



****** SPECIAL REPORT******

Legalized Discrimination: The Rise of the Marriage-Promotion Industry and How Federally Funded Programs Discriminate Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth and Families

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Over the past several years, the U.S. government has created a fully federally funded marriage-promotion movement and industry comprised of faith-based and community organizations. Through such ideologically motivated schemes as the Healthy Marriage Initiative, abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, and faith-based programs such as those funded through the Compassion Capital Fund, the federal government has put itself in the business of promoting and privileging particular types of individuals and families, while penalizing and stigmatizing others.

Sold as public health and social welfare programs, these programs are using billions of federal taxpayer dollars to push a narrow, conservative agenda that promotes heterosexual marriage above all else—above public health, medical opinion, scientific evidence, and basic human rights. Most importantly, they push this policy above what the evidence tells us is the most effective way to help people make healthy life decisions in the long term and ensure that they live full and productive lives.

The rights to love, marry, and form a family unit are fundamental human rights. A couple's decision to form a family and enter into a lasting union, including a legal marriage, is to be commended, supported, and affirmed by society. However, the current marriage-promotion initiatives, carried out with enthusiasm by the Bush administration, exclusively promote heterosexual marriage, and, are therefore not only discriminatory but violate basic American values. In the most fundamental way, marriage promotion threatens the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals, youth, and families. By promoting marriage and espousing that sexual activity is only to take place within the context of a heterosexual marriage, the federal government is preaching ideology and a narrow definition of morality.

Though the debate over same-sex marriage rights has been very public, the federal government's attempt to "sell" heterosexual marriage as the ideal and only morally acceptable relationship has received very little attention. This special report examines the marriage-promotion programs and the federally subsidized industry they have created by looking at the history of the programs, the money, the messages they give both adults and young people, the under-the-radar convergence of both programs and funding, and the conservative social agenda behind these programs. We then take a closer look at how these programs represent a deliberate attempt to legalize discrimination against LGBT individuals, and the effect such programs and policies are having on LGBT youth, LGBT parents, and their children. The report concludes with a set of recommendations for policymakers that will put an end to these discriminatory practices and the waste of taxpayer money.

THE HISTORY:

How the Federal Government Became Involved in Marriage

The federal government's interest in the institution of marriage is by no means new. In her book, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*, Harvard historian Nancy Cott explains that the founding fathers saw marriage as vital to the health of the nation both because it provided a built-in social structure and order to the new society, and because marriage itself was thought to create the kind of citizens that the country needed in order to succeed.¹ In fact, according to Cott, the Revolutionary leaders saw marriage as an analogous relationship to the one the country's citizens would be entering into with the newly formed, experimental government: "As an intentional and harmonious juncture of individuals for mutual protection, economic advantage, and common interest, the marriage bond resembled the social contract that produced government. As a freely chosen structure of authority and obligation, it was an irresistible model."²

The federal government, however, has no power to regulate marriage (except in federal territories). The specifics of marriage contracts—who can and cannot get married, who can perform ceremonies, what licenses are required, who can officiate marriages, and when and how marriages can be dissolved—have always been left up to the states.

The federal government has used the powers that it does have to make marriage appealing to individuals and couples by providing a host of benefits to married couples. A 2004 report by the U.S. General Accountability Office (GAO) found over 1,100 direct benefits of marriage bestowed by the federal government, ranging from those related to family leave, healthcare decisionmaking, and parenthood to those involving taxes, property rights, and inheritance.³

In 1996, however, the federal government took two unprecedented leaps into the realm of marriage—first by defining it and then by promoting it. With these efforts, the federal government effectively endorsed heterosexual marriage as the ideal and only morally acceptable adult relationship and institutionalized discrimination against same-sex couples and their families.

Defense of Marriage Act: Defining Marriage

Throughout the 1990s, states were grappling with issues of same-sex marriage. In some states, same-sex couples who had not been allowed to marry sued the state, arguing that they were being denied rights that were granted to heterosexual couples. In other states, conservative lawmakers and opponents of same-sex marriage feared the results of these lawsuits and sought to preempt them through legislation and referendums designed to ban same-sex marriage permanently.

Issues of who can and cannot get married are traditionally left up to the states and occasionally decided by the courts (as in the 1967 case of *Loving v. Virginia* when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that state laws banning interracial marriage were unconstitutional). In this instance, however, the federal government decided to step into the debate, and lawmakers passed the *Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)*.

DOMA did two things. Primarily, it provided the first ever federal definitions of "marriage" and "spouse." According to the new law, marriage is defined as a "legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife," and spouse is defined as a "person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife." Marriages that do not fit this description are ineligible for benefits offered by the federal government. The second part of DOMA ensured that no state would have to recognize the same-sex marriage contract granted in another state "despite the constitutional rule that each state should give 'full faith and credit' to public acts of the other."⁴ Under DOMA, for example, even if a state such as Massachusetts recognizes same-sex marriage, the federal government will not, and no other state can be forced to, recognize a same-sex marriage contract granted in Massachusetts.⁵

There is no question that DOMA aimed to legalize discrimination against same-sex couples. Legislators made it clear that they felt LGBT couples threatened the very fabric of society and stood to undo the entire foundation of America. According to then-Representative Bob Barr (R-GA) during debate on the *Defense of Marriage Act*, "...as Rome burned, Nero fiddled, and that is exactly what [proponents of same-sex marriage] would have us do...The very foundations of our society are in danger of being burned.

