



**National Resource Center for
Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning**
at the Hunter College School of Social Work

***INFORMATION PACKET:
Marriage Initiatives Update***

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Introduction

Since we published the Marriage Initiatives Information Packet in 2002, the public debate has shifted from *whether* an increase in levels of marriage reduces poverty to *how* policy should promote marriage without harming single-parent families or marginalizing same-sex couples. This is because substantial research has emerged supporting the link between marriage and poverty reduction, as well as other measures of child well being (Berlin, 2004; Haskins & Sawhill, 2003; Thomas & Sawhill, 2002; Lerman, 2002; McLanahan, Garfinkel & Mincy, 2001). Even some virulent critics of marriage promotion have acknowledged the benefits of marriage, toned-down their rhetoric and introduced policy proposals that incorporate much of the Bush Administration's Healthy Marriage Initiative (e.g., Ooms, 2004, and the *Marriage-Plus* proposal). Still, some critics of government promoting marriage continue in their skepticism about the cause-effect relationship between single-parenthood and poverty, and the unproven nature of many marriage programs now being implemented; they propose instead to address the causes of poverty more directly (Waller, 2004; Coontz & Folbre, 2002; Smock & Coontz, 2002).

Since TANF expiration in September 2002, the U.S. House of Representatives has twice passed TANF reauthorization legislation that includes specific marriage-promotion funding of up to \$1.8 billion over six years¹, approximately \$200 million per year in federal funds and the remainder in state funds. This represents only 0.2% of the \$150 billion budgeted per year for means-tested aid to single parents, reflecting the experimental stage of such programs, many of which are pilots aimed at establishing best practices. The Senate has yet to bring any related bill to the floor for a full vote, and current TANF law has instead received seven short-term

¹ For a thorough discussion of federal and state programs and changes in state law to promote marriage in recent years, see "Beyond Marriage Licenses," (Ooms, Bouchet and Parke, 2004). For a summary of TANF reauthorization provisions related to marriage promotion, see "Marriage-Related Provisions in Welfare Reauthorization Proposals: A Summary" (Parke, 2004).

extensions. In light of Republican gains in the Senate in November 2004, funding of the proposed marriage-promotion provisions may be expected to occur in the New Year.

Updated Review of the Literature

The seeds of the current emphasis on marriage promotion were planted under the Clinton Administration with the passage of PRWORA in 1996, in which three of the four stated goals of welfare reform included promotion of marriage and reduction of extra-marital child-bearing. In their often-quoted 2001 “Fragile Families” policy brief McLanahan, Garfinkel and Mincy framed the arguments on each side of the marriage policy debate as “pro-marriage” vs. “pro-marriageability”. The former focused on initiatives that directly promoted marriage, such as training in marriage and relationship skills, conflict resolution programs, counseling, and tax and benefits reform. The latter focused on reducing such obstacles to stable marriage as poverty, substance abuse, low levels of education, and limited job opportunities. Since few influential analysts argue (publicly) anymore that the government has no role in marriage promotion, we find this a useful way of framing the debate; namely should marriage be promoted directly (the “pro-marriage” camp) or indirectly (the “pro-marriageability” camp)?² Likewise, how do we provide the much-needed support to single-parent households without simultaneously providing disincentives to marriage?

In support of marriage promotion

Arguments on this side of the policy debate point to evidence that, across the socio-economic spectrum, married couples are generally better off economically than unmarried, and

² Although their ideas are currently out of favor politically, feminists and defenders of diversity on ethical grounds continue to argue against government promotion of marriage from the perspectives of female oppression and disenfranchisement of gays and lesbians. A full discussion of these important viewpoints is beyond the scope of this brief. For sources of information on these perspectives, please see the Bibliography and Web Resources pages.

that children who live with their married biological or adoptive parents reap developmental benefits compared to children in either co-habiting or single-parent homes (Berlin, 2004).

Poverty reduction

- In a series of often-quoted empirical studies completed in 2002, Dr. Robert Lerman examines the relationship of union status (variations of married, cohabiting and single parenthood) with economic hardship. As summarized by Kelleen Kaye of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Lerman's work concludes that marriage serves as a protective device against material hardship vs. every other union status, even in less-educated and low-income families.
- Various researchers have expanded on the potential reasons for this (Roberts, 2004; McLanahan, Garfinkel & Mincy, 2001), including additional familial support derived from marriage (wedding presents, financial support during troubled times), and a boost in earnings power of married men, sometimes attributed to higher motivation to meet family responsibilities, division of labor which frees men up to focus on their jobs, etc.
- Building on Lerman's work, Thomas & Sawhill (2002) and Haskins and Sawhill (2003) of the Brookings Institution provide evidence that, if the proportion of children living in female-headed families were the same today as in 1970, then poverty rates would be 19 – 27% less (this when simulating the marriage of real single mothers to actual, available men of similar racial and economic status). In these studies, the marriage effect is second only to full-time work for its influence on poverty reduction.

