

HEALTHY MARRIAGE: WHAT IS IT AND WHY SHOULD WE PROMOTE IT?

HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF THE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS UNITED STATES SENATE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS SECOND SESSION ON

EXAMINING HOW TO PROMOTE A HEALTHY MARRIAGE, FOCUSING ON
THE HEALTHY MARRIAGE INITIATIVE, THE TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE
TO NEEDY FAMILIES PROGRAM, AND DISCOURAGING TEEN PREG-
NANCY

APRIL 28, 2004

Printed for the use of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions



U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

93-523 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2005

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
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HEALTHY MARRIAGE: WHAT IS IT AND WHY SHOULD WE PROMOTE IT?

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 28, 2004

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, OF THE
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:02 p.m., in room SD-430, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Senator Jeff Sessions (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Senators Sessions, Bond, and Allard.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR SESSIONS

Senator SESSIONS. I think we will go ahead and get started. I know a number of members plan to attend and I know that there are conflicts. At this moment there is a conference going on on the Republican side, but I thought we would go ahead and get started. I welcome all of you to this hearing.

Marriage is unquestionably one of the fundamental institutions in our society. There was a time when it would have been difficult to imagine that such a pillar of civilization could be threatened. Yet today some say marriage is outdated and unimportant. We hear this from certain academics, the popular media, the secular left. The issue is driven home with emphasis when high courts declare that the traditional definition of marriage is unconstitutional.

I believe that it is important that we carefully examine this institution. Let me begin by emphasizing that while discussing the value of marriage to individuals and to society, I do not mean to in any way disparage single-parent families. Certainly there is no doubt that many children who grow up in single-parent households develop quite well. However, we are here to discuss what our scientific information will tell us and what the numbers say. We want to determine what the optimal arrangement for families might be.

By looking at marriage, we need to answer three fundamental questions, it seems to me. First, is marriage good for individuals and for society? Second, if marriage is good for individuals and society, should Government be involved in supporting and promoting it? And finally, if Government is involved, can it make a positive difference?

I believe that after listening to our distinguished group of witnesses today we will determine that the answers to these questions are yes, based on the remarkable and excellent presentations that I have read. First, the evidence will show that marriage is a social

good. Marriage certainly contributes to the physical, emotional and economic health of men, women, and children, and therefore is beneficial to the country as a whole. A plethora of social science evidence demonstrates that children do best when they grow up with both married biological parents.

The answer to the second question is also yes, Government should be involved both in supporting and promoting marriage. The Government frequently advances policies to promote the general welfare. For example, we provide incentives for homeownership, something I believe strongly in, because we know that communities with high levels of homeownership are safer, more stable, and families are stronger where homeownership is common. There are also tax breaks for charitable giving; grants, loans and tax breaks for educational advancement; and incentives for preventive health care. All of these are examples of Government supporting and promoting a social good.

Additionally, Government involvement can be justified because divorce and unwed childbearing create substantial public costs borne by the taxpayers. When both adults and children are members of a family led by a married man and woman, they suffer from lower rates of crime, drug abuse, education failure, chronic illness, child abuse, domestic violence, poverty, and other social problems. These families do not require as many programs covered by tax dollars such as welfare expenditures, remedial and special education expenses, daycare subsidies, child support collection costs, administrative costs, and social program cost. Therefore, Government has a very real interest in promoting marriage.

Finally, I would answer the third question by arguing that Government can make a very real difference by promoting and supporting marriage. Today we will hear about a recent study which demonstrates that policies supporting marriage in communities have led to a decrease in the number of divorces in those communities. We are going to hear about the Oklahoma marriage initiative, an innovative program to promote and support marriage that is serving as a model to other States and communities.

I do not believe that we have to continue down the same path that Europe is presently on. It is not inevitable that we will have 60 percent of our children born to unmarried parents as they are in Denmark. We do not have to allow other countries or our own activist courts to tell us that traditional marriage is outdated. It is not and we will let the facts speak for themselves today. In fact we will serve our Nation and the world if we study the issue objectively and take steps to reverse the trends and prove that the marriage of one man and one woman is and will always be the most ideal framework for a family.

At this time I would like to submit a statement from Senator Enzi for the record.

[The prepared statement from Senator Enzi follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR ENZI

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for agreeing to hold this hearing on healthy marriages. This is not only a vital topic for this committee, but an issue of great concern to our constituents across the Nation.

Almost every day, if you pick up the paper or read one of the weekly magazines you will see a spirited debate on the topic of marriage going on all over the country. Today's hearing will examine some of the arguments that have been made about marriage and send an important message to a wide audience that will make clear what the ramifications are of this issue and how they may have an impact on our work in Congress, as well as the policies we pursue on the local, State and national level.

I believe a healthy marriage isn't all that difficult to define. It starts with a heartfelt commitment to a spouse. Speaking from my own experience, I have often noted the Enzi tradition of "overmarriage." Simply put, my son and I, along with many other male Enzis in the past have been blessed to find that special someone in our lives who helped us to set goals in our lives and worked with us to achieve them.

One of the most important of those goals has been the care and nurturing of our children our next generation of leaders. I have often heard it said that the most important job we have as a society is raising our children and if we don't do a good job of that, nothing else we do will matter very much. It's a philosophy I support and promote in my household and in my life. It's also the philosophy behind a healthy marriage. I have recently become a grandfather, so that has added another dimension to my belief about healthy marriages and the fruits that continue to be produced by the shared commitment of a man and woman to their future together.

Yes, you can put me down as a strong believer in the importance of a healthy marriage to our society because I have been the beneficiary of it, so I may be biased. Fortunately, you don't have to take my word for it. There is plenty of objective evidence to prove that marriage is no longer a moral issue that has no place in the policy realm. We now realize that the institution of marriage has a significant impact on health policies, economic prosperity and the prospects for child development. Research by several different organizations and individuals has shown that marriage is a significant part of the equation to reduce child and family poverty. It is a major factor in the mental health and development of children, and it also has an impact on their civic involvement. That shouldn't come as a surprise to us, because we know that children learn from their parents as each parent becomes a role model for their future relationships, including their own marriage.

Several years' worth of research has demonstrated that children from stable two-parent homes are much more likely to succeed in school and in life than their peers. As some of the witnesses have suggested in their testimony, a healthy marriage is among the most important indicators of future success, even to the point that it is a stronger indicator than socioeconomic factors. Children from stable two-parent homes are also more likely to marry and stay married themselves.

In economic terms, two-parent families are less likely to need full-time child care services. The Federal Government spends billions of dollars each year on child care, but we spend next to nothing on programs that would encourage marriage. I have often expressed my concern that Congress is in the habit of treating symp-

toms rather than pursuing cures, and child care is one instance where promoting healthy marriages would help make the most of the Federal commitment to child care, by helping to focus that assistance to the families and single parents that need it most.

In most instances, if someone were to testify that a specific behavior could practically guarantee lower poverty rates, higher school achievement, lower participation in high-risk behaviors and significantly improve opportunities for long-term success in life, it would be embraced by every Member of Congress without reservation. Unfortunately, when marriage is identified as the behavior that would produce those benefits, the support for the policy doesn't materialize the way it should.

The benefits of marriage should not be excluded from the discussion when Congress considers major policy decisions. We should be considering the reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and supporting the institution of marriage should be a critical component of that reauthorization.

There is no question that the great institutions of our society serve as teachers to our children and the younger generation. The institution of marriage certainly qualifies for that distinction. Healthy marriages teach our children about long range goals and opportunities, about keeping our word and our promises, and about the role they will someday play in life. Marriage is more than the legal bond that recognizes the union of a man and a woman, it is a heartfelt commitment to the future of our Nation, our way of life, and ultimately, to our family and all our children.

Senator SESSIONS. I look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses today and I think each of you who will be listening to this hearing will conclude that we have some extraordinary witnesses and their message is very important to us.

Dr. Wade Horn is the Assistant Secretary for Children and Families with the Department of Health and Human Services. It is appropriate we lead off with you, Dr. Horn. Prior to his appointment as Assistant Secretary in 2001, Dr. Horn was the president of the National Fatherhood Initiative and has a history that demonstrates a commitment to children and families, including Commissioner for Children, Youth, and Families and as Chief of the Children's Bureau in the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families. He is the author of numerous articles and books on children and family issues. He received his Ph.D. in clinical child psychology from Southern Illinois University in 1981.

Dr. Horn, we are delighted to have you with us and are interested in hearing your thoughts on this important subject.

**STATEMENT OF WADE HORN, ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

Mr. HORN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you for calling this afternoon's hearing on marriage and for giving me the opportunity to share the Administration's work on this very important issue.

It is a credit that you and other members of the subcommittee are focused on family formation and healthy marriages with a very important purpose in mind, to enhance the well-being of children.

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 households.

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, as you note, with high rates of healthy marriages evidence less pathology, such as crime and welfare dependency, compared to those with low rates of healthy marriages.

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. There are many problems worth attending to, but strong and healthy marriages are the bedrock of strong and healthy societies, without which we will forever be seeking new programs and services to cope with the ever-increasing social problems that result from their absence.

One of the most important lessons that we have learned when explaining the government's role in promoting and strengthening healthy marriages is to first talk about what government ought not to do.

First, government ought not to force anyone to get married. One very important American tradition is the belief in a limited government. One of the areas in which government ought to be limited is the decision about whether or not a person should be married. That decision should remain completely up to the individual couple. Government ought not to get into the business of interfering with that personal decisionmaking.

Second, government ought not, intentionally or otherwise, to implement policies that will encourage anyone to get into an abusive relationship. In all that we do in this area we should always have a mindful eye toward ensuring that we do not increase the risk of domestic violence for anyone as a consequence of our work.

Third, government ought not to promote marriage by withdrawing support for single-parent families.

And finally, government ought not to promote marriage by being afraid to mention its name. There is something unique about marital relationships that distinguish it from other types of relationships. Preparing couples for marriage is different from preparing them for other types of relationship arrangements.

What then should government do? Here are three principles that we 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, not just marriage per se. The fact is that healthy marriages are good for children. Dysfunctional and abusive marriages are not.

Second, government should not merely seek to be neutral about marriage. Government is not neutral about lots of things, as you have noted, things like homeownership and charitable giving, precisely because it can be shown that homeownership and charitable

giving contribute to the common good. 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.

Third, while we do not know as much as we would like to know about supporting healthy marriages, that should not be used as an excuse to do nothing. 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 the couple manages conflict. The good news is that through marriage education we can help teach couples how to manage conflict in healthy ways.

With these three principles in mind, the Bush Administration is undertaking the following bold initiatives to support the formation and stability of healthy marriages.

First, the President has proposed increased funding for marriage education services as part of the reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program known as TANF. With these funds, organizations could conduct public education campaigns about how marriage education can help couples build healthy marriages, offer premarital education and marriage enrichment programs, 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.

Second, we are already 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. We have also begun to integrate support for healthy marriages into services currently being offered through the child support enforcement system, and we have added marriage education to the range of social services we offer to couples who come to America as refugees.

The reason we have come so far in promoting healthy marriage in America in such a short time is because of the leadership and commitment of President Bush. During his first year in office President Bush said, "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 a 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."

Mr. Chairman, I could not have said it better myself. Thank you.
[The prepared statement of Mr. Horn follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF WADE F. HORN

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 con-

tinued 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 American 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 decisionmaking.

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 reauthorization 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 pro-

pose? 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.

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you, Dr. Horn. We appreciate your comments and leadership. You have worked steadfast. You have had an open door to listen to all issues, and I believe you have won the respect of people throughout the country who deal with these issues.

Tell me about the situation in a country like Australia. I understand they may do even more than we do to nurture families.

Mr. HORN. Australia has had an interesting policy in place for a decade or more in which their Federal Government provides funding for marriage education services to couples who choose marriage for themselves and want to access those services on a voluntary basis.

Senator SESSIONS. Would this be before they are married?

Mr. HORN. It is both available before but also after they are married and is very similar to the kinds of things that we are proposing. They have been doing it for a good decade and-a-half or more without much controversy in the country of Australia. That is because they have structured it in such a way that it is clearly non-coercive. It is clearly voluntary. It clearly has a sensitivity to issues related to domestic violence. These are exactly the same kinds of attributes that we would like to see a marriage initiative here in the United States incorporate.

Senator SESSIONS. I know many ministers and churches insist on premarital counseling. Some very excellent and detailed counseling before marriage. Other programs offer that. Would this encourage that kind of premarital counseling—to prepare a couple for the inevitable stresses and problems that occur in marriage?

Mr. HORN. Yes. One of the services that we are particularly interested in supporting is premarital education, for a variety of reasons. First of all, as I said in my opening statement, the research is very clear that what separates stable and healthy marriages from unstable and unhealthy marriages is not the frequency of conflict—and as someone who has been married for 26 years it is somewhat reassuring to know it is not the frequency of conflict—but how the couples manage conflict. If couples when faced with conflict either avoid it or escalate it, that is associated with high levels of marital dissatisfaction, high levels of divorce. But if they are able to listen to each other with respect, if they can communicate effectively, if they can problem-solve conflict in healthy ways, that is associated with high levels of marital satisfaction and lower levels of divorce.

The very good news is that we also have research that says we can teach those skills. We can teach couples how to listen effectively to each other, how to communicate well, how to problem-solve conflict, through marriage education. When we do that, couples report that they are able to implement these skills in their lives. And when they do, they report higher levels of marital satisfaction. There is even some evidence to suggest that 5 years out there are lower rates of divorce. So the good news is we can teach those kinds of skills through premarital education.

But there is another benefit to premarital education. That is that through that process one can identify some couples for which marriage may not in fact be the best choice, either because they are completely unprepared for the responsibilities of marriage, or even worse, there is violence in the dating relationship. I know of no evidence that would suggest the cure for violence in a dating relationship is to get married. It only increases the opportunity for more violence.

So through premarital education we can identify high-risk couples and divert them away from marriage, particularly where violence is part of the dating relationship. Doing so may in fact prevent a bad marriage from happening in the first place, and in the case of violence, protecting the victim. So we are particularly interested in premarital education as a service both to help couples who do get married build skills, but also as an intervention point for those couples where violence might be part of their relationship.

Senator SESSIONS. Now will the present proposal provide counseling or other assistance in the case of an existing marriage when the couple would like assistance?

Mr. HORN. The answer is yes. We also know that couples, after they are married, often experience challenges, and if those couples are equipped with good skills, listening skills, communication skills, problem-solving skills and so forth, they also are less likely to experience marital breakup and in fact are more likely to report high levels of marital satisfaction. So it is both about intervening before the marriage but also after the marriage.

And finally, our efforts address outreach to troubled marriages. In today's world, unfortunately, we tend to present only two options to couples who experience marital distress. We say either stay married and stay miserable or get divorced. The fact of the matter is, there is a third option, for not all but for many couples, and that option is to enter into counseling to learn how to relate better, resolve your conflicts, and resolve your difficulties. Research shows that many troubled marriages in fact can be saved and the couples can fall more deeply in love with each other, sometimes even more than on the day they were married.

When faced with three options, if you are in a troubled marriage, one, stay married, stay miserable, two, get divorced, or three, go into marriage education and marriage counseling and fall back in love with each other and emerge on the other side with a healthy marriage, I think a lot more couples will pick the third option.

Senator SESSIONS. At this time in which there is no longer a social stigma of any significance on divorce—there was probably too strong a stigma at one point in our history—it is more important it seems to me, and would you agree, that we advertise and make clear to the public the good things that come from a stable marriage?

Mr. HORN. I think it is important for us to get the research out there that shows that there are benefits of healthy marriages to children, to adults, and to society. I think, and research and surveys bear this out, one of the reasons why some in the younger generation are attracted to cohabitation is not so much because they are fearful of marriage and a marital commitment, but because they are fearful of divorce. The evidence of that is that a lot of their friends, or perhaps themselves, grew up in a household where divorce occurred. So, what surveys tell us is, a lot of young couples choose cohabitation, not because they do not want to get married but because they are fearful of divorce. They use cohabitation as kind of a trial marriage, a way of determining whether this person that they are cohabiting with would make a good marital partner.

The difficulty is, research shows that cohabitation prior to marriage, and particularly if one or both of the couple had more than one cohabitation prior to marriage, actually increases, not decreases, subsequent divorce rates. It is a little bit like knowing your house is on fire but not knowing it is better to put water on it than gasoline. So one of the things we need to do is help our young know this information and understand it.

It is not government's role to tell people they ought not to cohabit or they have to get married, but it is government's role, it seems to me, to give people good information so they can make good decisions.

Senator SESSIONS. I do too, and some of the witnesses we will hear later on just drive home some of the positive aspects of it.

Senator Allard, thank you for the leadership on this issue and I would be glad to recognize you at this time for any comments or questions.

Senator ALLARD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you for holding this hearing. I think this is really important and this is a very important subject, not only at this point in time but I

think for the whole country, for the world. I think we need to fully understand what leads to a healthy marriage.

Dr. Horn, if you have covered this, I apologize, but what are the things that are going to mean that you are most likely to have a healthy marriage exist between two people?

Mr. HORN. What the research suggests is a couple of things. First of all, research suggests that, marriage is to some degree a matter of luck and chance. But also to a very large extent—and this is the piece that a lot of people do not know—it is also about skills. It is about the ability to be able to manage conflict well.

Again, one of the good pieces of news is that we are able to teach good conflict resolution skills, listening skills, communication skills, and so forth. And that couples when taught these things, report that they in fact can apply them, and when they apply them they have higher levels of marital satisfaction.

We also know though that an understanding and a commitment to the ideal of healthy, stable marriages also helps couples achieve healthy and stable marriages because the commitment to that ideal is what helps motivate them to actually apply the skills that they learn.

Senator ALLARD. What conditions exist that would drive a couple to meet that goal of a healthy marriage?

Mr. HORN. First of all, I think every couple that walks down the aisle on their wedding day is committed to the ideal of healthy, stable marriages. I do not know of any couples that say, this is what we would like, let's get married today and have 2 years of a pretty happy marriage, 3 years of fighting and bickering constantly, a really messy divorce, and then 15 years of fighting over custody of the kids. I do not think couples think that way. I think they get married with the aspiration of this marriage being a healthy and lifelong marriage. I do not think we have to sell the American people on the idea that marriage is generally, as an ideal, ought to be one that is about being healthy and lifelong.

Senator ALLARD. Let me rephrase the question. What are the factors? Do you see more healthy marriages when somebody is 16 marrying a 45-year-old, or maybe somebody has a high school education, another one has a college education, maybe somebody—what are the factors that make individuals be able to apply those skills with a common understanding? What makes that marriage succeed?

Mr. HORN. Certainly we know, for example, that younger marriage, marriage at a younger age—

Senator ALLARD. Now we are getting into some of the specifics I would like to hear.

Mr. HORN [continuing].—does increase the probability of instability. We also know that poverty presents challenges for marriages and that you have higher divorce rates in lower income households. We also know that couples who grew up in a household where there was a divorce have higher rates of divorce, and couples that do not have the skills that I have mentioned also have higher rates of divorce.

So if we are going to help people achieve stable marriages we have to do a variety of things. One, we have got to help young people understand it is not only a good idea to wait till you are older

to become a parent, but also to wait till you are married to become a parent. We also have to continue to work to eradicate poverty in America so we reduce the stress on low-income households so that they can achieve stable, lifelong marriages. And we also have to do a better job of providing increased access to marriage education services.

Senator ALLARD. If we have two people marry of the same sex, has that got a higher likelihood of success than not?

Mr. HORN. In America two people of the same sex at the moment are not legally able to get married, so there is no research on this.

Senator ALLARD. But we do have other countries that have allowed that. Do we have any data from those that would help us evaluate the effect it would have on the rearing of children and a healthy family?

Mr. HORN. I am not familiar with that research so I would not be competent to give an answer to that.

Senator ALLARD. Has there been research done? That is my question.

Mr. HORN. I do not know. I would have to check into that and get back to you for the record.

Senator ALLARD. My understanding is there is not a lot of research that has been done on that, and probably one area that would have some interest, I think, concerning some of the issues now facing this country.

Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you, Senator Allard.

Senator Bond, a senior member of this committee, we are glad that you are here. Thank you for your participation and support of these issues. I asked my Democratic colleagues, and Senator Gregg said we could have this committee hearing, if they had any witnesses who would like to provide any information to the committee as we go forward. They did not provide any, did not suggest any witnesses. But I think we have an outstanding group. Certainly, I guess, there are not many that want to come and testify that marriage is not a healthy institution.

Dr. Horn, one more question. My home State of Alabama is confronting the question on divorce, as Governor Keating did in Oklahoma. They have a project called Family Connections in Alabama. It was funded through a grant from your department. It focused on marriage-strengthening skills and family stability, particularly for lower income families. The Alabama Children's Trust Fund in cooperation with Auburn University coordinated this project at four different sites and the evaluation showed positive program impact in several areas, including an increased level of trust and happiness in relationships, problem-solving as a team, several individual empowerment areas, and verbal aggression in couples decreased.

There is a problem with lack of funding. They would like to continue that. Do you think this healthy marriage initiative that the President has proposed might provide funding that will allow them to continue such a program?

Mr. HORN. Certainly if we ever manage to get TANF reauthorized and if the Healthy Marriage Initiative is part of that, which seems to have broad bipartisan support, there would be an influx of new funds to the tune of up to \$240 million a year in Federal

funds to help support efforts like the one in Alabama. About half that money would be used in a competitive State grant process, so States would be the eligible applicant, and about half of it would be used for community-based organizations and faith-based organizations as well as State and local government to compete to provide exactly the kinds of services that the Children's Trust Fund in Alabama provided.

