



U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

Administration for Children & Families

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THE HEALTHY MARRIAGE INITIATIVE (HMI)

Healthy Marriage Matters to ACF

Background

Research suggests that family structure is related to child well-being. All things being equal, children who grow up in healthy-married, two-parent families do better on a host of outcomes than those who do not. Further, many social problems affecting children, families, and communities could be prevented if more children grew up in healthy, married families. Examples of social science findings include:

- Married couples seem to build more wealth, on average, than singles or cohabiting couples, thus decreasing the likelihood that their children will grow up in poverty.
- Children who live in a two-parent, married household enjoy better physical health, on average, than children in non-married households.
- Marriage reduces the risk of adults and children either perpetrating, or being victimized by, violent crime.



Congress acknowledged the importance of married-couple families when it reformed the welfare system in 1996. The 1996 legislation stipulated that three out of the four purposes of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program either directly or indirectly promote healthy marriages. President Bush echoed this sentiment when he indicated that healthy marriages would be a focus of his administration. In proclaiming National Family Week in November 2001, he noted:

“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.”

ACF Healthy Marriage Initiative

ACF’s healthy marriage initiative aims to **help couples who choose marriage for themselves develop the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages.** In practical terms, it involves:

- *Developing demonstrations.* In consultation with states, a number of communities have approached ACF to conduct healthy marriage demonstration projects. These are broad-based efforts to work with key community sectors (e.g., local governments, businesses, civic organizations, non-profits) to strengthen marriages.
- *Emphasizing marriage* in Federal programs. ACF’s program offices are promoting healthy

marriages in every appropriate program. For example, marriage education and enrichment services are being provided, alongside existing services, to low-income couples who utilize Refugee Resettlement, Children’s Bureau, Community Services, or TANF services.

- *Conducting research.* This initiative is using existing funds to explore the types of marriage strengthening services that exist and their effectiveness, so that future resources can be targeted more wisely.
- *Training.* The initiative is providing training about healthy marriage issues to interested Federal ACF staff.

This initiative is *not* about:

- Trapping anyone in an abusive or violent relationship.
- Forcing anyone to get or stay married.
- Running a federal dating service.
- Withdrawing supports from or diminishing in any way, either directly or indirectly, the important work of single parents.

Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (Enrolled as Agreed to or Passed by Both House and Senate)

SEC. 7103. GRANTS FOR HEALTHY MARRIAGE PROMOTION AND RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD.

(a) Healthy Marriage and Family Funds- Section 403(a)(2) (42 U.S.C. 603(a)(2)) is amended to read as follows:

 ` (2) HEALTHY MARRIAGE PROMOTION AND RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD GRANTS-

 ` (A) IN GENERAL-

 ` (i) USE OF FUNDS- Subject to subparagraphs (B) and (C), the Secretary may use the funds made available under subparagraph (D) for the purpose of conducting and supporting research and demonstration projects by public or private entities, and providing technical assistance to States, Indian tribes and tribal organizations, and such other entities as the Secretary may specify that are receiving a grant under another provision of this part.

 ` (ii) LIMITATIONS- The Secretary may not award funds made available under this paragraph on a noncompetitive basis, and may not provide any such funds to an entity for the purpose of carrying out healthy marriage promotion activities or for the purpose of carrying out activities promoting responsible fatherhood unless the entity has

submitted to the Secretary an application which--

`(I) describes--

`(aa) how the programs or activities proposed in the application will address, as appropriate, issues of domestic violence; and

`(bb) what the applicant will do, to the extent relevant, to ensure that participation in the programs or activities is voluntary, and to inform potential participants that their participation is voluntary; and

`(II) contains a commitment by the entity--

`(aa) to not use the funds for any other purpose; and

`(bb) to consult with experts in domestic violence or relevant community domestic violence coalitions in developing the programs and activities.

`(iii) HEALTHY MARRIAGE PROMOTION ACTIVITIES- In clause (ii), the term `healthy marriage promotion activities' means the following:

`(I) Public advertising campaigns on the value of marriage and the skills needed to increase marital stability and health.

`(II) Education in high schools on the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting. 2

`(III) Marriage education, marriage skills, and relationship skills programs, that may include parenting skills, financial management, conflict resolution, and job and career advancement, for non-married pregnant women and non-married expectant fathers.

`(IV) Pre-marital education and marriage skills training for engaged couples and for couples

or individuals interested in marriage.

`(V) Marriage enhancement and marriage skills training programs for married couples.