Other benefits of marriage

Research has demonstrated that children who live in single-parent homes are at higher risk of dropping out of school, becoming teen parents, engaging in criminal activity, abusing

drugs and having behavioral and health problems, even when controlling for other contributing factors (Berlin, 2004; Haskins, 2004; Stanley, 2004; Baumgardner, 2004).

Social and cultural predisposition favoring marriage

The Fragile Families Survey and numerous state-level surveys indicate that the attitudes, beliefs and desires of the majority of unmarried couples provide an opportunity for success of well-timed and targeted programs promoting healthy marriage. Large majorities of unwed parents are optimistic about their future together and believe that “it is better for children if their parents are married.” These families are committed to the father having a role in their child’s life by providing his surname, financial support and emotional involvement to the child (McLanahan, Garfinkel & Mincy, 2001).

In support of “marriageability” promotion

Analysts on this side of the policy debate argue, essentially, that poverty and its causes (lack of education, substance abuse, lack of suitable jobs with sufficient pay, etc) contribute to low marriage rates among the poor, as opposed to the other way around. Thus, any marriage policy that does not first remove these obstacles to stable marriage will neither promote marriage successfully nor reduce poverty. Additionally, analysts have raised concerns that some marriage-promotion programs are being rolled out with insufficient proof of efficacy in the target population, poorly-trained personnel, and inadequate support for families with trauma histories who are being exposed to short-term counseling and little follow-up.

Challenges to successful marriage

Despite their desires and intentions as regards marriage, unmarried couples often do not have the resources (personal and financial capital) to support themselves and their children. 90 percent of unwed mothers rate “husband having a steady job” and 69 percent rate “wife having

steady job” as very important qualities for a successful marriage. Yet, 34 percent of unmarried fathers and 37 percent of unmarried mothers have not finished high school, and about 30 percent have only a high-school degree. Likewise, 20 percent of non-custodial fathers earn less than \$6,000 and about 38 percent of unwed fathers have been incarcerated (McLanahan, Garfinkel and Mincy, 2001).

Marriage research among poor nearly non-existent

The most important criticism of marriage initiatives today rests in the implementation of programs that have been untested, particularly with low-income, low-education populations suffering from substance abuse and/or domestic violence. There is a concern that education and light-therapy programs that have been proven successful with white, middle-class couples may result in depression, violence and suicide if rolled out to other populations without the professional support to deal with unresolved grief and trauma. Programs have been identified that license “marriage education counselors” with only two days of training and which condense existing programs of couples therapy meant to last months into a few weekend workshops conducted in groups (Smock & Coontz, 2002).

Conclusions

For poor, unmarried couples that lack the human and financial capital necessary to provide a stable home to their children, marriage-promotion programs are unlikely to make a major difference either in marriage rates or poverty rates. These situations appear to represent an important minority of unmarried couples (30 – 40 percent); an unknown percentage of these couples are also burdened with such significant obstacles to healthy marriage as mental illness, substance abuse and domestic violence. These families and/or individuals should be directly

targeted by existing and additional programs supporting poor individuals and families, increasing high school matriculation, and providing vocational training and job opportunities at the appropriate skills level.

The remainder of poor unmarried couples and their children, which may be as high as 70 percent, may benefit from targeted marriage-promotion initiatives, especially when combined with job training and other more traditional anti-poverty programs. Analysts reveal cautious optimism about the potential for marriage-promotion programs to contribute to a reduction in poverty, especially when additional supports are also provided; but one should note that even the most optimistic scenarios expose limits to these programs' ability to reduce poverty.

The shift-share analyses cited earlier (Lerman, 1996 and 2002; Thomas & Sawhill, 2002) simulating a restoration of marriage to its 1970's level demonstrate a maximum reduction in child-poverty rates of 25-30 percent. While such results would be laudable if attainable, there are a number of cautions to consider: neither the depth and breadth of programs needed nor the cost associated with achieving such high marriage rates has ever been analyzed and there is no reliable data available yet as to the likelihood that current, experimental marriage-promotion programs would achieve such high success. Finally, even if the highest success threshold were achieved, the remaining poor families, mostly single-parent households, would continue to need programs that address their unique challenges. As a result, healthy marriage promotion should remain just one part of a multi-faceted approach to poverty-reduction policy.