One of the things that we are in the process of doing is funding evaluation contracts. But I think it is important for us to keep in mind that while we do know some things, we don't know everything about how to help couples form and sustain healthy marriages, and we ought to have a little bit of a skeptical eye that would encourage us to evaluate what works and then find out also what doesn't work.

So we will be prepared, if and when the Congress acts and authorizes those funds, to not only implement the programs, but also to evaluate them.

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you very much. I do believe that we have got to be rigorous in analysis and we will find some things work and some things we will be surprised to learn are not as effective as we thought.

Senator Bond?

Senator BOND. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I apologize. I have got four meetings going on at one time, two of them in Intelligence, but this one is so important I wanted to come join you and I thank the chairman for calling this very important hearing on the President's Healthy Marriage Initiative, because I really do believe that government can and should support families by promoting policies that strengthen the institution of marriage and help parents raise their children in a safe and healthy environment.

There have been times in the near past when we discouraged marriage by saying you would cut off your welfare payment if you had a man in the house. We have had a marriage penalty in the tax code that put a tax penalty on getting married.

But I think years of research in the fields of sociology, economics, medicine, psychology, has really shown a strong association between marriage and child well-being, because I think children raised in healthy, stable marriages are much less likely to experience poverty, abuse, behavioral and emotional problems, and more likely to achieve in school, less likely to commit crimes and develop substance abuse problems.

I want to talk a little bit about how healthy marriages not only benefit children, but the adults themselves and the communities, as well. I have had a lot of people anecdotally suggest that marriage is the best thing that has happened to me——

Senator SESSIONS. You look real good.

[Laughter.]

Senator BOND. My wife said, "Honey, we ought to go on the Atkins diet." She didn't, but I did, so that has helped me in a lot of ways.

But seriously, benefiting adults and getting stable marriages benefit communities, and I think both of those things are vitally important for the proper environment to bring up children. I am sure you have, and can you share with us some of the information

statistics you have on the benefits to adults themselves and communities which lead to the benefits for children?

Mr. HORN. We know that, for example, that adults in healthy marriages report higher levels of life satisfaction. They are less likely to be depressed. They are more likely to accumulate wealth. And they also are more likely to live longer. And if that weren't enough, we also know that married adults report more satisfying sex lives, so it has a lot to recommend itself.

Senator BOND. I am sure you can say a lot more about it than that, but that is good enough to start.

[Laughter.]

How does that impact child rearing, those benefits to the adults? Obviously, more wealth in the family is going to provide more benefits to the child.

Mr. HORN. We know, for example, that children who grow up in married households are five times less likely to be poor than those who do not. But even after you account for economics, we also know that kids in healthy married households are less likely to develop educational problems, less likely to drop out of school. They are less likely to develop emotional and behavioral problems requiring psychiatric treatment as adolescents. They are less likely to develop substance abuse problems. They are less likely to get in trouble with the law. And perhaps more beneficial of all, they are less likely to commit suicide as adolescents if they grow up in a healthy married household.

So there is a great deal of evidence in support of the proposition that children who are reared in healthy married households have advantages. That doesn't mean that children in single-parent households are doomed to educational failure and becoming juvenile delinquents and so forth. It is not true. Most kids in single-parent families do fine.

But there is an elevated risk of poor outcomes for kids in non-married households, and if we can lower that elevated risk by encouraging and supporting couples on a voluntary basis forming and sustaining healthy marriages, it seems to me that that would be good for children.

And as a child psychologist, that is why I am in this. You know, I am in this because I believe that support for healthy marriages is an effective strategy for improving the well-being of children. If I didn't believe that, if I didn't think the evidence suggested that, I would be looking elsewhere for strategies. And certainly it is not the only strategy to achieve that goal, but it is an important one.

Senator BOND. Thank you very much, Dr. Horn, and Mr. Chairman, thank you again for calling the hearing to highlight the need to support the institution of marriage and help parents build strong families.

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you.

Dr. Horn, I know you had to rearrange your schedule. I know you have a flight out. So we thank you very much for your excellent testimony and particularly for your leadership on this issue. There are few in this country that understand it better or who have better skills in bringing people together to make progress. Thank you a lot.

Mr. HORN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator SESSIONS. Our next panel, if you will step forward, we have the name tags we can put out. I will just be sharing the introduction while they do that.

First will be Dr. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead. She is the Co-Director of the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University. Dr. Whitehead speaks and writes about family and child well-being for professional, scholarly, and popular sciences. She has written numerous books, essays, and articles for a wide variety of publications and has made multiple media appearances on national programs. She wrote the script for the award-winning PBS documentary, "Marriage: Just a Piece of Paper?" Additionally, her 1993 Atlantic Monthly cover story, "Dan Quayle Was Right," was named one of the 10 most influential articles of the late 20th century by Policy Review.

Dr. Whitehead earned her B.A. from the University of Wisconsin, studied at Columbia University as a Woodrow Wilson Fellow, earned an M.A. and Ph.D. in American social history at the University of Chicago and lives in Amherst, MA. Thank you, Dr. Whitehead.

Roland C. Warren is the President of the National Fatherhood Initiative. He joined the board of the Fatherhood Initiative in 1997, was elected President 5 years later. He has represented the NFI in many national media appearances.

He has an M.B.A. from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. I guess that means you can count your money, Mr. Warren. It is a good school. He received an undergraduate degree from Princeton University. Prior to coming to NFI, Mr. Warren worked for Goldman Sachs and Company, a leading global investment banking firm. He has also held management positions for both IBM and PepsiCo and was an Associate Director of Development at Princeton University, Kit Bond's alma mater, where I think—

Senator BOND. I don't emphasize that.

Senator SESSIONS. Well, do you emphasize you were number one in your class?

Senator BOND. Move it along.

Senator SESSIONS. That is the truth, too.

Governor Frank Keating took over as President and CEO of the American Council of Life Insurers the morning after leaving office as Oklahoma's 25th Governor. He received his Bachelor's degree in history from Georgetown University, his law degree from the University of Oklahoma College of Law.

Governor Keating was elected Governor of Oklahoma in 1993 and again in 1998, becoming only the second Governor of Oklahoma to serve two consecutive terms. In his 1999 inaugural, Governor Keating established a series of goals for Oklahoma, including reductions in divorce, out-of-wedlock births, substance abuse, and child abuse. With First Lady Cathy Keating, he organized a statewide initiative designed to strengthen marriage, enlisting government, community groups, and the faith-based community. We would like to hear how that is going, Frank.

I notice they left out you were United States Attorney for Oklahoma. We served together. He was elected by his fellow United States Attorneys as President of the, what do you call it—

Mr. KEATING. The Advisory Council.

Senator SESSIONS [continuing].—the Advisory Council. That was such an important group, I can't remember the name of it, but I had the honor to serve on that.

[Laughter.]

Dr. Stan Weed is the President of the Institute for Research and Evaluation at Salt Lake City, UT. The Institute is a nonprofit corporation focused on application of research methodology to address important social issues and policies related to adolescents.

Dr. Weed completed his graduate work at the University of Washington in the field of social psychology. Much of his recent interest and research has focused on the social problems and programs related to marriage and divorce dynamics. He recently completed a national study of community marriage policies in 122 cities. Dr. Weed, we are glad to have you here.

Mr. WEED. Thank you.

Senator SESSIONS. I think you can see we have an extraordinary panel who both can share insights into the scientific data concerning marriage, the difficulties of marriage, and what we can do as a government to improve marriage.

Dr. Whitehead, I would be delighted to hear your statement at this time.

STATEMENTS OF BARBARA DAFOE WHITEHEAD, CO-DIRECTOR, NATIONAL MARRIAGE PROJECT, RUTGERS UNIVERSITY, PISCATAWAY, NJ; ROLAND C. WARREN, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL FATHERHOOD INITIATIVE, GERMANTOWN, MD; HON. FRANK KEATING, FORMER GOVERNOR OF OKLAHOMA, AND PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, AMERICAN COUNCIL OF LIFE INSURERS, McLEAN, VA; AND STAN E. WEED, PRESIDENT, THE INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH AND EVALUATION, SALT LAKE CITY, UT

Ms. WHITEHEAD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am delighted and grateful for the opportunity to be here today. As you mentioned, I am Co-Director of the National Marriage Project, a research organization based at Rutgers, and my colleagues and I conduct research on social trends affecting the institution of marriage.

My testimony today addresses three questions. What is marriage? What do we know about the benefits of marriage? And do people marry because they are better off, or does marriage itself make people better off?

First of all, what is marriage? Marriage is a universal human institution. It is a workhorse institution which performs a number of necessary social functions. Marriage organizes kinship, establishes family identities, regulates sexual behavior, attaches fathers to their offspring, supports child rearing, channels the flow of economic resources and mutual caregiving between the generations, and situates individuals within families, kin groups, and communities. Marriage enjoys social approval and public recognition. It confers positive status on men and women and a new social identity.

Well, what does the social science research tell us about the benefits of marriage? And here, I apologize if I am redundant and repetitive. Dr. Horn said some of this, but I will go through it quick-

ly. We now have a substantial body of research on marriage and its effects, so let me just offer a quick summary of some of these findings.

First, and in my mind foremost, marriage is good for children. Again, to repeat, researchers now agree and there is strong, strong research consensus on this, that excepting cases where parents are in high conflict, children who grow up in households with their married mother and father do better on a wide range of economic, social, educational, and emotional measures than do children in other kinds of families. This used to be disputed and now there is a lot of agreement based on the research.

They are significantly more likely to earn 4-year college degrees, an important source of individual capital and social advantage, and to do better occupationally than children from divorced or single-parent families. They have better emotional health. And interestingly enough, in their adult lives, children from intact families are more likely to be married and stay married than others. In fact, some researchers now argue that growing up with both married parents in a low-conflict marriage is so important to child well-being that it is replacing race, class, and neighborhood as the greatest source of difference in child outcomes.

Marriage is also good for adults. Again, married people are happier, healthier, wealthier, enjoy longer lives, and report greater sexual satisfaction than single, divorced, or cohabiting individuals. Married men earn more money than single men with similar education and job histories. Indeed, for men, marriage reaps as many benefits as education, largely because they get the help and support of their wives. Some people call this the nagging factor.

[Laughter.]

Married women benefit economically, as well. Although they often leave the workforce to care for children, they are still—women who are married are still economically better off than divorced, cohabiting, or never married women, and that is true even among the most economically vulnerable women, that is, mothers with low levels of educational achievement or low income.

Finally, marriage is good for the society. Marriage is not simply a contractual relationship between two people or a government-sanctioned form of intimate partnership. It is also a central institution in the civil society, and as such, marriage performs certain valuable social tasks and produces certain social goods that are far harder to attain through such alternatives as individual action, private enterprise, public programs, or any other kind of alternative we might dream up.

Let me give three quick examples of how marriage benefits society. First of all, marriage benefits society as a child-rearing institution. Marriage joins a father and a mother together in the shared work of bringing up children, helps to create a more equitable distribution of family responsibilities between the genders, and boosts the level of parental, and especially paternal, investment in the children's households. We have not yet found, though I think we have tried, substitutes for marriage that can provide equivalent levels of voluntary and sustained economic and emotional investments in children over what is now a prolonged period of youthful dependency.

Again, this was mentioned previously. Marriage benefits society as a wealth-creating institution, and that is because of economies of scale, access to work-related benefits that a couple might share. Marriage promotes savings. And importantly, it generates help from kin because two groups of kin come together and the community. On the verge of retirement, one study found married couples' net worth is more than twice that in other households, and that, of course, in an aging society is something we have to pay attention to.

Marriage benefits society also as a source of what sociologists call social capital, that is, the advantages that are generated through relationships of mutual aid, obligation, and caregiving. Married people not only are more likely to be involved with their own communities, to vote, and to be involved in civic life, but they also serve as positive role models for other children whose fathers, for example, might be absent from their lives, or in households where there is a very hard-working single parent who benefits from this help and support of married people in her neighborhood.

Now, my final question, very quickly, because this comes up a lot in research discussions, are the benefits of marriage simply due to the characteristics of people who marry? I mean, are those people better off to begin with, or does marriage itself create certain intangible and tangible benefits?

Well, the answer is both. People who are better off economically and educationally, who are religiously observant, and who grew up in married parent families themselves are more likely to marry and stay married than others. But at the same time, marriage itself has a transforming effect on people's attitudes and behaviors. Being married changes people's lifestyles, habits, associations, and obligations in ways that are socially and personally beneficial, and this transformation is especially pronounced for men.

So let me conclude with a word of caution about the implications of these amassed findings. Marriage is not a magic bullet solution to problems of poverty, disadvantage, crime, and discrimination. And in my opinion, government promotion of healthy marriage, though I think a very important initiative, should not be used as a reason for reducing or limiting other forms of government support for low-income families, such as child care, health care, education, job training, and other supports.

Nor, finally, should we expect marriage, even if everyone is happily married, to bring heaven on earth. Like all human institutions, marriage is far from perfect, and getting married does not turn people into saints.

Yet the fact remains, despite all its imperfections, marriage remains an indispensable source of social goods, individual benefits, mutual caregiving, parental cooperation and investment, affectionate attachments, and long-term commitments, and people who are married, though not saints, tend to behave in ways that benefit themselves, their children, and their communities.

So given these advantages, Mr. Chairman, I would say that, really, it does make a lot of sense to think about marriage promotion activities both by the public sector and the private sector to help build these strengths and benefits within our Nation and communities. Thank you.

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you, and thank you for your remarkable remarks that you have made a part of the record. We will make your complete remarks a part of the record because they are comprehensive. I think they distill the best known science that we have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Whitehead follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF BARBARA DAFOE WHITEHEAD

BENEFITS OF MARRIAGE FOR CHILDREN, ADULTS, AND THE SOCIETY

Marriage is a universal human institution. It performs a number of key functions in virtually every known society. Marriage organizes kinship, establishes family identities, regulates sexual behavior, attaches fathers to their offspring, supports childrearing, channels the flow of economic resources and mutual caregiving between generations, and situates individuals within families, kin groups and communities.

In contemporary American society, marriage is the central institution of the family. It establishes a family household, typically organized around the spousal couple and their dependent children. In this system, marriage plays a key role in fostering the social, economic and emotional bonds between husband and wife, parents and children, and the family and larger community. It prescribes a set of norms, responsibilities and binding obligations for its members. It shapes family identity, creates a context for intimacy and builds a sense of belonging among its members. Finally, marriage enjoys social approval and public recognition. It confers positive social status and a new social identity on men and women.

When marriage is low-conflict and, ideally, long-lasting, it is good for children. It brings together under one roof the mother and father who have brought the child into the world through birth or adoption and who share a mutual interest in the child's well-being. It gives children a chance to know, associate with, and develop close bonds with both parents. Marriage provides for regular paternal involvement and investment in children's family households. Indeed, more than any other family arrangement, marriage reliably connects kids to their dads and fathers to the mothers of their children.

Marriage contributes to the physical, emotional and economic well-being of individual adults as well. It provides an efficient way to pool resources, combine individual talents, and recruit kin support for the purposes of fostering the well-being of the family. It encourages wealth production and limits material hardship and want. Marriage unites mothers and fathers in the common work of childrearing and family life and helps to create a more equitable distribution of family responsibilities between the genders.

Marriage is also good for the society. Within the civil society, marriage fosters social connectedness, civic and religious involvement, and charitable giving. This is especially true for men. More than any other family arrangement, marriage connects men to the larger community and encourages personal responsibility, family commitment, community voluntarism and social altruism.

WHAT SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH TELLS US ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF MARRIAGE

Today, thanks to resurgent scholarly interest in family structure, we have a large body of social science research on marriage and its effects. Overall, the available research evidence persuasively demonstrates the advantages of marriage for children, adults and the society. Though it is impossible to cover the entire scope of the research in this limited space, let me summarize key findings.

BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN

Marriage—especially if it is low-conflict and long-lasting—is a source of economic, educational and social advantage for most children. Researchers now agree that, except in cases of high and unremitting parental conflict, children who grow up in households with their married mother and father do better on a wide range of economic, social, educational, and emotional measures than do children in other kinds of family arrangements.¹ According to some researchers, growing up with both mar-

¹For a recent summary of relevant research, see Mary Parke, Are Married Parents Really Better for Children?, Center for Law and Social Policy, May 2003. www.clasp.org. See also Why

ried parents in a low-conflict marriage is so important to child well-being that it is replacing race, class, and neighborhood as the greatest source of difference in child outcomes.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Children from intact families are far less likely to be poor or to experience persistent economic insecurity. In fact, if it were not for the demographic shift from married parent families to other kinds of family structures in recent decades, the child poverty rate would be significantly lower. For example, according to one study, if family structure had not changed between 1960–1998, the black child poverty rate in 1998 would have been 28.4 percent rather than 45.6 percent, and the white child poverty rate would have been 11.4 percent rather than 15.4 percent.² Children who grow up in married parent families are shielded from the economic effects of parental divorce. Estimates suggest that children experience a 70 percent drop in their household income in the immediate aftermath of divorce and, unless there is a remarriage, the income is still 40–45 percent lower 6 years later than for children in intact families.³

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

Children from intact married parent families are more likely to stay in school. According to a 1994 research review by Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, the risk of high school dropout for a child from two-parent biological families is substantially less than that for those from single parent or stepfamilies.⁴ Children from married parent families also have fewer behavioral or school attendance problems and higher levels of educational attainment. They are better able to withstand pressures to engage in early sexual activity and to avoid unwed teen parenthood, behaviors that can derail educational achievement and attainment. They are significantly more likely to earn 4-year college degrees or better and to do better occupationally than children from divorced or single parent families.

EMOTIONAL BENEFITS

Warm, responsive, firm and fair parenting helps to promote healthy emotional development and to foster emotional resilience in children. Parents, stepparents and grandparents in all kinds of family arrangements can, and do, manage to establish emotionally warm and secure environments, often against daunting odds. However, parents in long-lasting, low-conflict marriages are more likely to have the time, resources, relational and residential stability to coparent effectively. On average, children reared in married parent families are less vulnerable to serious emotional illness, depression and suicide than children in nonintact families. Further, because parental divorce is such a commonplace childhood experience, with close to four out of ten American children going through a parental divorce, it is an advantage to grow up in a low-conflict married parent household undisrupted by divorce. As the American Academy of Pediatrics notes, the effect of divorce on children is more than a set of discrete symptoms. It can be a “long searing experience.”⁵

Finally, in their own future dating and marriage relationships, children benefit from the models set by their married parents. Children from married parent families have more satisfying dating relationships, more positive attitudes toward future marriage and greater success in forming lasting marriages. According to a nationally representative survey of young men, ages 25–34, commissioned by Rutgers’ National Marriage Project in 2004, young men from married parent families are less likely to be divorced and more likely to be married. Among the never-married young men surveyed, those from married parent families were more likely to express readiness to be married than young men from other kinds of family backgrounds. In addi-

Marriage Matters: Twenty-One Conclusions from the Social Sciences (NY: Institute for American Values, 2002) <http://www.marriagemovement.org>.

² Adam Thomas and Isabel Sawhill, For Richer or For Poorer: Marriage As an Antipoverty Strategy, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 21:4, 2002.

³ Parke, Are Married Parents Really Better for Children?, 7.

⁴ The risk for an average white child in a two parent family was 11 percent compared to 28 percent for a child in a single or step-parent family. For an average African American child in a two parent family, it was 17 percent compared to 30 percent in a single or step-parent family. For an average Hispanic child from a two-parent family, the risk was 25 percent compared to 49 percent for single or stepparent families. Cited in Parke, Are Married Parents Really Better for Children?, 2-3.

⁵ State of Our Unions (Piscataway, NJ: The National Marriage Project), 2003. Available at <http://marriage.rutgers.edu>.

tion, young men from married parent households have more positive attitudes toward women, children and family life than men who grew up in nonintact families.⁶

BENEFITS OF MARRIAGE FOR ADULTS

Married people are better off than those who are not married in a number of ways. On average, they are happier, healthier, wealthier, enjoy longer lives, and report greater sexual satisfaction than single, divorced or cohabiting individuals.⁷ Married people are less likely to take moral or mortal risks, and are even less inclined to risk-taking when they have children. They have better health habits and receive more regular health care. They are less likely to attempt or to commit suicide. They are also more likely to enjoy close and supportive relationships with their close relatives and to have a wider social support network. They are better equipped to cope with major life crises, such as severe illness, job loss, and extraordinary care needs of sick children or aging parents.

Married parents are significantly less likely to be poor. For example, according to a study by economist Robert Lerman, poverty rates for married couples are half those of cohabiting couple parents and one-third that of noncohabiting single parents in households with other adults.⁸ Even poor parents who marry gain economic advantage from marriage. Though marriage itself may not lift a family out of poverty, it may reduce economic hardship. This effect occurs because marriage, especially if it is long-lasting, allows couples to pool earnings, to recruit support from a larger social network of family, friends, and community members, to share risks, and to mitigate the disruptions of job loss, loss of job benefits, or loss of earnings due to absenteeism, illness, reduced hours on the job, or lay-offs.

BENEFITS TO MEN

Marriage promotes better health habits and greater longevity among men, largely due to the care, attention and monitoring by their wives. In fact, men appear to reap the most physical health benefits from marriage and suffer the greatest health consequences when they divorce. Once married, men are also less likely to hang out with male friends, to spend time at bars, to abuse alcohol or drugs or to engage in illegal activities. They are more likely than unmarried men to attend religious services regularly, to join faith groups, and to spend time with relatives. In brief, men settle down when they get married.

