U.S. Federal Policy Efforts to Strengthen Marriage

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What is the rationale for government interest in strengthening marriage?
◆ Additional effort to reduce poverty and improve outcomes for adults and children
◆ Explore feasibility of targeting link between family structure and poverty
◆ Strengthening the social infrastructure of civil society

“Optimism is America’s birthright. There is no age-old problem we do not insist on trying to cure rather than endure: slavery, prostitution, drunkenness in the nineteenth century; poverty, domestic violence and inequality in the twentieth century. Total victory often eludes reformers. Still, Americans have an impressive record of refusing to bow to historical inevitabilities, of taking active responsibility for forming the society in which we live.”

Maggie Gallagher, The Abolition of Marriage

The “Devilish” Details

What is the federal government—and specifically the Administration for Children and Families—doing to strengthen marriage and improve children’s outcomes, especially for lower-income families?

(ACF establishes welfare policy in the U.S.)

Federal Initiatives to Strengthen Marriage
◆ 1996 TANF Program: Encourage state experimentation
◆ Expand social services to include marriage and relationship education
◆ African American/Hispanic HMIs
◆ Research and evaluation projects
◆ Proposed TANF Reauthorization
  Federal Welfare Reform Legislation 1996,
  Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Program:
  Encourage States
◆ 1996 PRWORA: States encouraged to reduce non-marital childbearing, strengthen two-parent families, promote marriage
◆ Encouraged by TANF, other states (AZ, LA, MS, FL, OK) building network of marriage education service providers for lower-income families, and other initiatives
Expand Social Services to Include Marriage and Relationship Education,
   Especially for Lower-Income Couples
◆ Grants to “retrain” traditional social service providers
◆ Grants to develop marriage education training of graduate students
   in human services
◆ Grants to integrate marriage education services into existing
   programs and curricula

FY 2002-2004, 100+ grants, $25+ million
   African American Healthy Marriage Initiative
◆ Promote a culturally competent strategy for fostering healthy
   marriage and responsible fatherhood, improving child well-being,
   and strengthening families within the African American community
   by . . .
◆ Education and communication
◆ Enhancement of partnerships
◆ Facilitating access to community and ACF resources
   Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative
◆ Goal: increase the number of Hispanic children who grow up in
   healthy, married, two-parent families by addressing the unique
   cultural, linguistic, demographic, and socio-economic needs of
   families in the Hispanic communities
◆ Increase awareness in the Hispanic community of the HHMI
◆ Establishing readiness in the Hispanic community for accessing
   marriage related resources
   National Healthy Marriage Resource Center
   www.healthymarriageinfo.org
◆ Established 2005; 5 year, $5 million project
◆ On-line resource to help individuals and couples find marriage
   education resources in their communities
◆ On-line resources, tool kits for individuals and groups who want to
   be involved in marriage strengthening activities in their communities
◆ Collect, summarize, synthesize, and disseminate research findings
   on healthy marriage to support marriage education efforts
   Research and Evaluation Projects
◆ “Building Strong Families”: 9-year study to evaluate programs to
   strengthen “fragile families” (unmarried, low-income parents)
◆ “Supporting Healthy Marriages”: 9-year study to evaluate programs
   to strengthen lower-income, married (or engaged) couples
◆ “Community Healthy Marriage Initiatives Evaluation”: 7-year study
   to evaluate the effectiveness of CHMIs.
◆ “Financial Disincentives to Marriage”: Analyze financial
   incentives/disincentives for marriage and family formation for low-
   income couples (w/ user-friendly software, by state)
General research funding

- TANF Reauthorization Proposal:
  $500 million over 5 years (matched by states):
- Public advertising campaigns on the value of marriage and skills needed to increase marital stability
- Education in high schools on the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting
- Marriage and relationship programs for non-married, pregnant women and expectant fathers (may include parenting skills, financial management, job skills)
- Pre-marital education and skills training
- Marriage enhancement and skills training
- Divorce reduction programs (w/ relationship skills)
- Marriage mentoring programs
- Programs to reduce disincentives to marry (in conjunction with any above activity)

  TANF Reauthorization:
  Plus, $500 million over 5 years (non-matching):
- Grants for demonstration projects to strengthen marriage (related to 8 allowable activities)
- Grants for research activities related to understanding and strengthening marriage
- Grants for technical assistance to marriage-strengthening programs (often related to evaluation research projects)

  Federal Initiatives Summary:
- Promote marriage education services, especially for lower-income individuals and couples
- Integrate marriage education services into expanded social service network

A final thought . . .

Cultural change that sustains a vibrant social movement is also needed to make a big difference.

State and federal involvement can help to create a marriage movement, not just expand social services.