Overview of Programs

Using non-TANF funding sources, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, committed at least \$90 million since 2002 to marriage-related demonstration grants, research and evaluation projects, and

technical assistance. Over the last several years, most state governments have substantially increased their healthy marriage promotion activities. Most “high activity” states are in the South or West (with the exceptions of “high-activity” Michigan and “low-activity” California), while the Northeast has very limited government-sponsored marriage initiatives. But explanatory factors such as rates of divorce, out-of-wedlock child bearing and poverty, do not in fact correlate well with states’ level of marriage-promotion activity.

Ooms, Bouchet and Parke (2004) divide the state marriage initiatives into four categories and cite which states have adopted initiatives in each (current as of Fall, 2003):

- *State policy initiatives, commissions and campaigns* Includes activities such as appointing marriage commissions, holding marriage summits, conducting media campaigns and publishing marriage handbooks. (Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Louisiana, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah.)
- *Changes in state marriage and divorce law* Includes reduction in marriage license fees for participation in pre-marital counseling (Florida, Maryland, Minnesota, Oklahoma and Tennessee); and introduction of a voluntary covenant marriage whereby couples agree to engage in counseling prior to both marriage and divorce, and divorce may only be granted under specific grounds or after a long period of separation (Arizona, Arkansas and Louisiana, with legislation introduced in at least two dozen additional states).
- *Programs, activities and services* Aim to directly promote and strengthen healthy marriage and two-parent families through such activities as marriage education for adults and high school students; fatherhood programs with co-parenting and marriage components; and training individuals to provide marriage-promotion services. (40 states, with Oklahoma and Florida noted for their geographic breadth of implementation).

- *Policy changes related to marriage and two-parent families in TANF and child-support*
Includes TANF implementation which reduces or eliminates certain AFDC financial disincentives for marriage, financial bonuses (one-time and/or ongoing) for TANF recipients who get and/or stay married, and forgiveness of child-support arrearages owed to the state for couples who marry or reunite. (47 states).

Examples of Healthy Marriage Programs

The following four programs are highlighted due to either the frequency with which they are cited in the literature as examples of model programs, or due to an interesting characteristic that is worthy of attention. None of these programs have been operational long enough to have published substantial information on their efficacy, but all have extensive evaluation studies underway which should start to yield substantive results in the next two to five years. For more information on the many programs with similar levels of funding provided by ACF, go to the Healthy Marriage Initiative website, at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/>

Oklahoma Marriage Initiative

Governor Frank Keating launched the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative in 1999 to strengthen marriage and reduce divorce in the state, which reported one of the highest divorce rates in the country. The initiative's overarching aim is to improve child well being by strengthening marriage and its specific goal is to reduce the divorce rate by one-third by 2010. It is mandated to remain grounded in "the best available research" and is often held up as one of the most comprehensive, geographically diverse and well-funded state initiatives.

- Oklahoma State University Bureau for Social Research published an extensive baseline marriage survey in 2001 (http://jumpteam.jumpfaster.com/dhs/omi/survey_report.pdf), on the

current state of marriage in Oklahoma, including the first information published about low-income couple's marital attitudes, beliefs and behaviors.

- OMI has adopted as its core curriculum PREP (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program) (<http://www.prepinc.com/>), a cognitive-behavioral education program that is offered in either a Christian or secular format, and is being used in many marriage initiatives across the country.³
- OMI is not aimed exclusively at low-income couples, but includes certain target populations (such as prisons, child-welfare recipients), and has solicited the input of domestic violence organizations.

See: <http://www.okmarriage.org/OklahomaMarriageInitiative.asp>

Louisiana Healthy Marriages Initiative

The Knapsack Project is a service offered to families served by the Louisiana Child Welfare Resource Centers and Foster/Adopt Resource Centers. The Knapsack Project seeks to enhance and stabilize the environment in which children live, by training their caregivers in skills that enhance their relationship. With improved communication, understanding and negotiation, caregiver stress may be reduced and mutual support may be increased, thereby reducing the risk of child maltreatment.

- Louisiana was one of the first states to implement a healthy marriage initiative and has focused a portion of the program specifically on low-income couples.
- Like Oklahoma, Louisiana has adopted the PREP curriculum.
- Louisiana State University is conducting an ongoing program evaluation.

³ For discussion about PREP and the research behind its development, see the U.S. Senate Testimony of its developer, Scott Stanley, Co-Director of the Center for Marital and Family Studies and the University of Denver (Stanley, 2004).

