Update on Marriage Promotion Initiatives, Legislation and Research

There were a number of developments in funding, research and legislation related to marriage promotion this month. The following are summaries of some of them.

**TANF “Clean” Extension Likely but Marriage and Fatherhood Bills Could Get Senate Consideration.** Although it was expected as of this writing that Congress would pass a clean 6 month extension of the TANF program on September 30 (today), which would delay consideration of any changes to the program for 6 months, it was still possible that a bill would be brought to the floor in an attempt to include its funding for marriage promotion and fatherhood programs in the extension language. The bill, co-sponsored by Senators Bayh (D-IN) and Santorum (R-PA) would provide two years of funding for marriage promotion and fatherhood initiatives. It is similar to last year’s H.R. 4 but has language that says for the first time that the purpose of the fatherhood section of the legislation is to “promote responsible fatherhood through marriage promotion.”

On another federal funding front, a request by the Bush administration for $50 million for marriage promotion and fatherhood responsibility programs was left out of the Senate Appropriations Committee FY 2005 Health and Human Services budget recommendation.

**Report Finds Divorce Incidence is Equal between “Born Again” Christians and Non-Christians.** A recent study by the Barna Group analyzed data from a nationwide telephone interview survey of a random sample of 3614 adults, age 18 or older, conducted between January and August 2004. The study found that:

- Among married “born again” Christians and married adults who are not born again, the divorce rate is identical at 35%. The divorce rate among atheists and agnostics is 37%.
- Among “born again” adults, 80% are or have been married, compared to just 69% among the non-born again segment.
- Nearly one-quarter of the married “born agains” (23%) get divorced two or more times.
- Catholics were substantially less likely than Protestants to get divorced (25% versus 39%, respectively). Among the largest Protestant groups, those most likely to get divorced were Pentecostals (44%) while Presbyterians had the fewest divorces (28%).
- A majority of the born again group (52%) disagreed that divorce without adultery is sin. Three-quarters of all non-born again adults (74%) disagreed with the statement.
- More than half of black adults (51%) agreed that divorce without adultery is a sin, compared to 70% of white adults who disagreed with the statement. Hispanics were in-between those extremes, with 64% disagreeing.

The report is available at www.barna.org.
**Paper on Marriage Promotion Critiques Its Rise and Impact on Domestic Violence.** A paper authored by DePaul University faculty Beth Skilken Catlett and Julie E. Artis traces the genesis of the current marriage promotion initiatives, and critiques their basis and misrepresentation of domestic violence research. *Critiquing the Case for Marriage Promotion: How the Promarriage Movement Misrepresents Domestic Violence Research* will be published in the journal *Violence Against Women*, Vol. 10 No. 11, November 2004.


**Marriage Savers Covenants Expanding; Using Public Resources.** Leesburg, Virginia became the 189th U.S. city to sign a “Community Marriage Policy” (CMP) this week. The CMP is a strategy created by Marriage Savers ([www.marriagesavers.org](http://www.marriagesavers.org)) in which local clergy sign a covenant to strengthen marriages. A recent CMP was signed in Springfield, Ohio (Clark County) that was the first to be organized by a local welfare office. The Clark County Department of Jobs and Family Services made a grant of $60,000 to create the policy. Marriage Savers has since secured a federal grant to work with Clark County on its program. Marriage Savers is also working with Head Start in Austin, Texas where public employees will ask Head Start couples if they are active in a church, and depending on the response, will design a church-based mentoring program or one administered by public agency officials.

**Marriage Promotion Grant Announced.** On September 23, the U.S Department of Health and Human Services announced a $900,000 award to the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) in Minneapolis, Minnesota for the creation of a Healthy Marriage Resource Center. NCFR is to be a nationwide repository for healthy marriage programs and research. The grant is for one year, with potential funding of up to $4.5 million over five years. The Center will create a website clearinghouse in addition to maintaining a healthy marriage program database for individuals, educators, practitioners and government officials.

