to help me. Rural Montana had few jobs so I went on welfare to make sure my kids had a home and medical coverage. If I had been forced to try to maintain my marriage I would not be writing this today as I am sure that I would be dead...and in fact my ex's next girlfriend was murdered by him.

H

I am a Crime Victim Advocate who works in the criminal justice system. Just last week a woman came into my office to receive an Order of Protection against her husband. The story she told me is a good example of why this legislation is a bad idea. Because this woman did not have potatoes ready for dinner one night, her husband became angry and violent. He gave her a black eye in front of their children. The next Sunday she went to church (one that professes to be very community-oriented, and tight-knit) and NOT ONE PERSON asked about her eye. Her mother, who does not belong to the same church, called the pastor to ask that he intervene with the husband (who respected the pastor). The next time this woman saw the pastor, he said to her, "You just need to do what he says." Over the next few days, several women from the church visited her and insisted that she return to the husband, despite the violence. When she came to my office, she was distraught about the violence, but even more so about the attitude of her church community. She knows she needs to leave this relationship or she and/or her children will get seriously hurt, but she is also in fear that God will strike her down for breaking up the family. She is also concerned that she will be unable to support her children when she leaves the relationship. She is reluctant to go on welfare, having been told that it is bad to take handouts from anyone outside the church, but she knows that neither she nor her children are safe within their church--and they must eat and have a roof over their heads. She has not been allowed to hold a job while married to this man, and has few job skills.

This is not an unusual story of those we hear in my office--of the 1500 people or so we talk to a year, we frequently hear stories of women who are forced to live in poverty by their abusers (I remember one woman who was not

allowed to buy shoes for herself or the children, and so came to my office in flip-flops on a snowy day); who are not allowed to develop their job skills while in the marriage, and so, if they choose to leave the violence, must go on welfare to survive; and who are abandoned by church communities that hold rigid gender expectations--and thus, perhaps inadvertently in some cases, support abusive behavior by the men in the church. Additionally, throughout the country, women are threatened by social services with [the] removal of their children if they "allow" themselves to be abused in front of them. Yet, if they don't allow it, and get divorced, legislation such as this threatens both women and their children with more severe poverty. This is an unacceptable double bind.

We must protect women in this country by not forcing marriage upon anyone. [Marriage] is not the solution to poverty or violence. Job skills, child care, and a focus on the person who perpetuates the violence rather than the victims of violence are the only ways that women living in poverty will be able to leave poverty and begin to support themselves.

NEW MEXICO

I am Kayla Michael. 10 years ago, my mother and older brother forced me to marry the man that had impregnated me. He was 30 and I was 19. It was a 'shotgun wedding' at the courthouse. During the year of living with that man, I was mentally, emotionally, and physically abused in the worst way. I was locked in the house with my baby son (no food). When I heard about the women's shelter on the radio, I packed one grocery bag full of baby things, broke out of the window, and went there.

[I spent] 3 months in the women's shelter, a few months homeless, [and] 2 years in the homeless housing projects. During that time, I entered and graduated UNM. [I] got a job as a social worker. [I] am still a social worker, working with victims of domestic violence. When you have kids and you're poor, as welfare mothers are, you don't find a nice man to marry. The welfare mothers that marry, marry abusive men. Abusive men seek us out, we're vulnerable.

I have never received child support and never been able to afford a lawyer at all. A better idea (instead of making us get married) would be to provide us legal assistance to obtain child support from the fathers of our children. (And to file for divorce for us.)

Thank you,
Kayla Michael

OKLAHOMA

Domestic violence occurs more often than you realize. While my life and sanity have been threatened more times than I would like to think about, it is the emotional abuse that does the most harm. Continual threats and put-downs cause knife wounds [that take] years to heal.

PENNSYLVANIA

I am not currently on public assistance, but my children and I [have] depended on it in the past due to our need to escape [from] domestic abuse. I had been married to a man who had an explosive anger problem, which I was not aware of when I married him. Due to this problem, he was often fired from whatever job he would get. When I was 6 months pregnant with our second child, I left the job I had due to health reasons related to the pregnancy. A month later, my husband lost his job (he was fired). Since he was fired, he was unable to apply for unemployment benefits.

We lived on our savings while he looked for work, but we did not have much saved, so that ran out after one month. After the birth of our second child, since my husband could not find work, he turned to using drugs (I did not condone or approve of this; in fact, it was the source of much argument in our home, as I was concerned that the police would find out about his drug use and arrest him, and that I would be implicated because I lived in the same house as he did, as he kept marijuana in his closet.) Due to conflicts about this and about money, the domestic arguments escalated and physical abuse was frequent. I could not immediately leave because I had a tiny infant to care for, and I did not at that time have a job. On one trip to a hospital emergency room after having been punched repeatedly on my thigh, choked, and picked up and thrown into the bathtub, the examining physician said, "I can't tell you what to do, but maybe next time you won't be so lucky." What the physician meant was that I lived through the abuse that time, but perhaps the next time I could die. I went to an emergency shelter, with my children, and filed a protection from abuse order.

After a divorce, which my husband caused to drag on for a long time by filing all sorts of motions (as he said "no one divorces me and gets away with it easy,") I found work, but it was only part-time. I applied for public assistance in order to feed my children and pay the rent on an apartment. But threats of physical violence continued (by phone and when my ex-husband would come to pick up the children for visitations). I moved several counties away and lived with my parents for several years, while I went to college. I now have a master's degree and a fairly good job, which means that I have been able to provide my children with a normal childhood (free of exposure to domestic violence or bill collectors coming to the house, and always with enough to eat, and the ability to take advantage of opportunities for recreation and education), but I could never have done this if I stayed with my husband.