Due to Louisiana's early commitment to marriage promotion and the size of the program, evaluation of program efficacy with low-income couples should be watched over the coming years. See <http://www.selu.edu/orgs/frp/knapsack/>

Florida Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives

In 2003 Governor Jeb Bush and the Legislature passed a law replacing the Florida Commission on Responsible Fatherhood with the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives. The aggressive goals of the newly-named commission are to reduce the divorce rate in Florida by 20 percent and non-marital births by ten percent by December 2006, by promoting “violence-free, substance-abuse-free, respectful, nurturing families based on the foundation of a healthy marriage relationship between parents.”

- The commission works with the Department of Children and Family Services to develop partnerships with community-based and faith-based providers to deliver marriage and family support services to Floridians, including marriage education for youth; relationship education; couple mentoring; anger management and conflict resolution to teach couples how to appropriately deal with disagreements; and family reunification services to help bring families back together in a stable and nurturing environment.
- Of the Governor's proposed 2004-2005 budget for the commission of \$10 million, \$1.7 million was granted by the federal government for three programs:
 - The Florida Marriage and Family Research Institute project, which provides training to social services staff as well as direct services to couples and families;
 - The Big Bend Community Based Care project, which provides in-home support, services and counseling to participating families in Florida's Panhandle; and

- The Building Local Capacity for Healthy Marriage and Family Formation project to expand the capacity of local department offices to work with parents and their children in promoting healthy marriage and family formation.
- There is also a baseline study available on Florida’s marital attitudes, beliefs and demographics, available at: <http://www.pphp.ufl.edu/~uspringe/FMP/Studies.htm> .

Healthy Marriages Grand Rapids (Michigan)

In May 2003, ACF awarded a \$990,000 grant over five years, to be matched by private funding, to a consortium of three faith-based and community-based social service organizations in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for a project called “Health Marriages/Healthy Relationships, A Grand Rapids Demonstration Initiative.” The overall goals of the demonstration program are to improve the establishment of paternity and increase financial support for children, as well as fathers’ relationships with their children and mothers of their children. The project also includes efforts to improve couples relationships and decrease domestic violence. All participants must be screened for domestic violence and referred to appropriate additional services as needed. This project is interesting for its augmentation of existing programs to increase child support for poor children by absent fathers with explicit efforts aimed at relationship building between these fathers and their children’s mother. The study will not be completed until at least 2008, with published results thereafter. See <http://www.healthymarriagesgr.org/index.htm> .

Next Steps

- Programs should be tested on a small scale and with diverse populations before a full-scale roll-out is undertaken. By their very nature, the fragile families targeted for support run the risk of losing more than they gain if programs are implemented with insufficient

training, lack of access to supplementary resources and incomplete research to demonstrate efficacy.

- As is the case in Oklahoma and Florida, officials should include contributions from the domestic violence prevention and treatment communities in their planning and implementation. Program participants should be screened for high-risk factors, such as domestic violence, substance abuse, sexual abuse and other forms of trauma, and sufficient supports must be provided.
- Programs should reduce or eliminate financial disincentives to marry, most importantly the reduction in TANF and Medicaid benefits resulting from the addition of the husband's income. Since cost of complete elimination is prohibitive, experimental programs should test the effects of transition periods and other marriage-penalty reductions in order to identify the changes that would be most effective.
- Efforts to reach the African American community should be increased, due to high rates of out-of-wedlock births and low marriage levels. 85% of African American children will spend some portion of their childhood in a single parent family (Haskins, 2004). To date, there has been only limited grass roots support, as many African American leaders remain skeptical about the benefits of marriage promotion in their communities. For more on the President's African American Health Marriage Initiative, see <http://www.aahmi.net/>.
- Specific program consideration should be given to parents who do not wish to marry, including gay and lesbian couples, but wish to improve their co-parenting skills.

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Web Resources

Research Organizations

American Public Human Services Association

<http://www.aphsa.org/>

Founded in 1930, APHSA is a nonprofit, bipartisan organization of individuals and agencies concerned with human services. Our members include all state and many territorial human service agencies, more than 1,200 local agencies, and several thousand individuals who work in or otherwise have an interest in human service programs. APHSA educates members of Congress, the media, and the broader public on what is happening in the states around welfare, child welfare, health care reform, and other issues involving families and the elderly.