Married men earn more money than do single men with similar education and job histories. Indeed, for men, marriage reaps as many benefits as education.⁹ The causes for this are not entirely clear. However, it is likely that married men benefit from specialization within marriage and from the emotional support they receive from their wives. It is also likely that married men's domestic routines and health habits reduce job absenteeism, quit rates, and sick days. And it may be that men's role obligation to provide for others gives them a greater sense of purpose and intensifies their commitment to work.

Marriage strengthens the bonds between fathers and their children. Married men are more involved and have better relationships with their children than unwed or divorced fathers. In part, this is because married fathers share the same residence with their children. But it is also because the role of husband encourages men to voluntarily take responsibility for their own children. Paternity by itself does not seem to accomplish the same transformation in men's lives.¹⁰

BENEFITS TO WOMEN

Women gain financially from marriage. Although married women often leave the workforce to care for children or other relatives, on average, they are still economi-

⁶The Marrying Kind: Men Who Marry and Why, State of Our Unions 2004, (Piscataway, NJ: The National Marriage Project), forthcoming June 2004.

⁷A comprehensive summary of research evidence on the benefits of marriage for adults may be found in Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage* (NY: Doubleday, 2000).

⁸See Robert I. Lerman, *How Do Marriage, Cohabitation and Single Parenthood Affect the Material Hardships of Families With Children?*, July 2002; see also Robert I. Lerman, *Married and Unmarried Parenthood and Economic Well-Being: A Dynamic Analysis of a Recent Cohort*, July 2002. Available at <http://www.urban.org/expert.cfm?ID=RobertILerman>.

⁹See Robert I. Lerman, *Marriage and the Economic Well-Being of Families With Children: A Review of the Literature*, 2002. Available at <http://www.urban.org/expert.cfm?ID=RobertILerman>.

¹⁰Steven Nock, *Marriage in Men's Lives* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1998); David Popenoe, *Life Without Father: Compelling New Evidence That Fatherhood and Marriage Are Indispensable for the Good of Children and Society* (NY: The Free Press, 1996).

cally better off than divorced, cohabiting or never-married women. Even among the most at-risk women (minority mothers, mothers with low levels of educational achievement or low income), marriage has significant economic benefits.¹¹ Married women also enjoy their sex lives more than sexually active single or cohabiting women, a finding that researchers attribute to women's greater trust and expectation of marital monogamy and permanence. In addition, marriage makes for happier mothers. Compared to cohabiting mothers or single mothers, married mothers are more likely to receive the cooperation, hands-on help, emotional support, and positive involvement from their child's father and his kin. Having practical and emotional support reduces maternal stress, anxiety and depression and enhances a mother's ability to parent effectively.

INTERGENERATIONAL BENEFITS

Marriage creates a new and expanded set of binding obligations between spouses; between parents and children; and between the married couple and their combined kin groups. Such obligations are encoded within the social norms of marriage and are assumed voluntarily as part of the status of "being married."

Consequently, marriage generates higher levels of help, support and care from families than other kinds of family arrangements. Though single parents receive significant family support, they lose the benefits of sustained help and support from the estranged or absent biological parent's side of the family. Close to 17 percent of married parents report support from father's kin whereas just 2 percent of single mothers and no unwed mothers got financial support from relatives of the father.¹² At the same time that married couples receive more help from family, they are also better able to give help to elderly parents and relatives, an important benefit in an aging society.

BENEFITS OF MARRIAGE FOR THE CIVIL SOCIETY

Marriage is not simply a contractual relationship between two people or a government-sanctioned form of intimate partnership. It is also a central institution in the civil society. As such, marriage performs certain critical social tasks and produces certain social goods that are valuable to the community and far harder to achieve through individual action, private enterprise, public programs or through alternative institutions.

MARRIAGE IS A CHILDREARING INSTITUTION

Though not all married people are parents, the institution of marriage reliably creates the social, economic and affective conditions for effective parenting. Of course, in fulfilling the task of rearing competent, healthy children, some married parents fail miserably while some single parents succeed brilliantly. Yet in general, marriage promotes parental investment and mother/father cooperation during what has become an increasingly prolonged period of youthful dependency. When marriages break up or fail to form, the task of rearing children becomes harder, lonelier and more stressful for parents, especially for those who are lone parents. When parents divorce or never marry, the State becomes more involved in requiring and regulating childrearing obligations that married parents assume voluntarily. Paternity establishment, child support, child custody, children's living arrangements, and even their school, sports and religious activities become matters for government oversight and enforcement. Moreover, from a child's standpoint, publicly sponsored alternatives for childrearing such as foster care, group homes or child support enforcement cannot easily replicate the advantages of growing up in a home with one's own married mother and father.

MARRIAGE PRODUCES WEALTH

Marriage provides economies of scale, encourages specialization and cooperation, provides access to work-related benefits such as retirement savings, pensions and life insurance, promotes saving, and generates help and support from kin and community. On the verge of retirement, one study found, married couples' net worth is more than twice that in other households. Because the accumulation of wealth usually requires time, the wealth-generating effects of marriage are strongest among those whose marriages are long-lasting. A study of retirement data from 1992 by Purdue University sociologists found that "individuals who are not continuously

¹¹ Lerman, *Married and Unmarried Parenthood*, 2002.

¹² Waite and Gallaher, *Case for Marriage*; Lingxin Hao, "Family Structure, Private Transfers, and the Economic Well-Being of Families with Children," *Social Forces* 75, 1996, 269-92.

married have significantly lower wealth than those who remain married throughout the life course.” Further, compared to those who are currently married, the researchers found a 63 percent reduction in total wealth. The study concluded that “participating in the social institution of marriage can lead to cumulative advantage” while not participating or interrupting participation can “set the stage for negative outcomes later in life.”¹³

MARRIAGE IS A “SEEDBED” OF PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR

Social scientists have long debated this question: Are the benefits and advantages of marriage due to the characteristics of people who marry and stay married (the so-called “selection effect”) or does marriage itself—and the status of being a married person—create certain advantages? The answer is: both. People who are economically and educationally advantaged, who are religiously observant, and who grew up in married parent families themselves are more likely to marry and to stay married than others. However, marriage itself has a transformative effect on attitudes and behavior. Being married changes people’s lifestyles, habits, associations, and obligations in ways that are personally and socially beneficial.

MARRIAGE GENERATES SOCIAL CAPITAL

Sociologist James Coleman introduced the concept of social capital to refer to goods that are produced through relationships among people.¹⁴ Unlike physical capital (machines, tools, productive equipment) and individual capital (skills, capacities, competencies), social capital is generated through relational bonds of mutual trust, dependability, commitment, shared values, and obligation. Social capital is not “acquired,” as one might acquire a computer or a college degree. It is generated as a byproduct of social relations.¹⁵

As the primary social institution governing familial and kinship relationships, marriage is a source of social capital. The social bonds created through marriage yield benefits not just for family members but for others as well. For example, married parents are more likely to vote and to be involved in community, religious and civic activities. Because marriage embeds people within larger social networks, married parents are better able to connect with other parents, including those who are working single parents, and to recruit help, friendship and emotional support in the community. Marriage gets men involved with others. Married fathers serve as important role models, not only for their own children but also for other people’s children. Their example and mentorship can be an especially valuable social resource in communities where there are too few married fathers and too many children who lack responsible fathers or positive male role models.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Let me conclude with a word of caution about the implications of these findings. Marriage is not a magic bullet solution to problems of poverty, disadvantage, crime, and discrimination. Nor should the existence of government funding for the promotion of healthy marriage be used as a reason for reducing or limiting other forms of government support for low-income families, such as childcare, healthcare, education, job training and other supports. Nor should marriage promotion be used as a substitute for other effective anti-poverty strategies such as reducing the incidence of unwed teen parenthood. Nor should the advantages of marriage be used to pressure everyone to get married.

Like all human institutions, marriage is far from perfect. And getting married does not turn people into saints. Yet the fact remains: despite its acknowledged problems and imperfections, marriage remains an indispensable source of social goods, individual benefits, mutual caregiving, affectionate attachments, and long-

¹³ Janet Wilmoth and Gregor Koso, “Does Marital History Matter? Marital Status and Wealth Outcomes Among Preretirement Adults,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 64: 2002, 254-68.

¹⁴ James S. Coleman, *Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital*, *American Journal of Sociology* 1988,94:S95-S120.

¹⁵ One illustration of social capital: During the deadly 1995 heat wave in Chicago, poor elderly residents who had regular social contacts with neighbors, shopkeepers, churches and who lived in neighborhoods with a bustling street life were far less likely to die than poor elderly residents who lacked these social contacts. Those who survived were drawn to familiar, safe, air-conditioned stores in their neighborhoods whereas those who suffered or died were unaware of, or reluctant to go to, special city “cooling centers” established during the crisis. Thus, for these elderly Chicagoans, the presence or absence of “social capital” made a life or death difference. See Eric Klinenberg, *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

term commitments. And people who are married, though not saints, tend to behave in ways that benefit themselves, their children, families and communities.

Given these advantages, it makes good sense for the public and private sector to explore ways to reduce the barriers to healthy marriage and to make it possible for more parents to form strong and lasting marital unions. Even a relatively modest increase in healthy marriage formation and duration would reduce levels of child poverty, increase parental income and promote higher levels of child well-being among families with children.

Senator SESSIONS. Mr. Warren?

Mr. WARREN. Thank you. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and the members of the committee, subcommittee. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this session.

My name is Roland Warren. I am President of the National Fatherhood Initiative, an organization that was founded in 1994 to really confront what I view as one of the most consequential social problems of our time, widespread father absence. NFI's mission is to improve the well-being of children by increasing the proportion that grow up with involved, responsible, and committed fathers in their lives.

Before joining NFI, I was employed in the world of business and finance, working in management for PepsiCo and Goldman Sachs and IBM. I left that world because I felt there was no greater issue for our country than connecting the hearts of fathers to their kids. Like many of the kids, too many of our kids today, I grew up without my father. I can say with confidence that kids have a hole in the soul in the shape of their dads. To this day, it still bothers me, and it is one of the reasons that I am motivated to do this work and why I am so committed to it.

That said, when you look at the statistics today, about 24 million kids live in homes absent their biological fathers. That is one out of every three kids in this country. In the African American community, in my community, it is about two out of every three kids, so it is the norm.

When you compare this to 1960, we had about 8 million children living apart from their fathers, and in the past 40 years, we have seen just an explosion in father-absent communities. And frankly, we have some neighborhoods that are father-absent.

There are two factors that really contribute to father absence. One is the high level of divorce, and a number of folks have spoken about that here today. And the other is out-of-wedlock childbearing. Currently in America, about 40 to 50 percent of all marriages end in separation or divorce. That affects about a million kids. But when you look at the statistics on out-of-wedlock pregnancy, they are even greater, about one out of three kids and about 1.3 million kids every year are affected in this way.

So this epidemic of fatherlessness is important and it has consequences. On just about every measure of child well-being, kids who grow up without fathers are worse off, on average, than kids who grow up with fathers. The children from father-absent homes are more likely to be poor, five times so. In TANF homes, about seven out of ten children live with single parents, according to the most recent data, as opposed to about one in ten from two-parent families. When you look at kids living with both parents compared to those living in single-parent households, living in a single-parent

household doubles the risk that you will suffer physical, emotional, or educational neglect.

Violent criminals are overwhelmingly males who grew up in father-absent homes—60 percent of rapists, 70 percent of adolescents charged with murder, 70 percent of juveniles in State reform institutions. No matter what their gender, age, family income, race, or ethnicity, adolescents not living with both parents, biological and adoptive, that is, are 50 to 150 times more likely to be involved in drugs and to use drugs. And the list can go on.

Now, the statistics are compelling, and there has been a growing consensus around the notion that kids need their fathers and that kids who have them do better across every economic, social, educational, and behavioral measurement of child well-being. It is not only that father absence is, on average, bad for kids, but we know that involved, responsible, and committed fathers, on average, help kids. In other words, fathers are not just another set of hands. They play a unique and irreplaceable role.

And more and more research is discovering the unique benefits that children enjoy, even from infancy, when they have involved fathers. Six-month-old babies whose fathers are involved test higher on cognitive ability and motor development. When you look at what happens to kids in schools, the children whose fathers are highly involved in their schools are much more likely to do well academically, to participate in extracurricular activities, to enjoy school, and are less likely to repeat a grade or be expelled than kids who have less involved fathers.

And let me just note that I am not saying this in any way to demean single mothers. After all, I was raised by a single mother, whom I love, and my mother and many single mothers are doing heroic work to raise their children alone, sometimes against difficult odds, and we should applaud them. But we would really be doing our children a grave injustice if we do not accept the reality that children need, and frankly deserve, involved, responsible, and committed fathers in their lives.

Given the weight of the evidence that father involvement benefits children, the challenge for all of us is to really figure out the best way to ensure that fathers and children are connected heart to heart. Of all the institutions our culture has available, marriage is the one that provides the best pathway to involved, responsible, and committed fatherhood.

When you look at the research on nonmarital cohabitation, it presents some significant challenges to long-term father-child bonds. Cohabiting relationships are more likely to end, and more likely to end quickly, and when we have situations with noncustodial fathers, there are a number of barriers that prevent them from being as involved. In fact, about 40 percent of kids in father-absent homes haven't seen their fathers at all in the last year.

As Dr. Whitehead said, marriage, although not perfect, is really the best environment in which men can fulfill their roles as committed fathers. I think one of the best predictors of the quality of the relationship a father is going to have with his children is the quality of the relationship that he has with the mother of his children.

I experienced that in my own life, that once my parents got divorced, over time, I saw less and less of my father. He became involved in other things. He had another family. My connection to my father after my parents were no longer married just slowly vanished.

This is an important link, this link between marriage and fatherhood, that really needs to be addressed. As the President of the National Fatherhood Initiative, I consistently see how discussions about responsible fatherhood evolve into discussions about marriage, and I am not surprised at that because I believe that the best societal glue that connects kids to their dads is marriage. And, in fact, even in communities where marriage rates are low, responsible fatherhood acts as a bridge to healthy discussions about marriage.

Once you start talking about the effectiveness of involved fatherhood in increasing child well-being, it becomes difficult to not talk about marriage, because if involved fatherhood is a good thing, then we want fathers as connected as possible, and good marriages have the unique ability to align the interests of mothers and fathers in the best interests of their children.

I would like to actually submit three NFI studies, to the record. One is a study we did in collaboration with others, "Can government Strengthen Marriage?" The other two are focused specifically on fatherhood, and they look at family structure, father closeness, related to delinquency, and also related to drug abuse. What you will find in these studies is that father involvement matters and that kids that have more involved fathers, even when the fathers are noncustodial, do better on average.

To confront the problem of father absence, NFI really started some aggressive work about 10 years ago and over the last decade, we have really developed a comprehensive strategy, not only to reduce father absence, but also to help fathers who are present engage more fully in the lives of their children. I call it our "Three-E" strategy—educating, equipping, and engaging the culture around this issue, and through this strategy, we really work to mobilize the three basic pillars of culture, the government community, the faith community, and the business community.

The first "E" is our education strategy. We do quite a bit in the area of public education awareness. We are part of the Ad Council's portfolio of campaigns and we do compelling PSAs around father involvement. To date, we have generated over \$320 million of donated media against this, one of the most successful campaigns that they have, and it really speaks to how important this issue is and how ubiquitous it is.

The second "E" is equipping, and the focus here is to get people from inspiration to implementation. You see a PSA. You hear someone talk about it. Your neighbor talks to you about it. But you want to be a better dad. How do you do that? Frankly, there are not a lot of places where dads can learn how to be great dads. So we set out to set up a National Fatherhood Clearinghouse and Resource Center to do that work.

And the last "E" is really engaging, engaging every sector of society in alliances and partnerships to encourage them to add fatherhood programming to the important work that they already do, and

we are very aggressive and, frankly, very creative in terms of doing that work.

So social science over the last 25 years has strongly suggested that kids do best with involved, responsible, and committed fathers, and people from across different political perspectives and ideologies have come together around this issue, largely because the weight of the evidence suggests that it is important. Additionally, when you look at the abundant research about marriage, it suggests that kids who grow up with married parents are better off and have the best chance at success.

And if we want what is best for children, then we should ensure that more children grow up with married mothers and fathers, as Wade Horn is fond of saying, real, live, in-the-home, love-the-mother, married fathers. And since the well-being of children is at stake and a litany of social ills correlates with the breakdown of married fatherhood, the government has to play a very important and active role in this regard.

There are a number of pieces of legislation on the Hill now that talk about this. I think one of the best is the legislation by Senator Bayh and Senator Santorum, the Responsible Fatherhood Act, S. 604, which is a real good bipartisan piece of legislation that talks about the link between marriage and responsible fatherhood.

In closing, I just want to read an e-mail that I received not long ago from a young girl. It was a 16-year-old girl and her e-mail address is "Always—Flirting". She said, "I just wanted to say thanks. What you all are doing is great. Fathers should be involved in their children's lives, but sadly, many aren't. I'm 16 years old and my father acts like he wants nothing to do with me or my brother, and it hurts sometimes, but I get over it. So yeah, I just wanted to say thanks and that I'm glad someone out there cares about the kids, even if their fathers don't."

I tell you, at the end of the day, that is what it is all about. I suspect that she is always flirting because she is looking for that dad who is not connected to her. I can tell you personally that this is an important issue and certainly government and the weight of government is an important player in terms of making sure that kids are connected to their dads heart to heart. Thank you.

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you, Mr. Warren, for those powerful remarks, and we thank you for your leadership at the National Fatherhood Initiative. It is a great organization.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Warren follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ROLAND C. WARREN

My name is Roland Warren, and I am the President of the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI), an organization founded in 1994 to confront the most consequential social problem of our time—the widespread absence of fathers from children's lives. NFI's mission is to improve the well-being of children by increasing the proportion of children who grow up with involved, responsible, and committed fathers in their lives.

Before joining NFI, I was employed in the world of business and finance, working in management for firms such as Pepsi, Goldman Sachs, and IBM. But I left that world because I knew how important this issue is for our Nation's children.

I grew up without my father, so I can say with confidence that every child has a hole in their soul in the shape of their dad, and to this day, I still experience a longing in my heart for what should have been. I left Goldman Sachs so that I can help ensure that fewer and fewer children will grow up with the hole in their soul left empty.

So, I greatly appreciate this opportunity to testify today about the importance of marriage and fatherhood.

THE FACTS OF FATHER ABSENCE

Today, 24 million children in America live in a home in which their biological father does not live.¹ That is one out of every three children in our country. In the African American community, father absence is the norm—two out of every three African American children live in father-absent homes.²

Compare this to 1960, when only 8 million children lived in father-absent homes.³ The past 40 years have seen the birth of not only the father-absent home, but also the father-absent community.

There are two factors that contribute to a majority of the father absence in our country. One is the high divorce rate. The other is out-of-wedlock childbearing.

The divorce rate nearly tripled between 1960 and 1980.⁴ Currently in America, an estimated 40–50 percent of all marriages end in separation or divorce, affecting over 1 million children per year.⁵ Our country has the highest divorce rate of all industrialized nations in the world.⁶

In 1960, about 5 percent of all births occurred out of wedlock. That number increased to 10.7 percent in 1970, 18.4 percent in 1980, 28 percent in 1990, and today that number is nearly 33 percent.⁷ About 1.3 million children are born to unmarried women each year.⁸

This epidemic of fatherlessness has consequences.

On just about every measure of child well-being, children who grow up without fathers are worse off, on average, than children who grow up with their fathers.

Children from father absent homes are 5 times more likely to live in poverty than children whose fathers are in the home. Forty-two percent of children in female-householder families lived in poverty in 1999, compared to only 8 percent of children in married couple families.⁹ Additionally, of children living in TANF households, more than 7 out of 10 lived with a single parent in 1998, while fewer than 1 in 10 lived with two parents.¹⁰

Compared to living with both parents, living in a single-parent household doubles the risk that a child will suffer physical, emotional, or educational neglect.¹¹

Children growing up with absent fathers are especially likely to experience violence. Violent criminals are overwhelmingly males who grew up without fathers, including up to 60 percent of rapists,¹² 72 percent of adolescents charged with murder,¹³ and 70 percent of juveniles in State reform institutions.¹⁴

No matter what their gender, age, family income, race or ethnicity, adolescents not living with both parents (biological or adoptive) are 50 to 150 percent more likely to use drugs, be dependent on drugs, and to need illicit drug abuse treatment than adolescents living with two biological or adoptive parents.¹⁵

In studies involving over 25,000 children using nationally representative data sets, children who lived with only one parent had lower grade point averages, lower college aspirations, poorer attendance records, and higher drop out rates than students who lived with both parents.¹⁶ Fatherless children are twice as likely to drop out of school.¹⁷

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth found that children who live in single parent families have more behavior problems compared to those who live in two-parent households.¹⁸

In a longitudinal study of more than 10,000 families, researchers found that toddlers living in single-parent families were more likely to suffer a burn, have a bad fall, or be scarred from an accident compared to kids living with both of their biological parents.¹⁹

Infant mortality rates are 1.8 times higher for infants of unmarried mothers than for married mothers.²⁰

Teenage girls who grow up without their fathers tend to have sex earlier than girls who grow up with both parents. A 15-year-old who has lived only with her mother is three times more likely to lose her virginity before her 16th birthday as one who has lived with both parents.²¹

The weight of the statistical evidence is compelling, and that is why there has been a growing consensus around the notion that children who grow up without dads are economically, physically, psychologically, behaviorally, and educationally disadvantaged compared to children whose mothers and fathers are both in the picture.