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"My wife and I had a difficult time about 15 years ago; communication breakdowns, arguments, control issues between the both of us. I left the relationship and in scornful retaliation she placed a PFA against me due to the misguided advice of a local domestic relations group. We were apart for most of the summer that year, and got back together in the fall mainly because that court order would not allow me to see my little girls. The PFA did not stop the arguments, and in the winter of the next year, my wife called the police in anger. I was put in jail. It ripped our family apart. As soon as I was in jail, the reality set in with my wife; she was without a husband and income. She furiously worked to get me out through the EAP administrator where I work. I was released 3 weeks later and was off to therapy for a 30-day stint. That was one of the best things to happen to me. I learned a lot of coping mechanisms, assertiveness, [and] communication skills. They had a hard time diagnosing me because I had no alcohol/drug addictions, but in order for the insurance to pay, they came up with depression nos. We got back together later that year and have been married ever since.

If it would not have been for the interaction of the mental health treatment facility, our family would not have been together. My daughters would have been raised fatherless, and we all know the statistics with that situation. I agree marriage and family is the building block of our great society, but when problems arise, the problems need to be dealt with no matter what they are. I have heard way too many horror stories, and due to the help I received, our family did not become one of them.

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"Congress:

Think about a time when the world looked rosy and you were happily anticipating the future with the one person in the world you promised to love in front of god and family.

Your husband also promised these things only to take the blanket of hope and promise and happiness from around your shoulders and replace it with shattered [a] mantle of depression, pain, indignity, confusion, degradation, poverty, deep wounds, and loss. Having an abusive partner is worse than death and living in such a high degree of stress and fear that it causes medical problems that lasts as a lifetime reminder. You learn mistrust, doubt, and hate replace love. It's so easy for others to tell you what to do when they haven't a clue as to what happens in a horrible marriage, thus

fixing you with shame on top of it all. It creates a hole in your life. You spend the rest of your days re-examining your judgment. It sets an example to the children of that marriage to think that's the way life works.

It's absurd to expect another man to take on the ruins of a bad marriage when the abuser didn't want the wife and children originally! The only thing that's going to occur is another poor family! I lived this life of abuse in several forms. After the threat of jail was made as the only recourse, abuse took on other forms. It left its scars but they are invisible to others. Handing down a solution by the government as pres. Bush has is not a viable answer to poverty. It's a recipe for disaster! Why are we allowing the government to tell us how to govern our personal circumstances?

If I hadn't been able to count on welfare to escape a dangerous marriage I fear my children would be without a mother today! I suffered a lot of abuse before I finally took my children and fled in secrecy. I thank god welfare provided a way for me to leave the torture of a dangerous marriage before I became another death statistic. Getting re-married to get out of poverty is such a simplistic and ignorant solution to such a horrific way of life that for an abused woman and her children it's a condemnation to more of the same!

What of the man? Why doesn't an answer present itself in the way of an abuser? Stricter laws? Protection? It's unfair to expect a new husband to take on [the] problems caused by someone else! The final insult, to have those who don't have a clue, brand us abused with shame for not doing what they think we should! This way of ending poverty is an insult to the many who have suffered and even died in the past."

II

I am a nurse who works with new mothers, and I am a survivor of a very abusive alcoholic marriage. Although we were wealthy, our children lived in the poverty of abuse and addiction. The women I work with are no different, except that they need public assistance, our public help, to live a healthy life. They can't afford to walk away like I could. Marriage is not the salvation for abusive relationships. It is the tie that binds and controls. Public assistance has given some of the women I work with [the ability] to walk away from an alcoholic partner, a drug dealing boyfriend, [and/or] an abusive man. Your temporary help enabled these girls to begin college, get a full time job with child care, and choose health [insurance], as I have done. Marriage is not the fantasy that makes everything work out all right. Our help and their hard work make the difference that matters. Today our family is rich in values and life.

TENNESSEE

My name is Kathy McCann and I am a survivor. I was sexually abused as a child, which is one of the reasons [why] I married my first husband. I wanted to leave my abusive home and he seemed to be the man of my dreams. He turned out to be a nightmare. I was not allowed to see my family. I was not allowed to drive. I could not work because he would not let me, the one time I got a job he forced me to quit because I made more money than he did. After three years of beatings and being sexually abused by him I left. I was lucky or unlucky to have a place to go to, my parents let me stay with them. I tried to go back to school to get an education. After three years of being told I was stupid, I had something to prove to myself. My parents agreed to watch my two small children and help me get through college. That did not happen because my father began beating my oldest son. I had no choice but to be homeless once again. If it were not for shelters, food stamps, and other assistance it would have been impossible for us to survive. I had no car when I left my parents for the second time. I had nothing but what I could carry for my child and myself. That was 14 years ago. I now have a home, a van and some of the better things in life. Yet, my first husband still does not pay child support that has been ordered through the courts. He still is not helping raise his children. Without the help [that] the state offers women like me, what would the children have? He is no dad, and never will be. I have been trying to get this support for the children, but every time we track him down and get the order for the company to pay the support, he up and quits his job. Leaving me to raise the children. His abuse will never end, and it is a shame that my children suffer. I am thankful for all the help I get from the state and without it I do not know where we would be today.