Click on “Links” at the following website: <http://www.aphsa.org/home/news.asp>

The Heritage Foundation

<http://www.heritage.org/>

Founded in 1973, The Heritage Foundation is a research and educational institute – a think tank - whose mission is to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense. See especially, The Nature of Marriage Research at:

<http://www.heritage.org/research/family/nature-of-marriage.cfm>

The Brookings Institution

<http://www.brook.edu/>

In its research, The Brookings Institution functions as an independent analyst and critic, committed to publishing its findings for the information of the public. In its conferences and activities, it serves as a bridge between scholarship and public policy, bringing new knowledge to the attention of decision makers and affording scholars a better insight into public policy issues. See especially, Research Topics/Social Policy/Family Structure at:

http://www.brook.edu/index/taxonomy.htm?taxonomy=Social%20Policy*Family%20structure

Center for Law and Social Policy

<http://www.clasp.org/>

CLASP is a national non-profit organization established in 1968 that advocates on issues related to economic security for low-income families and children. Home of Theodora Ooms, Senior Policy Analyst, who has written extensively on marriage policy, largely against, or at best cautious, re: the Bush Healthy Marriage Initiative. Website has numerous additional publications on marriage policy and the poor. See especially, Couples and Marriage Policy at:

<http://www.clasp.org/publications.php?id=6#0>

Joint Center for Poverty Research

<http://www.jcpr.org/>

The Northwestern University/University of Chicago Joint Center for Poverty Research supports academic research that examines what it means to be poor and live in America. JCPR concentrates on the causes and consequences of poverty in America and the effectiveness of

policies aimed at reducing poverty. Our goal is to advance what is known about the economic, social and behavioral factors that cause poverty, and to establish the actual effects of interventions designed to alleviate poverty. The Center's research agenda focuses on: changing labor markets and the causes of inequality in the current labor market; family functioning and the well-being of children; the impact of concentrated urban poverty; and the effects in these domains - and others - of changing policy and new programs. See JCPR's Publications page for multiple resources on topics of welfare reform, marriage and family.

Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

<http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/>

Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. is known for its high-quality, objective research to support decisions about our nation's most pressing social policy problems. The firm has conducted some of the most important studies of health care, welfare, education, employment, nutrition, and early childhood policies and programs in the United States. Its research, which crisscrosses the human life span from children's health and welfare to long-term care for elderly people, provides a sound foundation for decisions that affect the well-being of Americans. See especially, Welfare/Strengthening Families at: <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/welfare/strengthlow.asp>

Institute for Public Accuracy

<http://www.accuracy.org/>

Institute for Public Accuracy seeks to broaden public discourse. With systematic outreach to media professionals, the Institute provides news releases that offer well-documented analysis of current events and underlying issues. Serving as a consortium for an abundance of diverse expertise, the Institute for Public Accuracy makes frequent communication possible between independent policy analysts and working journalists. IPA promotes the inclusion of perspectives that widen the bounds of media discussion and enhance democratic debate. Some limited information on the topics of Marriage, Family and Welfare Reform.

The Cato Institute

<http://www.cato.org/>

The Cato Institute seeks to broaden the parameters of public policy debate to allow consideration of the traditional American principles of limited government, individual liberty, free markets and peace. Toward that goal, the Institute strives to achieve greater involvement of the intelligent, concerned lay public in questions of policy and the proper role of government. See especially, Research Areas/Welfare and Workforce at: <http://www.cato.org/research/welfare/index.html>

Center for Family Policy and Practice

(Formerly Center on Fathers, Families and Public Policy)

<http://www.cffpp.org/>

The Center for Family Policy and Practice, formerly called the Center on Fathers, Families and Public Policy, is a nationally-focused public policy organization conducting policy research, technical assistance, training, litigation and public education in order to focus attention on the barriers faced by never-married, low-income fathers and their families. See especially, The Legislative Marriage Agenda and Its Potential Meaning for Programs Serving Low-Income Families (2001) at: http://www.cffpp.org/publications/marriage_agenda.html

The Urban Institute

<http://www.urban.org/>

The Urban Institute is a nonprofit nonpartisan policy research and educational organization established to examine the social, economic, and governance problems facing the nation. It provides information and analysis to public and private decision makers to help them address these challenges and strives to raise citizen understanding of these issues and tradeoffs in policy making. For an extensive and authoritative mix of research on Marriage Initiatives, Same-Sex Marriage, and Fatherhood Policy, see Research By Topic/Family Structure at:

<http://www.urban.org/Template.cfm?Section=ByTopic&NavMenuID=62&TopicID=28&TopicName=Family%20Structure%20>

Child Welfare Institute

<http://www.gocwi.org/>

Our mission is to provide information, ideas and guidance in the field of child welfare training and organizational development consultation. Since 1984 CWI has been putting ideas into action to help our client agencies succeed. Our focus is on practice, and creating effective solutions that achieve measurable goals. Please note that there is little specifically re: marriage policy on this website.