And not only is father absence bad for children, but father presence is good for children. In other words, fathers are not just another set of hands. They play a unique and irreplaceable role in the upbringing of children. They are not just “nice

to have around.” More and more research is discovering the unique benefits children enjoy, even from infancy, from having consistent contact with their father.

Even 6-month old babies whose fathers are involved score higher on tests of cognitive ability and motor development.²² Preschoolers with involved fathers display higher levels of empathy and cooperation with peers.²³ When boys and girls are reared with engaged fathers they demonstrate a greater ability to take initiative and display self control.²⁴ Adolescents with involved fathers display higher levels of self-esteem.²⁵ When adolescents rate their dads high on things like nurturance, they are less likely to engage in deviant social behavior, including drug use, truancy, and stealing.²⁶

Children whose fathers are highly involved in their schools are more likely to do well academically, to participate in extracurricular activities, to enjoy school, and are less likely to have ever repeated a grade or been expelled compared to children with less involved fathers.²⁷

Let me just note that none of what I am saying is meant to be demeaning to single mothers. After all, I was raised by a single mom, and my mother and many single mothers are doing heroic work to raise their children alone, sometimes against difficult odds, and we should applaud them. But we would be doing our children a grave injustice if we do not accept the reality that children need and, frankly, deserve to have involved, responsible, and committed fathers in their lives who are physically, emotionally, and spiritually connected to their children. Simply put, kids do better when dad is around.

MARRIAGE AND FATHERHOOD

Given the weight of the evidence that father involvement benefits children, the challenge is for all of us to figure out the best way to ensure that fathers and children are connected, heart to heart. Of all the institutions our culture has available, marriage is the one that provides the best pathway to involved, responsible, and committed fatherhood.

Research has suggested that there are significant challenges for non-marital cohabitation in ensuring long-term father-child bonds. Cohabiting relationships are more likely to end, and to end quickly, than married relationships. Non-custodial fathers also face various issues that prevent long-term, frequent contact with their children. Forty percent of children in father-absent homes have not seen their father in at least a year. Of the remaining 60 percent, only one in five sleeps even one night per month in the father's home. Overall, only one in six sees their father an average of once or more per week.²⁸ More than half of all children who don't live with their fathers have never even been in their father's home.²⁹

Marriage, although not perfect, is the best environment in which men can fulfill their roles as involved, responsible, and committed fathers. One of the best predictors of the quality of the relationship a father has with his children is the quality of the relationship he has with the mother of his children. I experienced this in my own life. When my parents got divorced, over time I saw less and less of my father. He became involved in other things. He had another family. The connection between my father and I, after my parents were no longer married, slowly vanished.

Some would like to keep the issues of responsible fatherhood and healthy marriages separate. But they are hard pressed to do so. As President of the National Fatherhood Initiative, I have consistently seen how discussions about responsible fatherhood inevitably evolve into discussions about marriage. I am not surprised that this happens because I believe that the best societal glue to connect kids to their fathers physically, emotionally, and spiritually is marriage. In fact, even in communities where marriage rates are low, responsible fatherhood acts as a bridge to healthy discussions about marriage.

Once you start talking about the well-being of children and the effectiveness of father involvement in increasing child well-being, it becomes unavoidable to talk about the advantages marriage has over any other family arrangement in terms of connecting both mothers and fathers to their children. Several studies that we have released demonstrate this clearly.

National Fatherhood Initiative just released two studies entitled, *Family Structure, Father Closeness, and Drug Abuse* and *Family Structure, Father Closeness, and Delinquency*. One of the things these studies measured was the levels of both mother and father “closeness” in different family structures, as determined by adolescents’ answers to survey questions about their relationships with their parents. The studies found that levels of both mother and father closeness to adolescents are highest in two-parent married families, lower in stepfamilies, lower still in single parent families, and lowest in no-parent families where a mother or father substitute was named.³⁰

Adolescents are closer to both their mothers and fathers when their parents are married. This occurs because marriage aligns the interests of mothers and fathers in the best interest of their children. In fact, studies have found that homes in which both mothers and fathers live are more child-centered than other homes.³¹ And this is why marriage is such an important institution—it allows children to benefit from the unique and irreplaceable contributions of mothers and the unique and irreplaceable contributions of fathers.

PURPOSE OF THE NATIONAL FATHERHOOD INITIATIVE

To confront, head on, the problem of father absence, National Fatherhood Initiative has worked for the last 10 years to connect fathers to their children, heart to heart. As I said earlier, our mission is to improve the well being of children by increasing the proportion of children who grow up with involved, responsible, and committed fathers in their lives.

As NFI has evolved over the last decade, we have developed a comprehensive strategy for not only reducing father absence, but also for helping all fathers become more physically, emotionally, and spiritually involved in their children's lives. It is our "Three-E" strategy of educating, equipping, and engaging the culture on the issue of father absence. Through our strategy we work to mobilize the "three pillars" of culture—the business, faith, and government communities—to address an issue that effects people and institutions in all sectors of society. Any social movement that has had any success has been able to effectively mobilize the three pillars. The American Revolution did it. The Civil Rights Movement did it. NFI seeks to do it as well.

The first "e" of our strategy is educate. If you can't change people's minds, you can't change anything. Since 1996, NFI has partnered with the Ad Council to create and disseminate a comprehensive public service announcement campaign to raise awareness about the problem of father absence and to provide inspiration for fathers to connect with their children. Since the campaign's inception, it has garnered over \$320 million in donated advertising on television, radio, print, outdoor, and Internet media.

Respected individuals and celebrities such as Tiger Woods, Tom Selleck, James Earl Jones, Tim McGraw, and Ossie Davis have lent their talents to this unique campaign.

Millward Brown polling that tracks the effectiveness of the ads has found that Americans' attitudes about important fatherhood issues have shifted in a positive direction over the past few years. African Americans especially are experiencing dramatic shifts in the way they view the institution of fatherhood and its importance to children and communities.

In addition to the public service announcements, NFI provides research and other resources to educate the culture about the importance of fatherhood.

The second "e" of our strategy is equip. At NFI we are very focused on moving people from inspiration to implementation. We have established a National Fatherhood Clearinghouse and Resource Center (NFCRC) to provide a comprehensive collection of books, brochures, curricula, videos, CD-ROMS, and other resources for both individual fathers and for organizations throughout the country that are serving fathers. The NFCRC provides training institutes, workshops, and technical assistance to help grassroots organizations in implementing fatherhood programs in their communities. Through our online bookstore, we reach thousands of fathers every day with resources that cover a wide array of pertinent fatherhood topics.

The third "e" of our strategy is engage. NFI works to engage in strategic alliances and partnerships with organizations that are at the nexus of children and families. In order to confront, in totality, the problem of father absence, we cannot just talk to and work with men. We have to engage the culture as a whole to embrace the importance of connecting fathers to their children. We have to work with women to get them involved in the fight to end father absence. This is not a men's issue, it is a people issue. Accordingly, NFI works with organizations from all sectors of society—business, faith, and government—to find intersections in our work so that we can assist them in integrating fatherhood programming into the work they are already doing. For example, we are working with the Greater Pittsburgh YMCA to open fatherhood resource centers in the 14 YMCAs in that area. I like to call it the "Willy Sutton strategy." That bank robber from the 1930's was asked why he robbed banks and he responded simply "that's where the money is." Well, we try to go where the fathers are. When men enter these YMCAs to play basketball or learn judo, they will also be able to get resources and training on being involved, responsible, and committed dads.

Each year, NFI's National Summit on Fatherhood educates, equips, and engages 500 people from across the country on the latest issues relevant to the responsible fatherhood movement. It is our way of allowing folks from the public and private sectors to gather together to share ideas and get the very best training and inspiration for successfully creating, marketing, and maintaining fatherhood programming in their communities.

NFI also engages the popular culture with our annual Fatherhood Awards Gala and Golden Dads Campaign. The Fatherhood Awards recognize individuals, organizations, and corporations that do exemplary work in promoting involved, responsible, and committed fatherhood. The Golden Dads Campaign awards every day dads in the zoos, parks, malls, and museums of several American cities each year around Father's Day to celebrate the positive contributions dads are making to their children's lives.

CONCLUSION

Social science research over the past 25 years has strongly suggested that kids do best when they have involved, responsible, and committed fathers in their lives. People from across the political and ideological spectrum have come together on this issue, largely because of the weight of the evidence from the research. NFI's bipartisan Task Forces on Responsible Fatherhood serve as evidence of the unity that exists on this issue.

Additionally, a review of the abundant literature on marriage suggests that children who grow up with married parents are better off and have the best chance at success.

If we want what is best for our children, then we have to ensure that more children are growing up with married mothers and fathers. As Wade Horn would say, "real live, in-the-home, love-the-mother, married fathers."

Since the well-being of children is at stake, and a litany of social ills correlate with the breakdown of married fatherhood, the government has a role to play in helping families achieve exactly what they would want for their own children. No parent wants his or her daughter to be abandoned by the future father of her children. No parent wants his or her son to abandon the future mother of his children. Therefore, it is important that the government passes legislation that promotes married fatherhood as the ideal. Legislation should also do all it can to support children who grow up in father-absent homes so that they can make better decisions about how they are going to raise the children they will someday bring into the world.

Legislation should focus on supporting public awareness campaigns about the importance of involved, responsible, and committed fatherhood. It should help organizations establish fatherhood resource centers to provide skill-building materials to all kinds of fathers at their points of need. Legislation should provide funding for community-based fatherhood programs that work at the grassroots to engage all kinds of fathers and connect them to their children. Senators Bayh and Santorum's Responsible Fatherhood Act, bill S. 604, is a bipartisan piece of legislation that is exemplary in its addressing of responsible fatherhood issues.

Legislation is not the answer, but it is a start. Our children deserve a nation, and that includes a government, that is deeply concerned about their future. And our Nation simply cannot be neutral about the way our children grow up. This is a public health issue that the government, the business community, and the faith community must all work together to address. We have to ensure that the hole in every child's soul in the shape of their father is filled with the love, nurturance, and support of their dad.

I will close by reading an e-mail that came in through our website. It is from a 16-year-old girl, whose e-mail address was "always—flirting":

"I just wanted to say thanks. What you all are doing is great. Fathers should be involved in their children's lives but sadly many aren't. I'm 16 years old and my father acts like he wants nothing to do with me or my brother, and it hurts sometimes, but I get over it. So yeah, I just wanted to say thanks and that I'm glad someone out there cares about the kids, even if their fathers don't."

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify before you today, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have concerning my testimony.

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Senator SESSIONS. Governor Keating, we are glad to have you and I look forward to hearing from you now.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Senator Allard. I appreciate the opportunity to be here. I have a formal statement I would just like to make a part of the record. I have some very brief off-the-statement comments to make as——

Senator SESSIONS. We will make your statement a part of the record.

Mr. KEATING [continuing].——as substitutes for ancillaries or postscripts to those that have been made and will be made.

Oklahoma became the first State in the Union to create and to implement a marriage initiative. We also were the first State in the Union to commit public funds, in addition to private funds, to this purpose and we remain so to this day under both political parties. The governor that followed me was a Democrat. He is equally committed to this initiative as I was.

But I came at this, Mr. Chairman, strictly as an economic development matter. When I became Governor, I was troubled by the fact that my State, which is 28th in population, was 45th in per capita income. I mean, what made this State poor? How come people that were so enterprising and so good—witness the reaction to the Oklahoma City bombing, the fact that 302 buildings were damaged or destroyed and there was no act of looting—how could people like this be so poor?

So I commissioned through the State Chamber of Commerce the Oklahoma State University and Oklahoma University economics departments to do an in-depth study of the reason for the State's poverty. They came back and had a series of things that probably come as no surprise to many of us. They said, well, you tax too many things and you don't have right-to-work and your workers' comp system is too expensive and your civil justice system is basically in the—under the control of the trial bar. You have too much welfare. Your infrastructure is not adequate and your children don't work hard enough.

So with a Democrat legislature in both Houses, over the course of the next number of years, we became the first State in 42 years to pass right-to-work, reduce welfare costs, and cut taxes dramatically. As a matter of fact, the largest expenditure of public funds ever to build a transportation infrastructure reduced welfare by 80 percent, and required that every child take 3 years of math and 4 years of English and 4 years of science and 4 years of history and geography and the like.

But these economists did something that I have never seen economists do. They turned the page and said, you have too much divorce and you have too much in the way of out-of-wedlock birth. Well, for me, as a Catholic Governor in an overwhelmingly Southern Baptist State, to begin preaching on the subject of too much divorce obviously was something that I was somewhat cautious or sensitive about doing. But I spoke in my second inaugural message and also to a large group of Southern Baptist pastors and I said, how come we can be so good and yet have so much divorce, which results, according to the study of the economics departments of these two universities, in large doses of poverty?

So the first thing we did was with no mandate from the State, and quite truthfully with no State funds, we asked the faith community to come together and have courses before marriage to encourage people, as is done in my faith, in pre-Cana conferences, to prepare for marriage and understand that marriage is a lifetime contract, to make sure, as has been said by Dr. Horn and the other panelists, that you are prepared for marriage and that this is something that obviously is important for you and your prospective family.

So some 1,300 churches and synagogues in the State signed up to provide a course before marriage. One of my Southern Baptist pastor friends said, "You know, at first, I wondered what was this guy, this secular figure, preaching to me about the need to have a course before marriage." And he said, "The first couple that came to see me to ask for a date for a wedding, I thought, well, I will just see if Keating has a point. And I asked this young man and young woman, well, you understand that this is a lifetime contract, do you not, to which the young man said, "Well, we were going to give it a 5-year try."

[Laughter.]

And this pastor said, "Well, did you buy a car on time?" And this young man said, "Yes, I did." He said, "What is your time on the car payments?" He said, "Well, 3 years." He said, "what do you think the bank would have done if you told it that you were going to try to make those payments for a year?" He said, "Well, they wouldn't loan me the money." And he said, "Well, I am not going to marry you, either."

So the State as a faith community, and about 70 percent of our people go to church twice a month or more, committed at the outset to do this.

Then we had a series of conferences on marriage, brought in professionals. As a matter of fact, Wade Horn was one of the early people that came to help us. We decided we needed to focus on teachers, public health nurses. We needed a broad-based education system not only in addition to the pastors and priests and rabbis and imams of the churches and synagogues and mosques, but also we needed to have health care professionals and teachers talk about the importance of marriage as a contract, the importance of being able to argue, to resolve problems, and to truly be prepared for the marriage state.

So far, we have some 1,100, 1,200 people who have gone through or who have become "train the trainers" for these courses. It is a 12-hour course. It is a matter which has been funded through TANF funds over the course of the last probably 5 years. We have spent about \$7.5 million in TANF funds for this purpose. Obviously, there is a lot of private sector contribution and nonprofit support, as well.

But the State, the public community, that is the legislature, men and women of both parties, the governor, obviously two men of both parties, have committed that if, in fact, this is a way to make us more prosperous, this is not a secular statement, it is not—I mean, a sectarian statement, it is a secular statement, if this is one of those things that we need to do to make us more successful and more prosperous, better educated, obviously longer lived and

healthier, we are going to do it, and underway in Oklahoma today is just such an initiative.

I think it is too early to say what the results will be, but I cannot imagine that there would not be some positive result when you have the number of people and the number of committed people to have a course before marriage and to commit themselves for a lifetime relationship.

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you, Governor Keating. It is a very succinct and great story. It is a great accomplishment.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Keating follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF GOVERNOR FRANK KEATING

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to talk to you today. My name is Frank Keating and I am President and CEO of the American Council of Life Insurers. I have been asked to talk today about the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI), which I launched in 1999 when I was Governor of Oklahoma. While this Initiative began under my Republican Administration, Governor Brad Henry, a Democrat, was elected in 2002, and the OMI continues to thrive with his support.

I will talk today about why we decided to launch the Initiative, what it accomplished when I was Governor, and what has happened since Governor and Mrs. Henry joined in this important work. I will also suggest that there are some general lessons from the Oklahoma experience that may be useful to other States and communities committed to the same goals of strengthening families and child well being.

HOW DID THE OKLAHOMA MARRIAGE INITIATIVE BEGIN?

In my 1999 Inaugural address, I announced that Oklahoma's high rate of divorce was an economic and social policy problem, and I put forth bold goals to reduce divorce and out-of-wedlock birth rates. (In the last State ranking produced by the CDC in 1995, Oklahoma had the second highest divorce rate by State of residence, trailing only Arkansas.) As a first step, I convened a day-long Governor and First Lady's Conference on Marriage on March 22, 1999, where 200 leaders from many different sectors and regions of the State came together to hear from the nation's experts on marriage and to brainstorm ideas about what the State could do to counteract current negative trends. This event, and the subsequent ideas and support generated over the next weeks and months, launched what is now known as the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative.

WHAT IS THE OKLAHOMA MARRIAGE INITIATIVE?

The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI) is a broad based, comprehensive attempt to mobilize public and private sectors in a statewide effort to strengthen marriage and reduce divorce in order to improve child well-being and benefit adults. Even though Oklahoma has a long way to go to achieve critical mass in the delivery of services, no other State has launched as ambitious a plan or invested as many resources on this issue. As a result, the OMI has received a great deal of attention in the national and international press. In policy circles, Oklahoma has become a national model for innovation across broad systems and diverse groups in furtherance of the goal of strengthening marriages.

Due in part to the broad-based interest and support of the OMI, from the public and from a diverse group of stakeholders, and because of a shared belief that government must do something more to strengthen families, several other States are now following close behind. At the time of this testimony, there are seven States that have significant activities underway to strengthen marriage and two-parent families—Arizona, Florida, Louisiana, Michigan, Oklahoma, Utah, and Virginia. Other Governor's have now held statewide Conferences on Marriage, and in around 36 States new government funded educational programs are being offered on at least a pilot basis. These programs are largely designed to prepare couples for marriage and to help them achieve healthier, long lasting marriages.¹

WHY DID WE DECIDE TO LAUNCH THE OMI?

In 1998, during my second term in office, I commissioned economists at the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University to study the reasons for Okla-

homa's low per capita income and low rates of economic growth. The 1999 report that followed specifically cited Oklahoma's high divorce rates and teenage birth rates among the factors associated with its poor economic performance. As noted in an op-ed piece at the time "Oklahoma's high divorce rate and low per-capita income are interrelated. They hold hands. They push and pull each other. There's no faster way for a married woman with children to become poor than to suddenly become a single mother." Jerry Regier, who was Oklahoma Cabinet Secretary of Health and Human Services in my administration (who now serves as Governor Jeb Bush's Secretary for Children and Families) had also made me aware of the growing body of social science research that linked high rates of single parenthood to child poverty and other negative indicators of child well being.

The research basis for taking government action to strengthen marriage was strong, but I was well aware that there was little precedent for doing so, and my decision was going to be controversial. Marriage had always been considered a private issue, and little attention had been paid to government's role in this important institution. That is why I thought it was so important to bring together leaders from different sectors and political persuasions from across the State to our first conference to hear from the experts about the compelling research in this area. At this first conference, I talked about the sensitivity of the issue and acknowledged that, like the country as a whole, many of the assembled leaders were themselves divorced or had experienced divorce in their family. My wife, Cathy, also spoke that day, acknowledging that we have had our own struggles at times, and have experienced divorce in our extended family. Together we assured our fellow Oklahomans that our intent was not to point the finger of blame at anyone but to ask them to join us in a collective effort to decide how to reduce divorce and strengthen families in the next generations.

There are additional reasons to justify proposing government action. In Oklahoma, we believe that by investing in efforts to strengthen marriage and reduce divorce we will eventually reduce the level of government intrusion in family life. Judge Helen Brown of Detroit has pointed out that, "the best way to keep government out of your (family) life, is to stay married." It is when couples divorce, she says, that court officials are really intrusive, "telling you when you can see your child, how much money you should send each month, how and when you can communicate and how to divide the assets of your marriage."²

My Secretary of Human Services Howard Hendrick, who was retained by the new Governor, currently oversees the OMI, provided congressional testimony about the Initiative before the Senate Finance Committee, where he pointed out the high costs of all human service programs (artificial supports) that are needed to help single parents when fathers and mothers do not marry or when marriages break up—such as child support enforcement, welfare, food stamps, Medicaid etc. Hendrick testified that welfare reform in Oklahoma, as elsewhere, has been very successful in reducing the need for welfare assistance, but he said we must also find ways to strengthen the natural supports provided by healthy two-parent married families, both to improve child well-being and to ultimately lessen the need for government assistance.³

HOW DID WE DECIDE WHAT TO DO AND HOW TO FUND IT?

As I said in my State of the State Address in 1999, "There's something wrong with good people in a good society when it is easier to get a marriage license in Oklahoma than it is to get a fishing license and it is easier to get out of a marriage with children than it is to get out of a Tupperware contract."

But while it was easy to identify the problem, it was another matter entirely to decide on any one solution. There were no blue prints out there and, quite frankly, we didn't know what to do beyond our commitment to doing something. We decided against setting up a Commission that would study the idea and report back in a few years, as our priority was to use our broad-based support to begin implementing services. Instead we set about consulting widely with marriage experts in Oklahoma and across the nation, looking for promising ideas and programs that could be replicated in some form and on a greater scale. We established a large, broad based steering committee, and through a competitive bid, hired a public consulting firm, Public Strategies to manage the planning process and develop a service delivery system.