`(VI) Divorce reduction programs that teach relationship skills.

`(VII) Marriage mentoring programs which use married couples as role models and mentors in at-risk communities.

`(VIII) Programs to reduce the disincentives to marriage in means-tested aid programs, if offered in conjunction with any activity described in this subparagraph.

`(B) LIMITATION ON USE OF FUNDS FOR DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS FOR COORDINATION OF PROVISION OF CHILD WELFARE AND TANF SERVICES TO TRIBAL FAMILIES AT RISK OF CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT-

`(i) IN GENERAL- Of the amounts made available under subparagraph (D) for a fiscal year, the Secretary may not award more than \$2,000,000 on a competitive basis to fund demonstration projects designed to test the effectiveness of tribal governments or tribal consortia in coordinating the provision to tribal families at risk of child abuse or neglect of child welfare services and services under tribal programs funded under this part.

`(ii) LIMITATION ON USE OF FUNDS- A grant made pursuant to clause (i) to such a project shall not be used for any purpose other than--

`(I) to improve case management for families eligible for

assistance from such a tribal program;

`(II) for supportive services and assistance to tribal children in out-of-home placements and the tribal families caring for such children, including families who adopt such children; and

`(III) for prevention services and assistance to tribal families at risk of child abuse and neglect.

`(iii) REPORTS- The Secretary may require a recipient of funds awarded under this subparagraph to provide the Secretary with such information as the Secretary deems relevant to enable the Secretary to facilitate and oversee the administration of any project for which funds are provided under this subparagraph.

`(C) LIMITATION ON USE OF FUNDS FOR ACTIVITIES PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD-

`(i) IN GENERAL- Of the amounts made available under subparagraph (D) for a fiscal year, the Secretary may not award more than \$50,000,000 on a competitive basis to States, territories, Indian tribes and tribal organizations, and public and nonprofit community entities, including religious organizations, for activities promoting responsible fatherhood.

`(ii) ACTIVITIES PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD- In this paragraph, the term 'activities promoting responsible fatherhood' means the following:

`(I) Activities to promote

marriage or sustain marriage through activities such as counseling, mentoring, disseminating information about the benefits of marriage and 2-parent involvement for children, enhancing relationship skills, education regarding how to control aggressive behavior, disseminating information on the causes of domestic violence and child abuse, marriage preparation programs, premarital counseling, marital inventories, skills-based marriage education, financial planning seminars, including improving a family's ability to effectively manage family business affairs by means such as education, counseling, or mentoring on matters related to family finances, including household management, budgeting, banking, and handling of financial transactions and home maintenance, and divorce education and reduction programs, including mediation and counseling.

`(II) Activities to promote responsible parenting through activities such as counseling, mentoring, and mediation, disseminating information about good parenting practices, skills-based parenting education, encouraging child support payments, and other methods.

`(III) Activities to foster economic stability by helping fathers improve their economic status by providing activities such as work first services, job search, job training, subsidized employment, job retention, job enhancement, and encouraging education, including career-advancing education, dissemination of employment materials, coordination with existing employment services such as welfare-to-work

programs, referrals to local employment training initiatives, and other methods.

`(IV) Activities to promote responsible fatherhood that are conducted through a contract with a nationally recognized, nonprofit fatherhood promotion organization, such as the development, promotion, and distribution of a media campaign to encourage the appropriate involvement of parents in the life of any child and specifically the issue of responsible fatherhood, and the development of a national clearinghouse to assist States and communities in efforts to promote and support marriage and responsible fatherhood.

`(D) APPROPRIATION- Out of any money in the Treasury of the United States not otherwise appropriated, there are appropriated \$150,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2006 through 2010, for expenditure in accordance with this paragraph.'.

(b) Counting of Spending on Certain Pro-Family Activities- Section 409(a)(7)(B)(i) (42 U.S.C. 609(a)(7)(B)(i)) is amended by adding at the end the following:

`(V) COUNTING OF SPENDING ON CERTAIN PRO-FAMILY ACTIVITIES- The term `qualified State expenditures' includes the total expenditures by the State during the fiscal year under all State programs for a purpose described in paragraph (3) or (4) of section 401(a).'.

Additional Information: For more information, or to request technical assistance, visit the ACF website at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/key.html>. Or contact Bill Coffin, Special Assistant for Marriage Education, at bcoffin@acf.hhs.gov or (202)260-1550.

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Last Updated: August 14, 2006