Bendheim-Thoman Center for Research on Child Well-Being

<http://crew.princeton.edu/>

The Center for Research on Child Well being (CRCW), housed at Princeton University, conducts research on children's health, education, income, and family structure. Our faculty is made up of economists, sociologists, demographers, psychologists, and political scientists. Our goal is to promote basic research on children's well being and link research to practice and public policy. Advisory Board includes often-quoted Irwin Garfinkel of Columbia University, and Isabel Sawhill of The Brookings Institute. Home of investigator Sara McLanahan. See especially, The Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study at

<http://crew.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies/index.asp>

Annie E. Casey Foundation

<http://www.aecf.org/>

The Foundation makes grants, funds demonstrations, provides services, delivers technical assistance and disseminates data and analyses -- all aimed at helping states, cities, and neighborhoods do a better, more cost-effective job of supporting children and families. Our investments in each of these areas are evaluated against clear goals and measured by results, performance outcomes, and return on investment. This website strives to provide the best available data and analysis on critical issues affecting struggling families and at-risk kids. It is intended to be dynamic, with new information and products continually placed online. We encourage frequent exploration of our site, and invite comments and discussion from all users. See especially, 2004 Kids Count Databook at <http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/databook/>

Welfare Reform Academy

<http://www.welfareacademy.org/>

The School of Public Affairs at the University of Maryland has created an academy to help state and local officials, private social service providers, and other interested parties take full

advantage of the 1996 welfare reform law. While the law puts pressure on public officials and service providers to make their programs more efficient and better targeted, it also presents an unprecedented opportunity for states to reshape their programs. Since early 1997, the Welfare Reform Academy has provided training in program design, implementation, and evaluation for the new Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Food Stamp, Medicaid, job training, child care, child welfare, and child support programs.

Welfare Information Network

<http://www.financeprojectinfo.org/win/default.asp>

A project of The Finance Project, WIN is a clearinghouse for information, policy analysis and research related to welfare, workforce development, and other human and community services. One of the best sources of information and useful links under “Family Formation: Promoting Healthy Marriages Among Low-Income Populations.” See especially:

<http://www.financeprojectinfo.org/win/famformation.asp>

MDRC

<http://www.mdrc.org/>

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization. We are dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through our research and the active communication of our findings, we seek to enhance the effectiveness of policies and programs. See especially Strengthening Families at:

http://www.mdrc.org/subarea_index_12.html

National Organizations

The following organizations generally support Marriage Initiatives

Alliance for Marriage

<http://www.allianceformarriage.org>

The Alliance for Marriage (AFM) is a 501(c)(3) non-partisan research and education organization dedicated to promoting marriage and addressing the epidemic of fatherless families in the United States. AFM exists to educate the public, the media, elected officials, and civil society leaders on the benefits of marriage for children, adults and society. AFM also exists to promote reforms designed to strengthen the institution of marriage and restore a culture of married fatherhood in American society.

Campaign for Working Families

<http://www.cwfpac.com/>

The CWF is a non-partisan political action committee (PAC) dedicated to electing profamily, pro-life and pro-free enterprise candidates to federal and state offices.

Concerned Women for America

<http://www.cwfa.org>

The vision of CWA is for women and like-minded men, from all walks of life, to come together and restore the family to its traditional purpose and thereby allow each member of the family to

realize their God-given potential and be more responsible citizens. See Marriage, Welfare Reform and Fatherhood search results.

The Empowerment Network

<http://www.empowermentnetwork.com/>

The Empowerment Network (TEN) is a resource hub for state legislators, grassroots organizations, and other civic leaders promoting American family and community renewal of civil society in the 21st century. Website appears to be under construction until further notice.

Focus on Family

<http://www.family.org/>

Focus on the Family began in 1977 in response to Dr. James Dobson's increasing concern for the American family. A Ph.D. in child development (University of Southern California), he had served 14 years as associate clinical professor of pediatrics at the USC School of Medicine and a concurrent 17 years on the attending staff of Los Angeles Children's Hospital in the divisions of Child Development and Medical Genetics. What he had seen included massive internal and external pressures on American households, causing unprecedented disintegration. Yet there seemed to be no comprehensive, rational and biblically based conception of the family for those in greatest need. See especially, "Marriage and Family" in "Focus on Social Issues" at <http://www.family.org/cforum/fosi/marriage/>

National Marriage Project

<http://marriage.rutgers.edu/>

The mission of the National Marriage Project is to provide research and analysis on the state of marriage in America and to educate the public on the social, economic and cultural conditions affecting marital success and child well being.

National Fatherhood Initiative

<http://www.fatherhood.org/>

NFI's mission is to improve the well being of children by increasing the proportion of children growing up with involved, responsible, and committed fathers. We accomplish our mission through: 1) Educating and inspiring all Americans, especially fathers, through public awareness campaigns, research, and other resources; 2) Equipping and developing leaders of national, state, and community fatherhood initiatives through curricula, training, and technical assistance; 3) Engaging every sector of society through strategic alliances and partnerships.