As a result of our efforts, we discovered that over the past 20 years researchers have learned a great deal about what factors contribute to the success or failure of marriages. Some of this knowledge has been translated into a variety of educational programs designed to teach individuals and couples the information, skills and attitudes needed to make wise relationship choices, and to build and sustain healthy

marriages. These programs for the most part were not well known when we began, and they were not widely available. Moreover they were generally provided to middle class engaged or married couples. It was not clear whether or not these services could be offered on a large scale and/or to a more diverse population. Nevertheless, we were impressed with the promise of the field and a few outstanding programs, and it was our State's decision that providing these marriage education services should be the principal objective of the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative.

After an extensive review of applicable programs, the OMI selected the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), based in Denver, because it was the program with the strongest research basis, the most promising evaluation results, and the curriculum had been used widely with military couples. The PREP program consists of 12 hours of group instruction and interaction, typically delivered in 2-hour periods over 6 weeks, but the format is easily modified to fit with specific participant needs and the sponsor's setting. The founders of PREP also had many years of experience in training professional and paraprofessional workshop leaders to deliver the program, which was to be the basic design of the Oklahoma model.

After selecting a core curriculum, the immediate challenge was how to build the capacity to offer the PREP workshops on an ongoing basis in every county in the State. Public Strategies worked for many months with Jerry Regier, Howard Hendrick and DHS senior staff, and many individuals in the non-governmental sector to design the Marriage and Relationship Service Delivery System. The system was designed to train three categories of individuals: staff of publicly funded agencies who already had experience providing educational or therapeutic services to low income individuals and families; pastors, ministers, chaplains and lay leaders from the faith community; and health, mental health and other community leaders who might be in the position to deliver workshops to couples.

While the early planning efforts of the OMI were funded with private foundation dollars and a modest amount of State discretionary monies, clearly a statewide service delivery system would require significant funding. Since three of the four goals of the 1996 TANF law related to marriage, I asked the Department of Human Services Board to set aside \$10 million in TANF funds for this effort and they agreed. From the beginning, this commitment of resources made the OMI more than just another policy idea. It gave legs to ideas and demonstrated a real commitment to developing these services.

WHAT HAS THE OMI ACCOMPLISHED TO DATE?

I do not have ample time to describe in detail all the things that are going on in the OMI or the wide range of the benefits our State has received from this Initiative, but I will simply highlight here the most significant achievements in the areas of research, service delivery, and community involvement.

RESEARCH—THE OKLAHOMA STATEWIDE BASELINE SURVEY

The OMI has made a commitment to ongoing research through a partnership agreement with the Oklahoma State University Bureau for Social Research and the creation of a Research Advisory Group comprised of State and nationally known marriage scholars, practitioners and policy experts. These researchers are charged with providing ongoing guidance to the research efforts that guide program design and implementation.

In 2001, this research team designed and implemented a comprehensive statewide baseline survey to learn about Oklahomans' attitudes, behaviors and opinions related to marriage, divorce and marital quality. Additionally, the survey over-sampled Medicaid clients to ensure that the results were representative of the low-income population. The initial report was published in July 2002⁴. (Utah and Florida have since conducted their own State surveys modeled on the Oklahoma survey).

Among the key findings are:

Oklahomans marry an average of 2.5 years younger than the national median age at first marriage.

Thirty-two percent of all Oklahoman adults have ever divorced compared to 21 percent nationally.

Those who have been divorced give as the two top reasons for their divorces a "lack of commitment" and "too much conflict and arguing".

Over 2/3 of Oklahomans think divorce is a very serious national problem. Eighty-two percent of Oklahomans said that a statewide initiative to promote marriage and reduce divorce would be a good or very good idea.

Sixty-six percent would consider using relationships education to strengthen their relationships. Interest in relationship education is especially high among the young (77 percent) and low-income persons (72 percent).

Plans are to repeat the survey in upcoming years to assess whether there have been any changes in Oklahomans' attitude, knowledge and behavior related to marriage and divorce, but the data is already used to influence program design. The survey findings presented by the research team have helped the OMI target new priorities and activities, while also confirming many of the previously adopted program approaches. For example, since learning that Oklahomans marry so young and that young marriages are much more vulnerable to divorce, the OMI is implementing a new curriculum for high school students, created through a partnership between the developers of PREP and a youth-oriented marriage education curriculum. The OMI also partnered with the State's family and consumer sciences teachers in 2003, and as a result, Connections+PREP is currently being offered as an elective course in Oklahoma high schools.

SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM

There are now trained PREP workshop leaders available to deliver community-based workshops in most every county in the State. In Tulsa and Oklahoma City, there are sufficient numbers of trained leaders to begin to offer workshops on a continuous basis ("standing capacity"). As of April 2004:

OMI has trained 1072 individuals as PREP workshop leaders. (Individuals receive training at no cost in exchange for a commitment to conduct four workshops at no charge to participants). Those trained include staff of three publicly funded agencies with whom the OMI has cooperative agreements, namely—the Department of Health Child Guidance counselors; University Cooperative Extension educators; and professional staff affiliated with the Oklahoma Association of Youth Services, which has 41 community-based agencies that provide services to youth and their families. In addition, hundreds of workshop leaders have been trained from and to serve the faith community, military, Native American tribes, mental health providers, Department of Corrections, educational and academic sectors, and many other areas.

An additional 262 Family and Consumer Sciences teachers in 250 high schools have been trained to provide classes in the Connections-PREP curriculum. Approximately 10,000 high school students will complete the curriculum this year.

A total of 1,413 PREP workshops have been conducted to date, with approximately 18,721 individuals having completed the workshop. Participants represent a wide range of backgrounds and situations and include married and unmarried couples, single welfare mothers, parents of juvenile first-time offenders, and women residents of domestic violence shelters.

Approximately 35 percent of all participants are estimated to be low income. The proportion of low-income participants continues to rise as the OMI has become more focused on recruiting providers who serve this population. Recent data from workshop participants suggest that of those who reported income, 50 percent reside in low-income households as defined by the DHS poverty guidelines of household income at or below \$36,800.

The leadership of the Oklahoma Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault has worked with the OMI since its early stages of development to ensure that PREP leaders are provided training and information regarding domestic violence issues. All workshop participants are also given information about referral sources for domestic violence services, counselors, and substance abuse treatment.

Additionally, the OMI has achieved some success in training workshop leaders from African American, Latino and Native American communities to deliver the workshops in numerous areas and settings. The OMI has done much work to date in translating workshop forms, materials and training information into Spanish to serve the State's growing Latino population.

Several programs designed for special populations have also been developed as part of the service delivery system. For example, prison chaplains have been trained to offer PREP workshops on a voluntary basis to re-entry prisoners and their spouses/partners; parents who are adopting children with special needs are participating in PREP workshops as part of a post-adoption services program; parents and their teenagers are participating in PREP workshops as part of the juvenile first offenders program; child welfare families are participating in PREP services as part of their family service plans; and refugee resettlement workers are offering culturally appropriate services through two community-based organizations.

INVOLVEMENT OF THE FAITH COMMUNITY

Since the large majority of first marriages occur in a church setting, and 67 percent of Oklahomans claim affiliation with a church, it was clearly important and a logical step early in the development process for me to invite the faith leaders to actively join this Initiative. In 2000, leaders of almost every denomination and faith

throughout Oklahoma joined the First Lady and me at the State Capitol to pledge that they would work towards preparing couples for the complexities of marriage. These leaders signed a marriage covenant, committing themselves to encouraging more premarital education and counseling, enacting waiting periods before agreeing to marry, and developing a program of marriage mentors within their congregations. To date nearly 1,300 faith leaders have signed this covenant. Two hundred forty-six current PREP workshop leaders associate themselves with the faith sector and are delivering workshops within a congregation or faith organization. Additionally, mentor couples have been trained to work in conjunction with these marriage education workshops to provide congregations with a comprehensive program of family strengthening services and opportunities.

LESSONS FOR OTHER STATES AND COMMUNITIES

Secretary Hendrick tells me that the Initiative is constantly adapting and making improvements to meet the needs of new service populations and to correspond with the latest research. In the next year, now that services are becoming more available, planning has begun about ways to increase public outreach and communications, focusing on letting Oklahomans know about the value and availability of the PREP workshops. Work is also being done to develop an additional marriage education service for low-income parents who are becoming parents.

Like most prevention/early intervention programs, it will be many years before we will know the outcomes of the OMI and whether the Initiative has been successful in helping more people have better marriages and fewer divorces. But I think we can still reflect on some of the general lessons that we have learned thus far about how to implement marriage initiatives, whether statewide or at a city or community level. I'm sure those more closely involved than I could list many such lessons.⁵ I will now focus on four overarching lessons that stand out to me.

- **Attract committed high-level leadership.** With a new and sensitive subject it is especially important to obtain the strong commitment and support of top governmental leadership whether at the State, city or community level. In Oklahoma, my interest as Governor helped to overcome much initial skepticism and resistance and opened many doors. The resolve of Governor Henry to continue the OMI from one administration to another, and his commitment to support Oklahoma's initiative publicly has been the measure of true leadership and a testimony to the broad range of impact and support this Initiative has garnered.

The steadfast commitment of Secretary Jerry Regier in the early stages, and then the exemplary leadership of Secretary Howard Hendrick as the OMI has developed have made progress possible in innumerable ways. And most importantly, strong leadership at these levels has made it much easier to build the critical leadership needed throughout State agencies and in other sectors when one seeks to make a difference for families and children.

- **Build a strong, broad and inclusive base of support.** Any marriage initiative must devote the time necessary to having a period of information sessions and consultations with individuals in many sectors to help overcome any initial resistance and skepticism about a marriage agenda. Make sure to invite representatives from the domestic violence community to participate in meaningful discussions, and to engage groups who may feel especially nervous about what marriage promotion means. In Oklahoma we found that this effort was, though time consuming in the early stages, ultimately very rewarding as gradually more and more people have come forward to offer their assistance and support for these services. Nationally, there has developed an immensely productive and respectful discussion among liberal and conservative policy experts and researchers about marriage and family, and I am proud that Oklahoma has played a role in this evolving discussion.

- **Build the design and implementation of any marriage initiative on the best theory and research available.** When beginning a demonstration program where there is still so much to learn, use what you do know from research as your foundation. Let "lessons learned" and research findings guide your next steps to the extent that they can. Because we based our program and strategies in research, we had the credibility we needed to help gain support for the services.

- **Invest significant monies in planning and in developing services if you want to have any hope of having an effect.** You cannot change social service systems by passing laws with no appropriations or making declarations about the value of marriage. In Oklahoma we were fortunate to be able to use TANF funds for the development of these services, but other departments and agencies also have a stake in promoting healthy marriage—Health, Education, Justice, and the Armed Services. Each of these agencies should be encouraged to think of funding vehicles they may have to support marriage strengthening activities as well. It is important,

also, to include the business sector as divorces and family relationship struggles can be very costly to businesses in terms of lost productivity.

- **Involving the faith-based sector as a vital partner.** The faith community is often well aware that it has a special responsibility to do more to strengthen marriage, yet the tradition of separation of church and State makes many in the faith sector nervous of working too closely with government and vice-versa. Further, it is our experience that much of the faith community is in desperate need of training and resources to equip them to support couples and marriages. I believe our approach in partnering with the Oklahoma faith community could be a useful model to other States. In effect the OMI serves as an intermediary in service delivery, allowing the government the opportunity to work in parallel and along side the faith sector towards the same goal. In practice, the OMI is able to encourage faith leaders to make more efforts to strengthen their marriage ministries and is helping build their capacity to do so without any direct financial relationship.

I am immensely excited by and proud of everything the OMI has accomplished thus far. There are literally thousands of Oklahomans who over the past few years have been involved in meetings, discussions, trainings or participated in workshops and learning about the components of healthy marriages. These activities are clearly having a ripple effect and will continue to do so. As this Initiative moves forward, I believe we have a good chance of turning things around in Oklahoma. Over time we will replace a culture of divorce with a culture that supports strong and healthy marriages, and children will be the greatest beneficiaries.

ENDNOTES

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

2. Regier, J. (2001, May 22) Testimony before the subcommittee on Human Resource, Ways and Means Committee hearing on *Welfare and Marriage Issues*.

3. Hendrick, H.(2003, March 12) Testimony before the Senate Finance Committee hearing on *Welfare Reform: Building on Success*.

4. Johnson, C., Stanley, S.M., Glenn, N.G., Amato, P., Nock, S.L., Markman, H.J. & Dion, R. (2002). Marriage in Oklahoma 2001 Baseline Statewide Survey on Marriage and Divorce. Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Marriage Initiative. Available online at www.okmarriage.org.

5. See for example, Ooms, T. and Myrick, M.(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 APAM Research Annual Conference in Dallas, November 7 2022. Available from mary@publicstrategies.com.

Senator SESSIONS. Dr. Weed?

Mr. WEED. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I am pleased to be here today. I would like to share with you the results of a recent national study conducted by my colleagues and I at the Institute for Research and Evaluation. I will summarize from the article being published in the peer-reviewed Family Relations journal.

I would like to point out that this research was not about the pros and cons of marriage or divorce. We have accepted the well-established evidence regarding the negative impact of family disintegration on children, adults, and the broader society. We have moved in this research to a broader policy level question that requires a broad macro analysis of trends at the county, State, and national level. And so our research is really not about any one community or any one approach to helping strengthen marriage or reduce divorce. It was really a broad look that would help in terms of policy decisions.

We had two questions that we wanted to resolve. First, whether community marriage initiatives actually reduce divorce rates across a broad spectrum of States and counties. Now, in the research field, the common scenario is, well, there goes another beautiful

theory murdered by a brutal gang of facts. We wanted to answer the program impact question, but we also wanted to determine if we could develop an objective and rigorous methodology to test that question.

So we tackled this by looking at a specific community marriage initiative called Community Marriage Policies under the umbrella of the Marriage Savers program, developed by Mike McManus. The premise was that a large majority of marriages, about 86 percent, occur in the faith community setting and that religious leaders could be more involved in strengthening marriage through better education and preparation in their congregations.

By January of 2004, the clergy of 183 cities and towns in 40 States had adopted a Community Marriage Policy with the goal of reducing divorce rates among those married in area churches. You will see in my written testimony a description of that program, at least in summary form.

We had some challenges in this evaluation. The first was, to our surprise, the Federal Government discontinued collecting divorce data at the county level in the mid-1990s and stopped paying States to do so. As a result, we had to contact most States and individual counties directly in order to create a new database for U.S. counties from 1989 to the present.

Second, information about program implementation was not available from all CMP counties, but we were sure from the data that we were able to get that there was a broad range of quality in terms of implementation, which meant that our data summarizes and averages across strong, well-implemented policies as well as those that are pretty weak and almost nonsignificant.

And finally, national divorce rates are already declining in most U.S. counties. We found from this new data set we created almost a 15 percent decline in the divorce rates since 1990. So we had to do our analysis in the context of that ongoing decline.

The test involved a comparison between counties having Community Marriage Policies with matched counties in the same State who do not have such policies. And in order to do that, we had to examine all 3,141 U.S. counties and select comparison counties within the same State whose divorce rate and level was declining at virtually the same rate as our target counties. If you look at Figure 1 in your handout, you will see that our matching methodology was quite successful. We were able to match 122 counties with our target counties that had essentially the same rate of decline and the same level of divorce rate.

In addition, we controlled in the analysis for other factors that are directly related to aggregate divorce rates—percent urban, percent Catholic, median age, median income, percent female, and the marriage rate. We also looked at cohabitation rates as a factor that might have influenced the results of this analysis.

Our hypothesis was that the decline after the CMP was signed would have accelerated more in counties which adopted a Community Marriage Policy than in the comparison counties without the intervention. This hypothesis was supported by the data, and if you look at Figure 2, you will see that the decline in the divorce rate accelerated in those targeted CMP counties at a greater rate than our matched counties.

We concluded from this that CMP counties were experiencing a greater decline in the divorce rate than the comparison counties and the significant difference in divorce rate change over time between CMP and comparison counties persisted after accounting for changes in marriage rates, cohabitation rates, and a variety of the key demographic predictors that I mentioned earlier.

To put it in more common and user-friendly terms, if you looked at Table 1 in my handout, what you will see there is a decline in our target counties of 17.5 percent of the divorce rate compared to a 9 percent decline in the match counties. So the rate of decline was almost double in the targeted program intervention counties.

One of the things that is striking about this is that the deck is really stacked against finding a positive result in this kind of an analysis, especially on such a broad scale. It is not the usual thing that you find. I evaluate lots of different kinds of programs and the most common news that I take back to the client is, well, I wish we had better news. This didn't work, and maybe we can figure out why and perhaps you can improve it.

In this case, we found significant results and we analyzed it in dozens of different ways to see if those results were somehow a fluke of a particular analytical approach that we had used. But in fact, the analyses that we tried, dozens of them, came up with the same pattern of results. So we gained more confidence, and I think the important thing about these findings is not so much that they are large, which they are not. I mean, this is a modest result. But what is surprising is that there is any result at all under these circumstances.

So there is promise here. We think that there is good reason to look carefully at this and programs like it and find ways to support couples who would like to strengthen marriage and reduce divorce.

In summary, I would say that at the policy level, we would do well to invest in and further investigate this and similar approaches which have the potential of affecting divorce rates on a large scale through community marriage initiatives. Local communities with reasonable effort, good coordination, and good programs can make a difference in the divorce rate on a broad scale. Our society will be the benefactor. Thank you very much.

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you, Dr. Weed. That is good news, indeed, and I do think it is an important question.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Weed follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF STAN E. WEED

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am pleased to be here today to share with you the results of a recent national study conducted by my colleagues and I at the Institute for Research and Evaluation. I will summarize from the article being published in the peer reviewed *Family Relations* journal. (Assessing the Impact of Community Marriage Policies on U.S. County Divorce Rates; Paul James Birch, Stan E. Weed, and Joseph A. Olsen) May I point out that this research is not about the pros and cons of marriage and divorce. We have accepted the well established evidence regarding the negative impact of family disintegration on children, adults, and the broader society (Doherty, et al., 2002). We have moved to a broader policy level question that requires a broad, macro analysis of trends at the county, State and national level. We wanted to determine (1) whether community marriage initiatives actually reduce divorce rates across a broad spectrum of States and counties, and (2) whether we could develop an objective and rigorous methodology to test that question.

Numerous private, professional, religious, and government agencies have tackled the problem of family disintegration, and with more vigor in recent years. Coalitions of such agencies, referred to as Community Marriage Initiatives, have emerged as one of the major thrusts (see Parke & Ooms, 2002). Our research focused on one of the earliest of these community based efforts, launched in 1986 by founder Mike McManus with a group of concerned faith community leaders in Modesto, California. The premise was that a large majority of marriages occur in church settings (86 percent according to Hart, 2003), and that religious leaders could be more involved in strengthening marriage through better education and preparation in their congregations. By January, 2004, the clergy of 183 cities and towns in 40 States had adopted a Community Marriage Policy (CMP) with the goal of reducing divorce rates among those married in area churches.

THE PROGRAM

Most Community Marriage Policies involve local clergy developing a community marriage policy in which they pledge, publicly and in writing, to take five steps to revitalize marriage:

Require rigorous marriage preparation of at least 4 months during which couples take a premarital inventory and talk through the relational issues it surfaces with trained mentor couples, who also teach couple communication skills.

Renew existing marriages with an annual enrichment retreat.

Restore troubled marriages by training couples whose marriages once nearly failed, to mentor couples currently in crisis.

Reconcile the separated with a course conducted with a same gender support partner.

Revive step families by creating Step Family Support Groups for parents in remarriages with children.

As implied in the above components, couples in healthy marriages are enlisted to be a mentor couple to help others at critical stages of marriage. To date, about 3,000 mentor couples have been personally trained by the program founders. Numerous others have become involved through local congregational efforts.

EVALUATION CHALLENGES

We faced several challenges when addressing the questions of program impact. First, and surprisingly, the Federal Government discontinued collecting divorce data at the county level in the mid 1990s and stopped paying States to do so. As a result, we had to contact most States and individual counties directly in order to create a new data base for U.S. counties from 1989 to the present. In a few cases, the county data was not available or not reliable, which meant that some CMP counties had to be excluded from the analysis. For example, some States record filed divorces rather than finalized divorces. Second, information about program implementation was not available from all CMP counties. From the data we could acquire it was clear that the level of program implementation varied widely. Some counties did little beyond the original signing, others followed the signing with a serious and lasting effort. This means that what ever results we found would be made up of an average of both strong and weak policies. Furthermore, since national divorce rates are already declining in most U.S. counties, additional research had to be done to assess the effect of community Marriage Policies in the context of that overall decline.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS & RESULTS

The test involved a comparison between counties having Community Marriage Policies with matched counties in the same State who do not have such policies. The Institute wanted to identify counties whose pre-CMP slope was most similar to that of CMP counties. To do so, it was necessary to look at data from all 3,141 U.S. counties and select comparison counties in each State whose divorce rate was at the same level and declining at virtually the same rate as the CMP counties prior to CMP signing. The matching procedure relied on standardized squared Euclidean distance measures (using early divorce data) between CMP counties and all potential comparison counties. Population density was used as a second matching variable to further establish comparability between CMP and comparison counties. We were able to produce a set of counties which provided a good comparison (See *figure 1*). The divorce rate decline of comparison counties in the pre-CMP years, on average, was .095 divorce points per year (vs. .084 in CMP counties). In addition, we controlled in the analysis for other factors that are directly related to aggregate divorce rates: percent urban, percent catholic, median age, median income, percent female, and marriage rate. We also looked at cohabitation rates as a factor.