**Alaska to Use TANF Bonus for Marriage Promotion.** The State of Alaska has announced its plan to use $500,000 of the $3.2 million TANF bonus it received from the federal government to fund a Healthy Marriage Initiative that will be conducted by the state’s new Faith-Based Community Initiatives Program. The state will award grants of up to $50,000 for a range of programs including high school education and marriage mentorships.

According to the Anchorage Daily News, the state expects that the programs would be voluntary, but has not ruled out funding programs for which participation would be mandatory. The state is considering extending the program after its initial year using a portion of its federal TANF block grant funds.

**Audit of Virginia Marriage Program Reveals Misuse of Funds.** A grant for $990,000 made by the Administration for Children and Families to the State of Virginia that was intended to establish a healthy marriage coalition has been shut down due to the primary contractor’s misuse of funds. Parents Educating Parents, Inc. was also given $125,000 in state funds as its required match for the first year of operations. In August, after a state audit revealed that $277,000 had been spent by the organization with no tangible results, the contract was cancelled and both the coalition and the program closed down. HHS lawyers are determining whether to allow the state to find a new contractor and carry out the rest of the grant. Neither the state nor the federal government intends to seek recoupment of the funds.
Jail Inmate Fees Sought in Growing Number of Jurisdictions

As state and local governments continue to face budget shortfalls, an increasing number of jurisdictions are seeking authorization to collect fees from jail inmates to recover the cost of their incarceration. A 1997 report by the National Institute of Corrections Information Center reported that at least 41 states had passed legislation authorizing the assessment of inmate fees for jail services and operations at that time. Services for which fees can be collected include room and board, medical services, telephone services, booking charges, and work release programs. According to this report:

• Eighteen states had the statutory authority to charge per diem fees or fees for the general costs of incarceration in 1997.
• More than three-quarters of a representative sample of 130 large jails with populations near or exceeding 1,000 inmates were charging fees for one or more programs and/or services.
• Inmates were most often charged fees for medical services (56 jails) and participation in work-release programs (46 jails).
• In 1996, telephone services generated the most revenues ($544,000 per year).

According to the New York Times this month, more than 40 states to date have enacted legislation allowing their jails to charge fees, and current local budget shortages have led to more assessments by local officials of incarceration fees. The newspaper also points out that:

• In Cincinnati, Ohio, a federal court ordered the refund of more than $1 million in jail fees from people who had been detained in jail but had not been convicted.
• Some counties that charge for incarceration have found that the costs of enforcing payment of the fees exceeds any revenue produced for the county. As many as 80% of jail inmates are indigent.
• In Macomb County, Michigan, described as one of the most successful reimbursement programs in the country, nearly $1.5 million in jail fees from county jail inmates was collected last year. The county sheriff's office enforces the fees upon release by going to court to collect unpaid bills, seizing cars or putting some inmates back in jail.


HHS Releases List of Issues To Be Evaluated by Inspector General

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General’s Fiscal Year 2004 Work Plan includes planned evaluations of the following:

• States’ Use of Work Requirements for Noncustodial Parents. This study will evaluate how effectively child support agencies and courts use work requirements when dealing with noncustodial parents and the impact of these requirements on child support collections.
• Child Support Administrative Costs. OIG will determine whether the administrative costs claimed by a State are reasonable, allowable and allocable.
• Revocation of Federal Licenses. This review will assess the potential child support collections that would result from suspending federal licenses held by delinquent noncustodial parents.
• Undistributed Child Support Collections. OIG will examine undistributed child support
collections and determine whether the federal government received its share of program income earned in interest-bearing accounts or for undistributed balances written off by states. Historically, states have had difficulty in distributing sizeable amounts of child support payments due to missing or erroneous information on the custodial parent.

• Child Support Enforcement Task Force Model. OIG plans to increase the number of child support prosecutions, expanding on a 1998 task force model, to prosecute those individuals who have failed to meet their child support obligations.

The Work Plan is available at [www.oig.hhs.gov](http://www.oig.hhs.gov).