Michigan Family Forum

<http://www.michiganfamily.org/index.htm>

Michigan Family Forum is dedicated to strengthening the family through sound public policy in four key areas: strengthening marriage, promoting responsible fatherhood, protecting our children and honoring the elderly.

Oklahoma Family Policy Council

<http://www.okfamilypc.org/>

Founded in 1989, the Oklahoma Family Policy Council (OFPC) is a statewide nonpartisan, nonprofit research, education and communications organization. OFPC exists: to strengthen

families, to educate Oklahomans on public policy as it impacts the family, to encourage responsible citizenship, and to restore traditional, Judeo-Christian principles in American public policy. See especially, Marriage Initiatives at http://www.okfamilypc.org/marriage_initiative.htm

Abstinence Clearinghouse

<http://www.abstinence.net/>

The mission of the Abstinence Clearinghouse is to promote the appreciation for and practice of sexual abstinence (purity) until marriage through the distribution of age appropriate, factual and medically-referenced materials. We are a clearinghouse for abstinence information and an Association of abstinence advocates. The Department of Health and Human Services/Health Resources and Services Administration, (HRSA)/Maternal and Child Health Bureau, (MCHB), has awarded a contract to The National Abstinence Clearinghouse, Sioux Falls, SD for Technical Assistance for the Abstinence Education Program. The objectives of this contract are: 1) Providing a national criteria for the purpose of evaluating abstinence-only educational curricula; 2) Providing a comprehensive, national list of approved abstinence-only education curricula conforming to legislative requirements defined in Section 510(b)(2), for Maternal Child Health Bureau, (MCHB); 3) Providing medically accurate, science-based information and data at all pertinent educational levels, for grantees; 4) Providing culturally diverse and culturally competent approaches and strategies for promoting abstinence. See especially “Marriage Initiative” search results at

<http://www.abstinence.net/search.php?keywords=Marriage+Initiative&x=17&y=8>

The Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education

<http://www.smartmarriages.com/index.html>

The Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education serves as an information exchange and clearinghouse to help couples locate marriage and relationship courses; to help mental health professionals, clergy and lay educators locate training programs and resources; to connect those with an interest in the continuing development of the field; to support community initiatives, legislation and research; and to promote the effectiveness of the courses and increase their availability in the community.

Supporting Healthy Marriage

<http://www.supportinghealthymarriage.org/>

SHM is an evaluation of policies and programs aimed at helping couples strengthen and maintain healthy marital relationships. It is a multi-site study of healthy marriage among low-income married couples and couples planning to marry, to be conducted from 2004 to 2012. The project is sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and is being conducted by MDRC and its research partners, Abt Associates, Inc., Child Trends, Optimal Solutions Group, and McFarland and Associates, Inc. The website is new as of November 2004, so available information is still limited, but check here in coming months and years for updates on the research.

The following organizations generally oppose Marriage Initiatives

Alliance for Children and Families

<http://alliance1.org/>

The Alliance for Children and Families is an international membership association representing more than 350 private, nonprofit child- and family-serving organizations. Alliance members serve more than 5 million individuals annually in more than 2,000 communities, providing a vast array of services ranging from residential care to domestic abuse prevention and intervention. The Alliance's mission is to strengthen members' capacity to serve and advocate for children, families, and communities. The Alliance formed in October 1998 when Family Service America (established 1911) and the National Association of Homes and Services for Children (established 1975) merged.

Alternatives to Marriage Project

<http://www.unmarried.org/>

The Alternatives to Marriage Project (ATMP) advocates for equality and fairness for unmarried people, including people who choose not to marry, cannot marry, or live together before marriage. We provide support and information for this fast-growing constituency, fight discrimination on the basis of marital status, and educate the public and policymakers about relevant social and economic issues. We believe that marriage is only one of many acceptable family forms, and that society should recognize and support healthy relationships in all their diversity. ATMP is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Americans for Democratic Action

<http://adaction.org>

ADA is the nation's oldest independent liberal political organization, dedicated to individual liberty and building economic and social justice at home and abroad. Since 1947, we have led public opinion and coalitions by taking early, principled stands on a broad range of domestic, foreign, economic, military, social and environmental issues. Please note that there is little recent commentary on Marriage Initiatives at this website.

American Prospect Online

<http://www.prospect.org>

The aim of The American Prospect is to contribute to a renewal of America's democratic traditions by presenting a practical and convincing vision of liberal philosophy, politics, and public life. We publish articles for the general reader that attempt to break through conventional understanding and creatively reframe public questions. Ours is not a magazine of complaint, of angry gestures, or of private irritations. It is a magazine of public ideas, firmly committed -- however unfashionably -- to a belief in public improvement. America can do much good, and it can do much better.