Our hypothesis was that the decline after the CMP was signed would have accelerated more in counties which adopted a Community Marriage Policy than in the comparison counties without the intervention. This hypothesis was supported by the data. In CMP counties the divorce rate fell .084 before the CMP and .144 afterward. But in the matched counties, the slope of the divorce rate decline actually fell from .095 per year to .06 per year. This is a statistically significant difference ($b = -.095$, $p = .007$, $df = 1852$). (See *figure 2*) Different analytical models produced minor differences in these results, but the pattern was consistent regardless of the model we used.

We concluded from this that the CMP counties were experiencing a greater decline in the divorce rate than the comparison counties. The significant difference in divorce rate change over time between CMP and comparison counties persists after accounting for marriage rates, cohabitation rates, and a variety of key demographic measures.

In more familiar terms, counties with a Community Marriage Policy had an 8.6 percent decline in their divorce rates over 4 years, while the comparison counties registered a 5.6 percent decline. Over a 7 year period, CMP communities had a 17.5 percent decline in the divorce rate vs. 9.4 percent in comparison counties. Thus, Community Marriage Policy counties have a decline in the divorce rate that is nearly double that of control communities (See table 1). The levels of impact would likely be greater if more communities had higher levels of saturation and implementation. That is, if more churches and synagogues signed on and more mentor couples were trained.

The Institute estimates that 31,000 to 50,000 fewer divorces occurred in 114 cities/counties with a Community Marriage Policy. Since clergy and community leaders have now created 183 Community Marriage Policies, the actual number is likely higher.

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

We examined other possible explanations for this data, none of which discredited the basic conclusion that CMP counties showed a greater decline in the divorce rate than the matched comparison counties. For example, we looked at factors which often predict divorce rates to some degree, such as the percentage of the population which is Catholic (who tend to experience lower divorce rates), percent urban, percent poverty, percent who cohabit, etc. Controlling for these factors did not change the results. We also examined whether the marriage rates were different in CMP counties compared to matched counties within the same State. No evidence could be found that the observed differences in divorce were attributable to differentially changing marriage rates.

We looked at the data in a multitude of ways, using different analytical models and controlling for different demographic predictors of divorce: the results persisted. The bottom line is that a Community Marriage Policy signing and the related activities associated with it bring down the divorce rate and creates a stronger culture for marriage. These results are significant, not because of their magnitude (which was modest) but because there are any results at all. In reality, the deck is stacked against finding a positive program effect in this setting. The effort depends on local volunteers with a high turnover. Local pastors also change frequently. Impact on county level data would require a fairly large proportion of congregations in that county signing on, and program implementation varies widely in its quality. Training of mentor couples did not begin in earnest until 1998. In 1999 when the 100th CMP was signed, Marriage Savers introduced its *Manual to Create a Marriage Savers Congregation*, an indication that the program was still evolving and is relatively new. Recorded divorce rates lag considerably behind the intervention, making divorce rate changes harder to detect in a relatively new program. And, CMPs were adopted mostly at the city level but the data were only available at the county level, embedding the effect in a larger population than that which would be affected by the policy. Finding a significant program effect under these conditions would be surprising. We would expect that with a more complete and consistent level of implementation, better results would be achieved.

Can we believe these results? Are there alternative explanations for the observed pattern?

We have done several things that add rigor to the research and increase our confidence in the findings:

1. Used multiple policies (122) signed at different times, reducing the likelihood of some chance event around the time of the policy signing.
2. Chose comparison group of 122 counties matched on 5 years of the pre-existing decline. This helps us determine whether changes in the CMP counties are all that

unique, and whether other factors are at work in these counties that could be affecting the divorce rate independent of the program.

3. Developed a nationally representative model of divorce rates to see what factors, observed at the aggregate level, predict divorce rates and we then controlled for differences on these factors.

4. Used sophisticated statistical analysis techniques (A mixed effects general linear model with multiple levels) to determine whether the slope change in the divorce rates before and after the policy would be different in the CMP counties than the comparison counties.

5. Tested the results with different analysis models to determine if the results were "persistent". (It is one thing to try many different methods until you find the result you want. It is quite another to run many analyses after finding significant results to see if your conclusions hold up. We have done the latter).

CONCLUSION

The slope of the decline in the divorce rate is steeper than in the comparison counties. The difference in the divorce rate change over time between CMP and comparison counties persists after accounting for marriage rates, cohabitation rates, and a variety of demographic measures which explain the variation between county divorce rates.

IMPLICATIONS

The overall effect is modest but statistically significant and promising. On average, the policy counties did better than the matched comparison counties. The simple explanation of these results is that Community Marriage Policies lead to reductions in divorce rates. This conclusion is further strengthened by the fact that numerous communities have adopted the Policy at different points in time (from 1986 through 2000), and in geographically dispersed areas of the country. At the policy level, we would do well to invest in and further investigate this and similar approaches which have the potential of affecting divorce rates on a large scale through community marriage initiatives. Local communities with reasonable effort, good coordination, and good programs can make a difference in divorce rates. Our society will be the benefactor.

Future research of this type should:

- Use a larger sample size (more policies, and more years of data following the intervention).
- Provide for a careful tracking of program implementation.
- Analyze program components to determine which of them has the greater effect.
- Examine other Community Marriage Initiative programs.
- Extend and further validate of the Institutes national marriage/divorce data set.

CITATIONS

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Parke, M. & Ooms, T. (2002). *More than a dating service? State activities designed to strengthen and promote marriage*. Center for Law and Social Policy. Washington, D.C.

Figure 1: Pre-policy divorce rate trends in program and comparison counties.

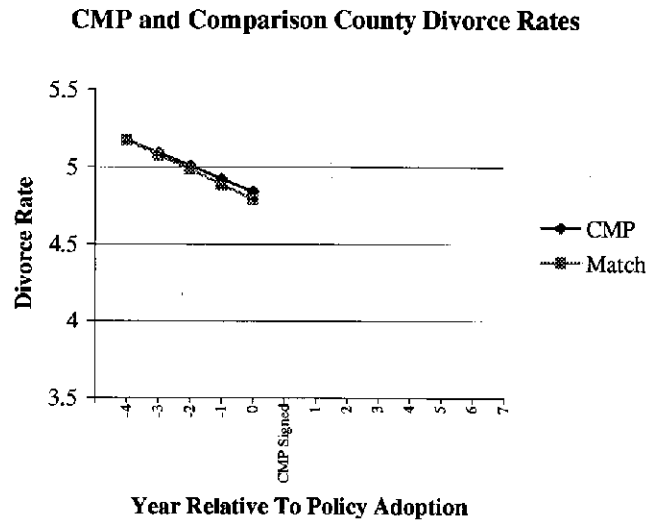


Figure 2: Post policy divorce rates trends for program and comparison counties

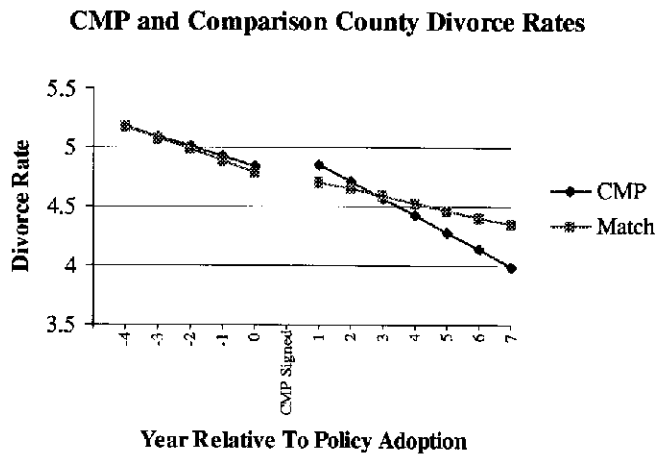


Table 1: Effect estimates converted to percentages

	<i>Year prior to Signing</i>	<i>4 years After CMP</i>	<i>% Change</i>	<i>7 Years After CMP</i>	<i>% Change</i>
CMP county	4.84	4.42	-8.6%	3.99	17.5%
Comparison	4.79	4.52	-5.6%	4.34	9.4%
Raw Difference			-3.0%	0.35	-8.1%
Ratio			1.5 times greater		1.86 times greater

Senator SESSIONS. I have been involved in a number of different programs, from drugs to other things, and you do studies and, like you say, frequently, you are surprised that the numbers don't come out like you would anticipate. But these numbers are noteworthy, almost a 1.8 times greater decline in divorce, is that the way I read that, after 7 years—

Mr. WEED. That is correct.

Senator SESSIONS [continuing].—almost twice as great a decline in divorce over 7 years with communities that have Community Marriage Policies.

Mr. WEED. Yes.

Senator SESSIONS. And I guess we can assume that those Community Marriage Policies certainly don't reach everybody in the community.

Mr. WEED. That is right.

Senator SESSIONS. So you are only touching on—

Mr. WEED. In some cases, we are fortunate if 30 or 40 percent of the county is touched by this policy. In many cases, it is much lower than that. Some of the policies were well-conceived and well-implemented and have endured over time. Others were much lower on the scale of implementation. But we lumped all of that together and still found positive results.

So what it suggests to me is that there is promise here and I think that with adequate support and diligent tracking, we would find a greater effect than what we have reported here. This is, I suspect, a conservative estimate.

Senator SESSIONS. Very good. Dr. Whitehead, you have raised a number of points in your remarks, but one I thought was particularly valuable for the men around, that men really do better—it may be more important for men in marriage than women.

Ms. WHITEHEAD. Men get a great deal from marriage, and across a spectrum of measures. They enjoy better physical health. Men suffer big drops in their physical well-being when they divorce, for example, much more than women. They have the advantage of having the supervision and support, emotional and physical, of their wives. And as Roland Warren suggested, being married does enhance a father's involvement with his children and really, in some ways, contributes to optimal fathering behavior. That just begins to chip away at some of the advantages for men.

This, I think, is significant, because what we see in our society is that parenthood is asymmetrical in the sense that the mother-child bond is strong and survives many bumps along the way,

whereas fathers, particularly when they are not living in the household married to the mothers of their children, begin to fade out of the picture. So marriage is a particularly important institution in attaching men to families, and men themselves personally benefit from this economically and physically and emotionally, as well.

One of the dark scenarios that people paint for the future is that if we continue to have extremely high rates of divorce and nonmarriage, we will have a lot of isolated elderly men with nobody really to care for them in their declining years. So I think that is an important feature of marriage, certainly.

Senator SESSIONS. I agree. Dr. Weed, has anyone done any study on the marriage penalty tax we have? I know a person that told me they divorced in January and she said, "You know, had we divorced in December, we could have filed separate returns and it would have saved us \$2,400." And I am thinking, we have created a system in which there is a bonus to divorce. We are paying a bonus. I know it is not clearly visible out there, and we have eliminated it now and I think we will continue that tax elimination, but could that have had a factor? Do any of you want to comment as to whether that would have had any impact or not on marriage?

Mr. WEED. I have not seen data on that, Mr. Chairman. Maybe one of the other panel members could share something.

Senator SESSIONS. I think some of the young people know about it and have discussed it, but it was a real fact and the numbers were startling. When two people, a man and woman working together, both working with a modest income—nurse, police officer—it was over \$2,000 more they paid to Uncle Sam, Frank, than if they didn't marry. So it is a big deal. We have eliminated most of that today and I think that is significant.

Dr. Whitehead, until about the time you wrote your famous article, "Dan Quayle Was Right," there was a genuine dispute about marriage and its utility, wouldn't you say? Have the numbers—I mean, has everybody now gotten on board with the conclusion you have reached?

Ms. WHITEHEAD. Well, that is sort of a mild understatement, that there was disagreement. I mean, that was 10 years ago. In 1993, I wrote that article. There was just a—I think the Atlantic Monthly received more letters, most of them angry, some threatening to cut off subscriptions, in response to that article than any that they had received in the last 50 years.

So the response was enormous and I found, then, in the aftermath of the article that there was just great dispute, particularly coming from academic institutions, academicians, arguing the point that children overall do better in two-parent families, which was the thesis of the article. And in the subsequent 10 years, partly because there has been resurgent interest in family formation and family structure effects within this academic world, the research has led to, I think, a widespread consensus on this point, that you rarely hear argument of the kind that you had 10 years ago on the importance of fathers to children and the importance of married parent families to children.

So to me, that represents some hope that with research and good evidence and argumentation, that some of these patterns can be turned around.

Senator SESSIONS. I think that is very good news, because just a decade ago, we did not have a consensus that marriage was better for family relations, and we do have a growing consensus today. Mr. Warren, does that give you a sense of encouragement that the culture can reverse a slide we have been on?

Mr. WARREN. Oh, absolutely. I think it, I mean, it took us a while to get here and certainly it may take us a while to get back, but there are some hopeful trends, even in father absence. I think when NFI first started this work, the statistics were about 4 out of every 10 kids growing up in homes without dads. We started to see a leveling off in 1995, 1996, to one out of three.

But as we are fond of saying, we don't have a fatherless kid to spare, so there is still a lot of work that needs to be done around this issue. That is the wonderful thing about the human condition, is that we can see that we are heading in a direction that is not right or not in the best interests certainly of our children and make a decision to turn and move in a different direction.

Senator SESSIONS. Well, we get good information. We eliminated the tax penalty, which was significant. We involve church leaders who marry people. Eighty-six percent of the people, Mr. Weed, are married in some religious setting?

Mr. WEED. That is right.

Senator SESSIONS. That is remarkable. Engage them, as Governor Keating did. How did that work? What kind of response did you get? You mentioned it generally, but how do you feel about it?

Mr. KEATING. If I may, to postscript what Dr. Whitehead said, at least in my environment, and I would suspect it is probably fairly similar in Colorado and Alabama, the reaction wasn't so much marriage isn't important or why do we think that fathers ought to be in the families or mothers ought to be in the families. It was, why are you preaching? I mean, why should the government be involved in telling us that we should have strong families or strong marriages?

Well, the easy answer, which was accepted on a bipartisan basis, was we are all over you anyway. I mean, the fact of the matter is, if this marriage doesn't work out, then you have a judge who you don't even know who will decide who gets the kids and where your life savings goes and will go in minute detail into every bit of your affairs and decide even where the lingerie goes. I mean, it is somebody that you don't even know.

The determination of child custody, the determination of asset distribution, I mean, we require marriage licenses. We require divorce decrees. So the government is very much in the middle of the marriage relationship, both at the start and at the end, and it made good sense to us to try to say, okay, if we are in this thing and if we are spending a lot of money, hundreds of millions of dollars a year, for example, in Federal and State funds in trying to put back Humpty Dumpty on the wall after relationships crash and dysfunction either created that crash or dysfunction followed that crash, then doesn't it make sense to spend some of this money, a

tiny fraction of this money, to try to save these relationships in advance and save these relationships once they are established?

The pretty well consensus answer, bipartisan consensus answer is, yes. The present situation is miserable. We were number two in divorce rate in the United States and anything is better than that.

Senator SESSIONS. Senator Allard?

Senator ALLARD. Mr. Chairman, thank you. I would like to thank all the panel members for their testimony and discussion. I think you all did a great job. Mr. Warren, I know that your effort on the National Fatherhood Initiative is greatly admired by many of us. I appreciate Governor Keating. The last time we met, I think might have been in Colorado. I think you were there and hope you get back more frequently.

I just have a general question I would like to have all of you address. What is the status of a healthy family today as compared to, say, 50 years ago, half a century ago? Can you give us some evaluation on that and perhaps why you think there is a difference one way or the other, or maybe there isn't a difference. I would just like to hear some comment. Maybe we can start with you, Dr. Whitehead.

Ms. WHITEHEAD. Well, one thing that I can say that should be obvious is that a married couple, families today, are not as numerous as they were 50 years ago. There has been a decline in the percentage of children who grow up in married parent families. The majority still do, but compared to 50 years ago, there has been quite a drop. So people who are married are not, I think, as well supported, or they don't find as many similar families within their communities as they once did.

I would also say that if anything, the status of being married today is probably more important to a couple, a family's stability and capacity to successfully rear children for two reasons. One I mentioned, which is the increasingly long period of youthful dependency. I am the mother of three children and I was still helping support my single children well into their 20s.

Senator ALLARD. We have all experienced that to some degree. [Laughter.]

Ms. WHITEHEAD. Happily so, but it takes longer to get an education. People are marrying at later ages. So there is this period in between completion of formal schooling and trying to get traction on the job ladder where parents continue, I think, to try to help their children to the best they can, and obviously for reasons we have talked about, married parent families have greater capacity to do that. So again, lots of parents do it very well against difficult odds. So that is one thing.

And then there is, I think, the fact that we live in a society now that is economically dynamic. People don't stay in a single job for a lifetime anymore. Bonds and ties are shallow because we move a lot. We are a big country with a diverse society. And so it is extremely important for individual, and particularly children's sense of emotional security and sense of kinship ties to have a stable family and to feel that they have an emotional center to their life.

So people talk about family as being kind of an anchor in this swirling island of—an anchor in this swirling sea of dynamic econ-

omy and diverse society. So I think it gives them a sense of inner strength to have that kind of support from their parents.

Senator ALLARD. Before I give Mr. Warren an opportunity to say something, I would like to follow up on something that you said, that we have fewer marriages today as we did 50 years ago. That was saying that perhaps maybe it is not as healthy as it was 50 years ago. I understand that, right. And of those that we have, are they healthier than they were 50 years ago? Do you see what I am driving at?

Ms. WHITEHEAD. There are many stresses on marriage today. There is some research, survey research of it and it suggests that people are less happy in their marriages today than 50 years ago, even though you would think with the high rate of divorce that really miserable marriages would get weeded out.

So I think that speaks to the stresses that people who are married encounter, the difficulty of holding together a strong family and a difficult economy amid a lot of social change, and then some of the social factors that are inimical to strong family ties which makes it more difficult to raise children, including the kind of media culture that parents face and that we hear about all the time, and that is across the board.

But I think there are across-the-board stresses on families that may make it harder to stay married and possibly account for some of the reason behind the persistently high divorce rate.

Senator ALLARD. Mr. Warren, do you have any comments?

Mr. WARREN. I think Dr. Whitehead covered a lot, but I would just say, certainly on the fatherhood landscape, I mean, we have gone from Ozzie and Harriet to Ozzie Osbourne as the model for fatherhood. Certainly, there were clearly issues with even the Ozzie and Harriet model, but my sense is that the landscape has not been good.

When you look particularly at communities like the one I grew up in and low-income communities, it is particularly troubling, the absence of fathers, because I think if you want to turn the corner on ensuring that more kids have the best chance at success and if you want to even support women, frankly, in their roles of being full partners in the workplace, then you are really going to need strategies where men are full partners at home, encouraged and supported in that construct. So I think it is troubling, but I am hopeful.

I don't know if I have an overall barometer for sort of the health of the family, but I do think, as a father of two sons, it is a more difficult climate. I think that many of the guard rails that were in the culture are no longer there in the way that they were before. In fact, instead of the guard rails kind of working for you, in many cases, there are some forces out there that are trying to pull down the guard rails that you as a parent are trying to put up to protect your kids and help your kids make healthy choices. I think that from that perspective, to the degree those things continue to happen, it is problematic.

Senator ALLARD. The challenges are a little different, I think. Fifty years ago, you got in trouble for chewing gum in class. Today, it is drugs of some sort or something like that that you are dealing with.

Mr. WARREN. Yes.

Senator SESSIONS. Different challenges.

Mr. WARREN. Absolutely problematic. And I certainly spend a lot of my time in the business community and there used to be a saying that, "How does it play in Peoria?" from a consumer marketing construct. The strategy there was, Peoria was this community that wasn't affected by the East Coast and the West Coast in terms of if you were going to test a product, you really had sort of a pure environment, pure from a marketing standpoint, an environment where you could test it and really get good data.

But with the Internet, the media, and various other forces that are out there, there is no place that you go that your kids are not going to be affected by some of the more negative things out there that could hurt us. And that is, from my perspective, a primary role of fathers, to stand in the gap.

Senator ALLARD. Family gets more important, doesn't it?

Mr. WARREN. Absolutely.

Senator ALLARD. Governor Keating, do you have any thoughts?

Mr. KEATING. All I know is when I first met Jeff Sessions 23 years ago, he had a cute young thing for a wife, I had a cute young thing for a wife. We are still happily married, and I don't know what made it possible, but I guess we lucked out and found two special, two very spectacular women.

To the extent that families and mentors and friends can preach this subject, we need to do that. But let me tell you, in my inaugural message when I first raised these issues, I said something to the effect, tell me the wisdom, tell me the sense of a system where it is easier to get a marriage license than it is to get a hunting license? You have to take a course to get a hunting license. Or tell me the sense of a system where it is easier to get out of a marriage relationship, marriage contract with children, it is easier to get out of that than it is to get out of a Tupperware contract.

We basically have taken the view that marriage is a throw-away—default divorce was a terrible blunder, and I was a part of that. I was a legislator in Oklahoma in the early 1970s. We all figured, well, you know, we ought to just get away from bad situations. As it turned out, the first argument means reject her or reject him, and that simply is not the way to develop a stable life, a stable family, and a stable society.

So to debate these issues today at the Federal level and the State level, to get the best research, to join the debate, men and women, Republicans, Democrats, Independents, whatever, everybody in every social status, every social class, I think for the safety and security of the country is very important.

Senator ALLARD. Thank you for coming. I sort of have to join with you and Senator Sessions. I feel blessed by a wonderful wife. We have stayed hooked ever since, oh, since we first took our vows.

Dr. Weed?

Mr. WEED. Two thoughts, Senator Allard. One is really to reinforce Roland's point about the changing landscape in terms of what our kids face and deal with. He didn't mention, but I am sure has thought of the effects of the Internet, for example, and the things that are available to kids now were unheard of when I was growing

up. It is just an amazing amount of bombardment that kids and families are exposed to.

So to safeguard that, the family is the best safeguard against it. A lot of my research is in the area of teen pregnancy prevention and kids, girls from single-parent homes are five times more likely to have an out-of-wedlock teen birth than kids in a two-couple family. These things are all related. As the culture begins to grasp the realities of that, I am hoping that we can pull it back together.

The other thing that I would comment on is that prior to my research emphasis in my career, I did a lot of counseling and marital counseling work. I guess I came to the conclusion, perhaps overly simplistically, that the most important and fundamental factor that kept families together was a commitment to the idea and the institution of marriage.

I remember one lady in particular who said that she was now contemplating her fourth marriage. It turned out she did not do it. She stayed married to her third husband. Her decision, her conclusion after all of this wrestling around was "if I had worked as hard at my first one as I did at the third one, I would still be married to the first one."

So the idea of marriage as an institution and placing it with high value and giving it status and recognition and support and encouragement and preparation and creating a greater sense of commitment to that as an institution, I think would go a long ways toward moving us in the right direction.

Senator ALLARD. And actually, your community initiative that you talked about in your testimony, in effect, that is what you were doing to those communities where you had the problem. You were elevating or emphasizing the importance of marriage more, which wasn't happening in other communities. I think that is——

Mr. WEED. That is correct.

Senator ALLARD [continuing].——the thing that made the difference. Don't you think that was——

Mr. WEED. That is correct.

Senator ALLARD. And people focus in on that, and so they are more willing to kind of work out their differences and work together as a team.

Mr. WEED. I think that is true. I think the dynamic of it is that when a couple comes in and the person who is going to marry them says to them, this is a serious commitment and how ready are you and here are some steps that I think you should take in preparation for that, all of a sudden they say, gee, this is a bigger deal than I thought. I had better take it more seriously. So I think that does happen, as you have described it.

Senator ALLARD. Mr. Chairman, I have some more questions but I know my time has run out so——

Senator SESSIONS. We have got such a great panel.

Governor Keating, I will ask you this and see what you think about it. I remember a great lawyer in Mobile. He wrote the Bar bulletin editorial and he railed against no-fault divorce. People laughed at him. We all thought that was old fashioned. He is a brilliant man. It is J. Ed Thornton.

Do you think the changing of divorce so radically from a fault-based system to a totally no-fault system was more significant than

just that legal change, that it led the culture in some fashion? And if you would like to, you might comment on the same-sex marriage issue. Would that have a cultural significance beyond just the legal matter at stake?

Mr. KEATING. I happen to believe that marriage is a state between a man and a woman, but that said, the default divorce or no-fault system basically said that this was a lesser important contract than many other contracts. You know as an attorney, and Senator Sessions and I were U.S. Attorneys together back in the early 1980s, but if you have a bilateral contract, there are obligations between two people. In the default divorce or no-fault divorce environment, basically, it is mutual incompatibility, but it means one person's incompatibility. I just don't like you anymore, for any reason. I am walking away.

I think many of us reflect, and in my State, we weren't able to make any changes there because there still is that feeling, well, if they can't get along, they shouldn't be married. But many of us were of the view, and I am very firmly of the view, that if we think that the marriage contract is the most important contract two individuals can enter into in the United States, then it ought to be more difficult to get in and it ought to be more difficult to get out.

In other words, you ought to have sense and preparation to get into it. Certainly, as in the case of premarital contracts for individuals who lose a spouse, those are only solid when both people have a full awareness of what this asset mix is. Well, people need to have a full awareness of what this marital relationship means.

But to get out, there ought to be fault. We had in my State a list, you know, violence, drug abuse, abandonment, those kinds of things that you had to show before you could walk away—one of those things—before you could walk away from the marriage. In the trendy 1970s, we felt that that was certainly old fashioned and we were going to get rid of it. As I said, I was a part of that and I think it was a terrible mistake, because I think that accelerated people's view that the marriage contract was not as important as a Tupperware contract to society's great chagrin.

Senator SESSIONS. Ms. Whitehead, would you like to comment on what that signaled?

Ms. WHITEHEAD. Well, I do agree that there was cultural momentum behind the no-fault divorce revolution. The only other point I would like to make is that once—one of the lessons of the no-fault divorce revolution, I think, is that once these changes become institutionalized, it is hard to change. It is hard to reverse them. Although there are some interesting ideas about divorce law reform—a longer waiting period, some introduction of fault, particularly where dependent children are involved—it is a hard sell in the State legislatures.

So it is just another lesson, and I agree with—I wrote a book on the divorce culture and I think that there are measurable effects of divorce and then there are cultural effects of divorce. I agree with Governor Keating that one of the major cultural effects was to change our idea about the norm of permanence in marriage so that marriage became an easily disposable contract, and that changed a lot of things even generationally, so that kids today have a different conception of marriage and the ease with which one gets

into it and gets out of it as well as a fear of divorce that makes them reluctant to marry that our generation simply did not have.

Senator SESSIONS. Dr. Weed, would you like to comment on no-fault divorce?

Mr. WEED. Well, from a research perspective, we tried to account for that statistically rather than analytically. That is, we made sure that when we matched our counties up for comparison purposes, they came from within the same State so that the same legal system would be operating. So we can't explain the effects of it. All we can say is we accounted for it and it doesn't change our results.

Senator SESSIONS. It doesn't affect your results and you are not expressing an opinion as to whether or not there was a cultural signal that marriage was no longer permanent when we removed—

Mr. WEED. Oh, as an opinion, yes, I would express that. I just don't have the data to support it.

Senator SESSIONS [continuing]. With regard to the educational initiatives that could strengthen marriage, I mean, I was traveling last week with a lady that works for me, Valerie Day. She is an African American. She and her husband are vitally interested in marriage and they counsel at their church, premarital counseling and when families have trouble. I said, why you? She said, well, they say that people think we have a good marriage and we have credibility and we just do a lot of it.

She has talked about the same problems—money, sex, power, lack of communication. I guess she said money, lack of communication, sexual relations falling apart as a result of problems with the first two, is her experience. Can premarital counseling and education lessen those stresses and help people cope with the inevitable difficulties that occur? Dr. Weed, you have counseled yourself. I will ask you.

Mr. WEED. The answer is, yes, it can help, but I think it is also important to point out that it is not only prior to marriage that people need support and help in marriage. There are troubled marriages that need help. There are reconstituted families that need help, step-families, step-parent situations.

So I think that when we think about policy-level strategies, we ought to think about not only the preparation period, but also, as we might describe it, the life cycle of marriage and the stages and phases that it goes through. We can do a better job not only in preparation, but in support of married couples and families throughout that life cycle.

Senator SESSIONS. Dr. Whitehead?

Ms. WHITEHEAD. One particularly important point to support married couples after they have been married is with the birth of the first child, because that does change the marital relationship. The mom usually falls in love with the baby and the father very often feels neglected or he has to assume a new role. Because the expectation is that the family is overjoyed, as they are with the birth of a child, it is hard to acknowledge that it also changes the spousal relationship.

So some of the good—and a good idea about marriage education and marriage skills training has to do with intervening at some of these key crisis moments in the marriage, and that is one of them.

I would suggest, having been through it myself, that another might be when the children leave home.

Senator SESSIONS. Any other comments? Governor?

Mr. KEATING. When our daughters turned 15, then I needed counseling.

[Laughter.]

No, I would say this, Mr. Chairman. I think that as a consumer of marriage counseling services, I think it is very important to say to the society at large, it is not an embarrassment to admit that in the course of a long marriage or not-so-long marriage you need help. Cathy and I have had counseling and it has strengthened our marriage. It has made us, I think, understand what each of us generally need, but each of us had made mistakes and it was important to correct behavior so that we could have a stronger marriage and be better parents, because obviously if the parents are clashing frequently, the children are bloodied.

But I think as Governor, I made it abundantly clear that marriage counseling is good and people ought to not have so much pride as to say, well, I don't need some other person to tell me what I am doing wrong or how I could improve. We ought to be willing to listen to other people.

Senator SESSIONS. Wayne?

Senator ALLARD. I do not know whether I have the expertise on this, but I will try this question. Maybe this is a matter of perception for members of the panel, but if you were to compare judicial marriage here in America as compared to other countries, is our marriage uniquely American, or what we are experiencing here in this country, are we seeing the same trends worldwide? And if not, I'd like to have some comments why. Would any of you like to comment?

Ms. WHITEHEAD. Well, we do know that these trends are not unique to American society, that in other advanced European nations, we see some of the same patterns, increases in cohabitation, high levels of divorce. Until recently, maybe even still today, we do have an exceptionally high rate of unwed teen parenthood. And in general, the weakening of marriage as a form of lasting partnership. Similar trends in England, in certainly the Scandinavian countries, though there are different reasons perhaps there, and so yes, these are global trends, and perhaps others would—I have a few ideas about why that is so, but—

Senator ALLARD. Would you like to share them?

Ms. WHITEHEAD [continuing]. One reason is cultural. It has to do with, I think, a greater—a loss of some of those key institutions of social life in the family, greater individualism. That is a very good thing in many domains of life, but perhaps when it comes to the family domain, it can have negative effects.

The pressures of surviving in a difficult and turbulent economy would be another factor. But also, one of the exceptionally—one of the differences between our society and many of the—Canada and some of the Western European nations is that we are a more religious society, and some scholars believe that that is an advantage in sustaining or giving us at least a chance at renewing our family life. So, though we are increasingly secular, but still, compared to the other nations and societies, more religious.

Senator ALLARD. Mr. Chairman, I was struck by the comment about the lessening importance of marriage, less emphasis on the institution. We saw over here with Dr. Weed's study where they emphasized the importance of things that all seem to kind of strengthen the institution. That is a very important concept.

I think that is one of the more significant things I have gotten out of this hearing. I think that is a very important concept. I think we need to continue to stress the importance of marriage. I like to think of it as a building block. It is fundamental to our country, and if you have a functioning family, there is less need for government and that does have an appeal. So I think it is something that we need to continue to emphasize.

Thank you for letting me join here on the committee. I want to thank the panel members.

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you so much. This has been an extraordinarily valuable hearing, I believe. It deals with an important subject, and I came away with the feeling more than I have in many years that we actually can make a difference. We do not have to preside over the total collapse of the American family.

I remember riding in the subway about 6 years ago with the great Senator and professor Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and he said, in the history of the world, we have never seen anything like the collapse of family that we are seeing today, and he was concerned about it.

But we don't have to yield to these trends. I believe that if we talk about it openly, if we talk about the advantage of marriage that appears to be pretty indisputable, we talk about the advantage for children in marital relationships, as the Fatherhood Initiative is dedicated to, if we look at our economic tax policies, if we look at our welfare policies—as Mr. Horn is trying for the first time to really put some marriage component into welfare reform instead of just having it purely economic, but have a cultural-social connection there—and if we engage in education and counseling programs through churches and through government and through encouragement of that kind and we just basically stand up and affirm the institution, I don't think this trend is inevitable.

I think America can preserve marriage. And for those who don't want to marry, they are perfectly free not to do so. But choices do have consequences and the numbers that we have seen today indicate that, by and large, people do well and better when they live in a stable family environment.

Is there anything else that you feel like you would like to add? I would just note that the record will remain open for 2 weeks for questions and submissions that you might like to offer. Mr. Warren, I would like to place in the record the publications you have brought, particularly that one on government activities, what can be done.

Mr. WARREN. Thank you.

Senator SESSIONS. If there is nothing else, we will stand adjourned.

[Editor's Note: Due to the high cost of printing previously published materials submitted by witnesses can be found in the committee file.]

[Additional material follows.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

PREPARED STATEMENT OF STOP FAMILY VIOLENCE

WELFARE REFORM AND MARRIAGE INITIATIVES

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 percent 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.

Tennessee—“If it were not for shelter, 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 better things in life. Without the help that the State offers women like me, what would the children have?”

Of particular concern are the increased risks of domestic violence associated with such a program. The reality is that as many as 60 percent 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.

Connecticut—“Public assistance was the only money that I had during the relationship to put food in my children’s mouths . . . afterward, it was the only way I was able to regain custody of my children and put my life back together. I went to school and finished my education and now am a professional, working a full-time job.”

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.

Massachusetts—“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 . . . we can empower abused women to make a life for themselves without the ‘help’ of an abusive partner.”

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 Alabama, Connecticut, Iowa, Kansas, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming. 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 Stop Family Violence at iw@stopfamilyviolence.org or visit www.stopfamilyviolence.org.

ALABAMA

As a strong supporter of many things our government has done to maintain our liberty as Americans, I strongly disagree with the program that encourages low-income mothers to get married. I have worked for 2½ years for organizations that support and advocate for victims of domestic violence. I have seen victims controlled emotionally and physically, to the point where they don't feel life has purpose. I have seen women murdered by their intimate partners because he wanted control over them.

Since research has shown a strong correlation between poverty and domestic violence, I believe that encouraging marriage for low-income mothers could be very dangerous—even deadly. Although I do believe strongly in the sanctity of marriage for couples in healthy relationships, promoting this program allows a perpetrator to maintain control over his victim. Therefore, I plead that this program be dismissed or reevaluated to ensure that more people do not become victims of the crime we know as domestic violence.

I am a counselor, and I have worked primarily in the community as a Vocational Adjustment Counselor. In that role, I have helped people with disabilities to enter or re-enter the education system or the workforce. I have worked with many women who [have] become disabled (mentally and/or physically) as a direct result of domestic violence. These women absolutely had nowhere else to turn financially during their time of escape and healing but public funds. I was glad to be part of the process as they continued to heal and entered the education system or the workforce, many for the first time as they had worked without pay in their homes for years. The most detrimental, cruel, and ignorant thing I could have told these women, as their counselor, was to return to the abusive situations that contributed to their disabling, sometimes near-fatal outcomes. It's simply irrational and has nothing to do with family values. Forcing marriage, as some kind of superficial political bandaid fix is not good for women; it's not good for children; it's not good for violent perpetrators who are never held accountable or taught a better way. It's not good for my community. I know because I work hard in my community trying to make it a better place.

CONNECTICUT

I was involved in a relationship with a man from another country, who in a very short time became very abusive. I suffered broken ribs, nose, wrist, cheekbone, and fingers. Public assistance was the only money that I had during the relationship to be able to put food in my children's mouths. . . . [Afterward it was] the only way I was able to regain custody of my children and put my life back together. I went to school and finished my education and now am a professional, working a full-time job. My children are honor roll students and contribute regularly to the community to help those that were once in our situation. This man did want me to marry him—the man who did things like burn me, whip me with an electrical cord, smack me over the back with a crow bar, sexually assaulted me with a screw driver—all of this while I was pregnant. What would have happened if I had married him.) Well, maybe the next time he played Russian roulette with me I would not have been so lucky and my children would have been bringing flowers to me at a cemetery on every holiday.

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.

KANSAS

In my first marriage I had no access to money to leave. My husband controlled the finances. He counted my change from the grocery store. I got three different jobs in 2 years. He called one and told them I quit. He beat me up so bad that I was fired from the second one for missing work. I finally got out with the third one.

My second marriage was abusive as well. I believed in working for a good relationship. My husband and I attended church regularly. When he started beating me I thought the minister could help. The minister told me he was a good guy and I should give him some time to change. I did, but the abuse continued. I tried to leave him several times. Once I got away for 4 months. I was living on my own and started attending a different church. My husband started attending the new church as well, even though I had a restraining order against him. The minister there was impressed with my husband's work ethic and contribution to the church. He encouraged me to give him another chance. He said he would provide counseling. In the counseling the minister told my husband he was wrong, that his actions were a sin. But he counseled us together and never spoke to me separately. He never asked me if things were still going well. They weren't. He was becoming more and more unpredictable. I wanted to move away, to leave him, but I had no money. I worked a good job and made over \$30,000 a year, but my husband refused to pay any of our bills and continued to run them up. I was only able to escape when a friend offered me a place to stay in another town and enough money to move. I also was able to get a new job in the new town. Without those things I would have been forced to continue being a good wife, being raped, and being beaten.



I was married to a verbally abusive man [who] also an alcoholic, which explains a lot of what happened, and is still happening. Verbal abuse does not show any physical bruises, but there are definitely bruises of another sort. I divorced this man over 6 years ago, but our four children are still suffering. After I left him with our four children (whom he had heavily influenced against me), I was in a low paying job, renting a two-bedroom house, not receiving any child support, and on welfare. At that time, welfare was the only way I could support my four children. My ex-husband called me awful names in front of our children and in the front yard of my home when he would come pick them up for his visitation. This continued until I obtained a better paying job and could move away from him. I was able to get off welfare at that point. But the verbal abuse continued, by phone and email. After he called me a b*** on the phone to our daughter, I charged him with harassment. He pled guilty and was ordered to go through anger management, but it was nothing more than a slap on the wrist since it was not enforced. He filed for a change of custody after our children had been with me for almost 5 years. He lied to the court about his work history, and was successful in coercing our children into hating me. Now, he has another failed marriage, been through alcohol treatment for only 5 days, still drinking, and my children have finally seen him for what he really is. I have been remarried for 5 years and am in a successful job.

I did not want to be on welfare because I knew that was not what would sustain my children or me. I had an education before all this began so I just needed to put it to use after I could get out of the chains of the verbally abusive relationship. I remarried because I found someone who was loving, patient, and not abusive. He has helped me to overcome some of the abuse. But he has been very patient in this process, since I still have a lot of the abuse to work through. As I said before, verbal abuse does not show physical signs, but there are definitely scars that remain far longer. Many women have come from abusive relationships but did not have the education I did, these women need opportunities to gain [an] education [in order] to allow them to better themselves and become self supportive for their children as well. There must be a way for women to gain success from within themselves. Forcing them to marry when they are not ready or to try to remedy another situation is not the answer. My success came from me, not from the government or any government program. Do I still have the verbal abuse to contend with from my ex? YES. This will always be there until HE learns how to help himself. No government program will stop him from being abusive. What have my children gained from this?

From their dad, hate. From their mom (me), unconditional love and support. They now realize I have been there all along for them. But they still have scars, just like me.

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 with 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 is the root of the problem is pathetically naive and absurd. These women do not need 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 14 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 of color living in poverty.

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"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 it 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-year-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 8 weeks she decided not to return and the job was offered to me. I stayed at the job for 5 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 of the Assistant 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.

NEW MEXICO

I am Kayla Michael. Ten 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 "shot-gun 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 have 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

NEW YORK

"Hi, my story will be a little different. I was a child recipient of food stamps. I am 41 years old and my parents divorced in 1972 when it was very difficult to get a divorce. My mother showed great courage in doing so. My father, like so many, never paid child support after he left. He then moved out-of-state and court orders did not go past State lines at that time. My mother had married right out of high school and never had a full time job. She worked for minimum wage in a factory. She then put herself through nursing school while raising the remaining two of five children, with myself [being] the youngest. I started doing "chores" in the neighborhood at age 11 and full-time summer babysitting at 12. I paid for all my clothes and anything else I needed. We also got free lunch at school. Without those programs, survival would have been at the barest level. Had the government "encouraged" my mother or rather "forced" my mother to stay married by elimination of programs, my life would have been totally different. As I said, I am the youngest female of five children. Because I watched my mother walk away, I am the only one out of five to not be in unhealthy relationships. My sisters followed my mother and were married and [became] mother[s] by 21. My brothers have both had multiple marriages, children, stepchildren etc. I saw a different way of life. Growing up with a single mother is not easy, but you band together and it was certainly better than the constant fear. My father was a high functioning alcoholic and abusive. We had a beautiful home, went to church, had the right friends and to the outside world, looked great. The inside was a nightmare. I learned from that and watched my mother take control of her life. I did the same. I am the only one out of five with a bachelor's degree. I worked my way through school. I was determined to never be dependent on a man. That it would always be my choice to stay with someone. The trickle down effect, in that I sought help, educated myself and now am happily married in a healthy relationship raising two wonderful kids. I broke the cycle. My children and grandchildren will never know the realities of that kind of life, because my mother was able to leave with the help of free lunch and food stamps. Forcing people into "survival marriage" is opening the gateways to hell that so many have worked so hard to shut.

Susan Morgan-Rosicka, New York

□

"The times that I was on welfare were when I was married. I tried marriage twice and was on welfare for 3 years with the first marriage and for a few months in the second marriage. Now that I am single I have not been on welfare for over 14 years. When I was able to get off welfare it was because I became educated. I am now an R.N. I don't think I will ever be on welfare again. I needed welfare because the

two husbands I had, wanted children and then didn't support them. I didn't want children. The first marriage was dangerous. I was physically and mentally abused and he threatened to take away my girls if I left the marriage. It took years and some risky steps to achieve a divorce. I have been the soul supporter of my family, neither ex-husband paid child support. If anyone thinks a husband is the answer to support the children, they need to look at the specific situation much closer."

NORTH CAROLINA

"I am a disabled vet, a single mother, and an unmarried survivor of an abusive relationship. I was married to an abusive man for 9 years. I would have done almost anything (at that time) to make my marriage work for the sake of my child. Indeed, I actually did, including marriage counseling in which my husband lied to the therapist about the abuse in every session. My last straw incident was October 12, 1996, being smacked in the face in a vehicle he was driving after he attempted to break my arm (again while driving the truck) in front of our daughter.