Council on Contemporary Families

<http://www.contemporaryfamilies.org/>

Founded in 1996, The Council on Contemporary Families (CCF) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the national conversation about what contemporary families need and

how these needs can best be met. They seek to meet the need for accurate information about the condition of America's families through the dissemination of educational materials, media coverage, conferences, and seminars. Often-quoted Stephanie Coontz is co-Director. Many briefing papers available on Marriage Initiatives, most with excellent bibliographies.

National Association of Social Workers

<http://www.naswdc.org/>

The NASW is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world, with more than 150,000 members. NASW works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies.

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

<http://www.thetaskforce.org/>

NGLTF is the national progressive organization working for the civil rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people, with the vision and commitment to building a powerful political movement. Visit NGLTF's Policy Institute at

<http://www.thetaskforce.org/ourprojects/pi/index.cfm>

National Organization for Women

<http://www.now.org/>

Since 1970, the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund continues to be at the center of every major social and economic justice concern on the women's rights agenda, defining the issues and bringing them to public attention. NOW Legal Defense pursues equality for women and girls in the workplace, the schools, the family and the courts, through litigation, education, and public information programs. See Marriage Equality Issues Brief at

<http://www.now.org/issues/marriage/index.html>

Unitarian Universalist Association

<http://www.uua.org/>

The UUA grew out of the consolidation, in 1961, of two religious denominations: the Universalists, organized in 1793, and the Unitarians, organized in 1825. The UUA provides resources and offers consultations to local congregations, creates religious education curricula, spurs social action efforts, expedites the settlement of professional religious leaders, supports Beacon Press, and produces pamphlets, devotional material, and the bimonthly journal, *UU World*. The UUA works in concert with many organizations to provide a wide range of services.

Unmarried America

<http://www.unmarriedamerica.org/>

Unmarried America engages in education and advocacy for America's 86 million unmarried adults. Our group includes people who are ever-single, divorced, or widowed, and who have a variety of living arrangements (solo singles, single parents, domestic partners, roommates, and unmarried families). We are seeking fairness for unmarried employees, consumers, and taxpayers and more recognition of unmarried voters.

Federal Government Sites

The White House

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/>

See Report: “Working Toward Independence” for summary of Bush Administration’s plan to “promote child well-being and healthy marriages.”

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/02/welfare-reform-announcement-book.html>

See also: “Fact Sheet: Reforming Welfare to Increase Independence & Strengthen Families.”

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/welfarereform/fact-sheet.html>

Department of Health and Human Services

<http://www.dhhs.gov/>

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is the federal agency that oversees the comprehensive bipartisan welfare reform plan created by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA). Enacted by Congress and signed into law in August 1996, PRWORA dramatically changed the nation's welfare system into one that requires work in exchange for time-limited assistance. PRWORA contains strong work requirements combined with supports for families moving from welfare to work, including increased funding for child care and continued eligibility for medical coverage. It also provides a performance bonus to reward states for achieving PRWORA's goals, state maintenance of effort requirements and comprehensive child support enforcement provisions.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND PROMOTING RESPONSIBILITY

Ending dependence and promoting two-parent families. Flexibility under PRWORA extends to providing services to non-custodial parents to ensure that they are able to support their children and have the skills necessary to be better parents. All states have the administrative flexibility to use TANF funding for programs that strengthen and encourage two-parent families. In addition, PRWORA includes grants to help states establish programs that support and facilitate non-custodial parents' visitation with and access to their children.

Teen pregnancy prevention. PRWORA provides \$50 million a year in funding for abstinence education activities. This program provides states with grants to support a wide range of innovative abstinence programs for adolescents.

Encouraging healthy marriages and two-parent married families. The President's plan directs up to \$300 million for programs that encourage healthy, stable marriages. These programs include premarital education and counseling, as well as research and technical assistance.

Other government sites with information on marriage promotion:

Family Formation Pages of Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation

<http://www.aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/hspparent.htm>

Administration for Children and Families (ACF)

<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/>

Child Care Bureau

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/>

Children's Bureau

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/>

Family and Youth Services Bureau

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/>

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect

<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/>

National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth

<http://www.ncfy.com/>

Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE)

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/>

Office of Family Assistance

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/>

Healthy Marriage Initiative: The official site of the Bush Administration's marriage policy.

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/>

U.S. Census Bureau

<http://www.census.gov/>

Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics

<http://www.childstats.gov/>

House Ways and Means Committee

<http://waysandmeans.house.gov/>

National Center for Health Statistics: Marriage and Divorce

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/marriage.htm>