The only reason I was able to change my life, Thank you God, is that two friends who had been in abusive relationships and are married to each other (heterosexual) made me come to their house when I called after the incident, showed me both of their files about their respective abusive ex-spouses, and all the help that was available to them and to me to get out of the abuse. Because of their direction to programs: domestic violence shelter and the empowerment classes, child support enforcement through DSS, and the protective order and ex-parte order in the State of North Carolina, I was able to extricate myself from this horrible and dangerous marriage.

Because of those programs, and my friends, I gained the support and courage I needed to go back to school and get my masters degree in family therapy, gain an immeasurable understanding that if I did not make my health (emotionally and physically) the utmost priority, I would chose another abuser and stay in that pattern. As a result of my education, I was able to transcend my abusive past, work for 3 years on the domestic violence council, and am now screening for family violence, providing personal safety plans, and linking victims (male and female) to programs to get healthier."

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 3 years of beatings and being sexually abused by him, I left. I was lucky or unlucky to have a place to go. My parents let me stay with them. I tried to go back to school to get an education. After 3 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 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.

VERMONT

Marriage is not the answer. Believe me I know. I married just because I was pregnant and I would never have left if it wasn't for public assistance. I was so afraid I would never have made it on my own if I didn't have the help and support programs out there for single mothers with children. Marriage, especially, with abusive relationships, only gives more power to the "man." He thinks he has the control and essentially he does.

□

Twelve years ago I dropped out of college to marry a man I thought I loved. I thought, since I was expecting our first child, that I was “doing the right thing.” I ended up in a marriage to a man I really didn’t know. My husband was controlling and abusive. So here I am, trapped with one son and another one on the way, always living in fear. I had to stay in my marriage because I couldn’t work anywhere. I had no skills. Then in the summer of 1996 my husband decided he didn’t want to be married or be a father anymore and threw us out onto the street. So pregnant and with a 4-year-old son, I ended up in a shelter for abused women. I stayed in that shelter for 7 weeks. During those 7 weeks I had to get back on my feet. I signed up for public assistance and began looking for an apartment. I found nothing. Even the shelter had to shorten my stay due to [a] shortage of beds, and the need for abused women to be in shelter. So once again I found myself on the streets. Finally my grandmother, in Vermont, heard of my ordeal and said she would take us in. So from Illinois to Vermont, I moved half way across the country for a chance to make a life for my children and myself. In Vermont I found my way. Not by getting married, but by hard work. Because of the educational, child care, and social welfare programs instituted in the State of Vermont, by Governor Howard Dean, I was able to graduate from the Vermont Adult Diploma Program and the Office Administrative Assistant course at my local Technical Center. I was able to find employment with my skills through the Job Training Partnership Act at my local town office. And while I was getting an education my children were able to go to daycare, paid for by the State of Vermont. I was able to access many social programs and supports like counseling (paid for by the generous allotments for Medicaid) and parenting classes in order to enrich my life and the life of my young children. Marriage didn’t save me, community support and my own hard work saved me. I have worked many jobs since then as an Executive Administrative Assistant. I live in a beautiful low-income townhouse, I drive a fairly new mini-van, and I am still a SINGLE working mother. This year I’ll be 31. I am not looking for a husband but for ways to consolidate my college loans. And this summer I’ll be starting courses at the Community College of Vermont. A man with a bank account or a job to support me DID NOT get me here. I GOT ME HERE!

VIRGINIA

I was a victim of domestic abuse for 8 years. Marrying my abuser was the worst decision of my life. After our marriage, he was able to control me to an even greater degree. He controlled our finances, so that I felt I was unable to leave him, because [if I did] I would be on the street. Although I worked, he insisted on seeing my pay stub, and had me account for every penny I spent. All of my pay had to go into our joint account. I was unable to hide any money in order to make a getaway. Of course, he had already done all that he could to destroy my support network, so I felt that I didn’t have anyone close enough to ask for help. Getting married was exactly the opposite of protection—it was a horrifying prison.

□

“I was married to an abusive man. Marriage did not help keep me out of poverty. My (now ex) husband wanted to control all of the money, including the money I earned [money] from working, and [saved] the money my parents had set aside for me to attend college. He refused to pay our rent on time even though he made twice as much as I did. He was always making threats on my life and was physically and emotionally abusive as well. I finally realized that I might lose my life if I continued to stay in this marriage, so I escaped with our son in 1999. My infant son and me had to stay in a shelter for battered women for a few days because I was afraid of what my husband would do to us when he found out that we had escaped and I had taken out a protective order on him. When I petitioned the court to get legal custody of our son, my husband said that he didn’t want to pay child support and that nothing would make him happier than to see me spend my last dime in the courts.

He was able to get legal aid to represent him while I had to empty my savings account, take out a bank loan, max out my credit cards, and drain my college account in order to pay for my attorney’s fees. Thank God the judge saw through all of my ex-husband’s and his family’s lies and gave me sole custody of my son and supervised visitation to my ex-husband. I have since had to declare bankruptcy, which has a very negative impact on one’s credit rating, as a result of all of the thousands of dollars I’ve had to shell out in attorney’s fees. My ex-husband continues to use the court system to harass and control me. I have been forced to appear

in court at least 75 times in the past 5 years because my ex-husband continues to ask the court for custody, even though custody was decided years ago. I had to go on public assistance for a period of time and even lost my apartment after I was forced to declare bankruptcy.

I now have two children and my ex-husband continues to abuse the judicial system and harass me by bringing me to court almost every month. Trying to get women to marry abusive men is not going to solve anything—it just creates more problems.”

Signed, Angela D. Sargent

WASHINGTON

“I broke up with the father of my child because he was using my AFDC grant to buy marijuana. After 9 months, I started to hear from friends how he had been sleeping with various female[s] and ‘experimenting’ with drugs more potent than marijuana. He never hit me, but the mental abuse I was subjected to had convinced me that I was lower than dirt, and that I was incapable of becoming anything more than his doormat. Since leaving him in 1986, I have gone on to complete an Associates of Applied Science, regained my self-esteem, and I now earn a respectable living as an Administrative Assistant. Our child was not subjected to his abuse and so I have hope that she too will live a productive life. Marriage does NOT solve all problems!”

□

I was married to my abuser for nearly 20 years. He was a successful businessman and a corporate vice president. We moved often, so my support system was always changing, which worked in his favor. For most of those years, I attempted to get him actively involved in couples counseling. He went for a few visits, until he felt secure that he had adequately charmed the therapist; he’s very intelligent and very charming, when he wants to be. At some point, he would always say, “I’ve done all the changing that I want to do; you’re the one who’s sick!” At one point, he was the Vice President of the State Mental Health Association in the State where we were living, and he was addicted to cocaine, and abusing me mentally and physically every weekend when he came home from his travels! It was not until he beat up our 16-year-old daughter, that I got the nerve to leave. The financial uncertainties were always the reasons that kept me from leaving; I knew that he would do everything he could to make sure that I lived in poverty. He took me to court every chance he could to whittle away at my funds. Because I could never afford the retainer to get an attorney to represent me, he was successful at reducing me to poverty. If it weren’t for public assistance, I wouldn’t be here today. My children are now grown and gone, and I’m currently working as an advocate for domestic violence victims in Washington State.

□

“Twenty years in an abusive marriage. Four children. Twenty years of walking on egg shells. Sixteen years of welfare because he wouldn’t work. Raising children in poverty. Volunteering everywhere and anywhere just to further my education. [But] finally, freedom. He hurt our daughter and was arrested. Single mother now, but 4 more years of welfare. Formal education and volunteerism. Finally a job, a very good job. Off of welfare and on a roll. Freedom from fear, hunger, poverty.

I know I would never have been able to travel the path that I have, with him still in my life. He dragged me down, told me I was stupid, told me I was ugly, told me that my family was ashamed of me, pitied me. HE was the one, for 20 long years, that used everything in his power to make me feel that I was only worthy of scorn. I now work in the same organization that helped me gain my freedom, the domestic violence program in my county. Everyday I see women who reflect my past, who are mired in the same slime that held me down for so long. I also see many of these women break free of their abusers, and I watch as they begin to grow strong in their own rights. The struggles they have to contend with are difficult, but not impossible. For so many of them, it is an uphill battle, but at least the dead weight of their former abuser is one less impediment.

Do not force us back into the dark ages, but light the path to freedom with health care, affordable childcare, education, counseling, and mentorship.

□

I became pregnant at age 18. I married the father even though he was extremely physically abusive to me throughout my pregnancy and after my baby was born. I

married this man not out of love but because I felt I had no other choice. This man couldn't keep a job for more than 1–2 days. He was an abusive drug addict. We lived on what was known as AFDC. This was barely enough to survive on. My husband sold drugs to make ends meet. On one particular night, about 2 months after my son was born, my husband beat me severely [all] because I did not want to have sex with him. He broke my ribs and left me black and blue. I made a plan and left a few weeks later. I never went back. I got off welfare. I obtained a full time job. [I] put myself through college and now help other battered women. I gave my son a chance to grow up in a healthy, loving home free from abuse. I definitely feel that marriage should not be promoted as an answer to women's poverty or to keep women from receiving welfare benefits. The only answer is job training and [obtaining a] college education [in order] to [achieve] self-sufficiency. Toni

WYOMING

Because I was in an abusive [and] controlling relationship, I am getting divorced. Because of my decision to leave my husband and better my kids lives, and me I had to move out of my nice home and into a significantly smaller house. I have had to spend every last penny to hire an attorney, and he fights [with] me on everything I've asked for in the divorce, even after I've told him to take the kids and everything else and leave me with nothing. Because he is still living with me (the police can't force him out and the kids want to see him), I cannot receive any assistance until he does leave. I have called the police on several occasions. We [have] tried couples counseling but during every session he accused me of sleeping around and I've found myself defending myself not only to him but to my counselor. Throughout this horrific process of getting divorced I have come up against every obstacle, including being ostracized by my church, family and friends, coworkers, and community members. They ask me things like "why did I get married so young?" and "why can't I love him for who he is?" Throughout my journey I have learned that there is a much larger burden for the victim to carry than anybody knows. Because we aren't technically divorced and Wyoming doesn't have benefits for mere separation, I struggle monthly to pay rent, daycare, and bills. He gives me \$500 at the beginning of the month, [but] only if I ask and beg him for this money. My kids and I don't have the luxury of cable or the Internet. Because of him, my credit is ruined. I am working to get that [back] on track and it is getting better. Because I have to work, my kids must learn to be strong and get on the bus after school or be consoled by daycare providers when they are sick because I can't pick them up from school or stay home with them. If I have the opportunity to cash out any sick leave so I can have extra money, I will. My estranged husband wants me to fail so I don't have any choice but to drop the divorce, and the system is backing him up. There are two ironies to my story. First, my husband and I are both educated and have graduate degrees. Second, I work at a safe house and am a domestic violence victim's advocate. If leaving a violent man is so hard for me, imagine how hard it is for anyone else.



There were so many more events of abuse. It suffices to say that most of this marriage I was on welfare so that my children could live. I was married to a man who kept me isolated and was abusive. I could not have raised my children without the help I got from these agencies. Many times he attempted to sabotage by being an a** in the welfare office. After he had quit the job he had kept the longest (2 years). I took my last beating. I was working five jobs at the time and most of the time he didn't like it that I worked, but I refused not to work. This is a very condensed version of my story, but to say that I was financially successful because I was married is "horse hockey." Welfare helped me, but he had such low self esteem that he could not get out of his abusive, unemployed, slouched state. So my children would be overjoyed when they came home and the fridge was full. The new food stamps came that day. I usually always worked, but there was always some public assistance or another. Marriage did not make my life better. My mate was not a provider for his family. I had to work twice as hard to provide because I had to give my children some sort of role model.

Finally, when I found out that I did have a brain and I could learn, I got an education. I am a social worker now. I have a good life, a great husband, great children, [and] wonderful grandchildren; three [of which,] belong to my [first] son who I reunited with after I finally left [my] abuser.

WELFARE REFORM AND MARRIAGE INITIATIVES

LEGAL MOMENTUM

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. 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, cohabiting, 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 two-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 9 years for the Building Strong Families demonstration and random-assignment evaluation project; MDRC (and other secondary contractors) \$38.5 million over 9 years for the Supporting Healthy Marriages demonstration and random-assignment evaluation project); and RTI International and the Urban Institute (\$20.4 million over 7 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 reduc-

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/acfnews.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/jnews/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).

ing 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 2-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.

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.

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 percent) want the government to stay out of this area, while just 18 percent 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 percent) 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 5 percent of those surveyed select marriage promotion as the number-one welfare priority for Congress, while fully 62 percent 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 3 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 percent of those surveyed reject proposals to provide financial bonuses to mothers on welfare who marry the father of their children, and over 70 percent 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

¹²The 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.

¹³Peter D. Hart Research Associates. "TANF/Welfare Survey Findings." National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support Memo, April 12, 2002, at 1.

¹⁴Ms. Foundation for Women. "Americans Say Welfare Should Provide Self-Sufficiency Skills, Move People Out of Poverty—Not Promote Marriage." (February 6, 2002) at 1.

¹⁵Peter 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.

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 cohabiting 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 percent and 25 percent) 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 percent 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 percent having been harassed at work, 50 percent having lost at least 3 days of work a month as a result of the abuse, and 25 percent 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 percent) of the State’s divorced women cited domestic violence as a reason for their divorce.²⁶ More than half (57 percent) 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

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 percent 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 percent 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 percent 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.

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 to 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.

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_edinforweb1-31.pdf.

Second, due to death and divorce, marriage does not ensure women's economic security. Approximately 40 percent of marriages end in divorce²⁹ and 12 percent end due to the husband's death.³⁰ 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. 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 percent of single mothers with a college degree who worked full-time year round lived in poverty. Less than 8 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 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 5 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. (The authors

²⁹The 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>.

³⁰United 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>.

³¹Neil 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>.

³²Manpower Demonstration Research Corp. (MDRC), chap. 6, available at <http://www.mdrc.org/Reports2000/MFIP/MFIP—Vol—1-Adult.pdf>.

would like to thank Shawn Chang for his invaluable assistance in completing this testimony.)

RECENT MARRIAGE PROMOTION STUDIES

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The Bush Administration and its allies are touting two new marriage promotion studies as proof that domestic violence is not a concern and that marriage promotion works. These claims are false.

The Administration's initiative would add marriage promotion to the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. Study after study demonstrates that a large proportion of the welfare caseload (between 15 percent and 20 percent) are current or recent victims of serious domestic violence,¹ and that between half to two-thirds of the women on welfare have suffered domestic violence or abuse at some time in their adult lives.²

A new Heritage Foundation study concedes these high domestic violence rates but argues that they are irrelevant because the marriage promotion initiative won't target welfare recipients but rather will target so-called "fragile families"—unmarried parents of newborns—for whom, Heritage asserts, domestic violence rates are much lower than for welfare recipients.³ But there is absolutely nothing in the Administration's proposal that restricts or targets the proposed funding to fragile families, the Administration itself has never made such a claim, and the Administration has funded many marriage promotion programs that target welfare recipients as a group.

Heritage also claims that marriage promotion programs have been shown to reduce domestic violence, a claim that the Administration itself does not make. Heritage does not cite a single study to support its claim, offering as the sole evidence a statement from an Oklahoma official that not a single instance of domestic abuse "linked" to the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative has been reported.

Even assuming this statement to be true, this proves absolutely nothing about whether even the Oklahoma program has reduced domestic violence—and, as former Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating recently explained to the Senate, that program makes unusual efforts to address domestic violence, by working closely with the Oklahoma domestic violence coalition, training all providers of marriage promotion services on domestic violence issues, and providing information about domestic violence services to all program participants.⁴ Much less is there any evidence about the effects on domestic violence of other programs in other places which lack the protections that are in the Oklahoma program. What is more, the Administration has not proposed to require these protections in its marriage initiative, and is currently funding many marriage promotion projects without requiring that they include domestic violence protections.

Heritage also argues that marriage protects women from domestic violence because unmarried mothers report a higher rate of domestic violence than married mothers. But it is much more plausible to suppose that domestic violence discourages single mothers from marrying their abusers than to suppose, as Heritage appears to do, that an abuser will cease his abuse if the woman he is abusing marries him. Further, it is simply indisputable that many married women are victims of domestic violence, as domestic violence is one of the main reasons that roughly half of all marriages end in divorce. The Oklahoma marriage program that Heritage cites recently conducted a study which found that domestic violence was given as a reason for their divorce by 44 percent of the State's divorced women and by 57 percent of the divorced women who had been welfare recipients.⁵

¹ 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).

² See Mary Ann Allard et al., McCormack Inst., "In Harms Way? Domestic Violence, AFDC Receipt and Welfare Reform in Mass.," 12, 14 (1997) (64.9 percent 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 percent 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 percent of 846 women).

³ Melissa G. Pardue and Robert Rector, "Reducing Domestic Violence: How the Healthy Marriage Initiative Can Help," Heritage Foundation Background Paper No. 1744 (March 30, 2004), <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Family/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=60606>.

⁴ <http://health.senate.gov/testimony/86 tes.html>.

⁵ Communication from Oklahoma official, copy available upon request.

Concerning divorce, the Administration is hailing another new study as proof that marriage promotion programs reduce divorce. According to Dr. Wade Horn, Assistant Secretary for ACF, who appeared at an April 5th press conference touting the study, the study refutes critics who have said that there is no proof that marriage promotion reduces divorce.⁶ This dubious study proves nothing.

The new study evaluates the impact of the Community Marriage Policy (CMP) program that is operated by an organization called Marriage Savers, <http://marriagesavers.org/>.⁷ The study was conducted by the Institute for Research and Evaluation of Salt Lake City, whose director, Dr. Stan Weed, was one of the study's authors. The Institute has no web site, and its capacity for performing evaluative research is unknown.

The CMP program lobbies clergy to sign pledges that they will not marry any couple unless the couple first takes "rigorous marriage preparation of at least 4 months during which couples take a premarital inventory and talk through relational issues it surfaces with trained mentor couples, who also teach couple communication skills." The CMP study compared 122 counties in which Marriage Savers reports that some clergy have signed such pledges with 122 other counties selected by the study's authors. The executive summary reports that "counties with a Community Marriage Policy had an 8.6 percent (average) decline in their divorce rates over 4 years, while the comparison counties registered a 5.6 percent (average) decline." Based on this finding, the evaluators assert that "[t]he simple explanation of the results is that Community Marriage Policies are successful and lead to reductions in divorce rates."

Only the study's executive summary has been released and the summary contains less than even barebones details. (For example, only one of the counties with a CMP program is identified.) Dr. Weed refused our request for a copy of the full study.

Dr. Weed appears to have thin research credentials. We were unable to locate any other evaluation studies conducted by Dr. Weed or his Institute.

Moreover, Dr. Weed appears to be a partisan of the CMP program, not a neutral evaluator. The Salt Lake Tribune reported on January 12 that he and the Marriage Savers director had met with leaders of the Mormon Church to urge that the church adopt the CMP program.⁸ Dr. Weed's Institute also reported on its 2002 tax return that it had received \$46,737 from Marriage Savers, raising serious questions about his objectivity in evaluating the Marriage Savers CMP program.⁹

Dr. Weed's expertise and objectivity are especially crucial questions given that the study methodology was so highly subjective. The finding of positive results for CMP rests entirely on a comparison of the CMP counties with counties without CMP selected by the evaluators. A different set of selections might well have yielded contrary results.

Dr. Horn's endorsement of the CMP study as proof that marriage promotion works shows that the Administration still embraces the simplistic and dangerous message that marriage is good and divorce is bad, a message which is contrary to the Administration's repeated claim that it intends to promote not marriage per se but only "healthy marriage." If healthy marriage is the goal, a marriage promotion program's success must be measured by whether it increases healthy marriage, not marriage per se. But even taken at face value, the CMP study offers no evidence that the CMP program increases healthy marriage. The study focused exclusively on divorce rates. There was no effort to measure the prevalence of domestic violence or the quality of the marriages in CMP communities, or to assess how the CMP program affected domestic violence.

There are also separation of church and State concerns. These arise from the possibility, apparently envisioned by Dr. Horn when he appeared at the April 5th press conference promoting the CMP study, that CMP is one type of program the Administration would like to fund through the marriage promotion allocations it has requested from Congress. In fact, Dr. Horn has already provided Federal funding to an Idaho marriage promotion program seeking to model the CMP approach. The separation of church and State issue is this: the CMP program relies on obtaining commitments from churches not to marry couples unless and until the couples have completed a 4-month long premarital marriage education program. It is entirely appropriate for churches to adopt such a policy if they so choose, and for Smart Mar-

⁶ <http://marriagesavers.org/Press%20Release.htm>.

⁷ Stan Weed et al., "Assessing the Impact of Community Marriage Policies on U.S. County Divorce Rate," executive summary available at <http://marriagesavers.org/Executive%20Summary.htm>.

⁸ "Could 'Marriage Policy' Cut Utah's Divorce Rate", The Salt Lake Tribune (Jan. 12, 2004), link to article available at <http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives>.

⁹ Tax return available at <http://www.guidestar.org/index.jsp>.

riages or similar organizations to use their own private funds to encourage churches to make this commitment. But a central premise of the separation of church and State that is embodied in our Constitution's First Amendment is that government must avoid entangling itself in religion. Using public funds in an attempt to influence churches as to the conduct of their internal affairs violates the values underlying this fundamental First Amendment principle.

[Whereupon, at 3:56 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