The flames of hedonism, the flames of narcissism, the flames of self-centered morality are licking at the very foundation of our society: the family unit.”⁶

Welfare Reform: Asking States to Promote Marriage

That same year, Congress took on the task of reforming the welfare system and, using similar arguments, seemed to suggest that unmarried heterosexual couples (especially those who were poor and relying on public assistance) and, more specifically, children born out-of-wedlock, were also a threat to the fabric of our society.

The *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act* (PRWORA) sought to address what Congress considered the national “crisis” of out-of-wedlock births by overhauling our welfare system. According to Cott, the argument behind this move asserted that “...the availability of public assistance for poor and unemployed single mothers had allowed the men who fathered children to forget about marrying the women they made pregnant, and to shirk financial responsibility for their children. In this view, ‘welfare,’ encouraged shiftless women to get pregnant in order to be supported by the public purse in female-headed households.”⁷

Although much of the debate around this bill focused on the change from “welfare” to “workfare,” particularly for single mothers, the law itself focused on marriage and family formation. In the original act of 1996, the first three findings state that:

1. Marriage is the foundation of a successful society.
2. Marriage is the essential institution of a successful society which promotes the interests of children.
3. Promotion of responsible fatherhood and motherhood is integral to successful child rearing and the well-being of children.⁸

The new welfare program, known as *Temporary Assistance to Need Families* (TANF), created block grants to states. TANF funds could “be spent to help needy families with welfare cash grants, job training and education, job placement, child care, and other supports designed to help parents obtain and sustain employment.”⁹

In addition, three of the four goals of the legislation that created this program were to “end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage,” to “prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies,” and to “encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.”¹⁰ As such, TANF funds could also be spent on programs designed to promote marriage among both recipients of welfare and other residents of the state.¹¹

Interestingly, “two-parent families” was not defined in the federal law at this time, and, thus, states were free to establish their own definitions. States were also given overall flexibility in determining the rules for their state TANF programs. States pursued the TANF family formation goals created in 1996 in many different forms, including eliminating the stricter two-parent family eligibility requirements, thereby making it easier to provide cash assistance to two-parent families, and funding responsible fatherhood programs, which served non-custodial parents. In addition, a few offered financial incentives for marriage, some set up separate state-funded programs for two-parent families, and a couple of states modified child support regulations that may discourage marriage. Much to the chagrin of the congressional supporters of marriage promotion, as of 2004, only seven states had dedicated significant TANF dollars specifically to strengthen and promote marriage and couple relationships.¹²

Ultimately, efforts to strengthen marriage under TANF fell far short of many marriage-promotion advocates’ expectations as much greater emphasis was placed on welfare-to-work initiatives—moving people off welfare assistance and into jobs. According to some analysts, such as those at the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), this was largely due to the fact that job-training programs were already in place while the marriage-promotion infrastructure was not similarly in existence. It was a lesson learned and a challenge soon to be taken up by the ascendancy of an extreme social conservative in the White House.

Healthy Marriage Initiative: Funding Marriage Promotion

With the 2000 election of President George W. Bush, marriage promotion was thrust into the forefront of the new administration's socially conservative agenda. Originally authorized for five years, as TANF reauthorization approached, many conservatives expressed serious concerns that states had not been doing enough to pursue the program's goals of family formation and marriage promotion.

In 2001, the Bush administration, supported by several congressional leaders, including Representative Deborah Pryce (R-OH) and Senator Charles Grassley (R-IA), made marriage promotion one of the priorities for the reauthorization of welfare reform legislation. During the announcement of his welfare-reform agenda, President Bush made clear that, "[M]y administration will give unprecedented support to strengthening families."¹³

While welfare reform was not officially reauthorized until 2005, this focus on marriage promotion was solidified in 2001 when Wade Horn, who was then the Assistant Secretary overseeing the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), declared that the Healthy Marriage Initiative was one of nine strategic ACF priorities.¹⁴ According to ACF, the goals of the Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI) are to:

- Increase the percentage of children who are raised by two parents in a healthy marriage.
- Increase the percentage of married couples who are in healthy marriages.
- Increase the percentage of premarital couples who are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage.
- Increase the percentage of youth and young adults who have the skills and knowledge to make informed decisions about healthy relationships including skills that can help them eventually form and sustain a healthy marriage.
- Increase public awareness about the value of healthy marriages and the skills and knowledge that can help couples form and sustain healthy marriages.
- Encourage and support research on healthy marriages and healthy marriage education.
- Increase the percentage of women, men, and children in homes that are free of domestic violence.¹⁵

ACF defined allowable activities for the use of the funds. Funds could be used to support:

- Public advertising campaigns on the value of healthy marriages and the skills needed to increase marital stability and the health of the marriage.
- Education in high schools on the value of healthy marriages, healthy relationship skills, and budgeting.
- Marriage education, marriage skills, and relationship skills programs, that may include parenting skills, financial management, conflict resolution, and job and career advancement, for expectant couples, both married and unmarried, as well as recent parents, both married and unmarried.
- Pre-marital education and marriage skills training for engaged couples and for couples or individuals interested in marriage.
- Marriage enhancement and marriage skills training programs for married couples.
- Divorce reduction programs that teach healthy relationship skills.
- Marriage mentoring programs which use married couples as role models and mentors in at-risk communities.
- Programs to reduce the disincentives to marriage in means-tested aid programs, if offered in conjunction with any activity described above.
- Research on the benefits of healthy marriages and healthy marriage education.
- Provide technical assistance to grantees who are implementing any of the above activities to help them succeed.¹⁶

HMI grew as a result of TANF's eventual reauthorization through the *Deficit Reduction Act of 2005*. The *Deficit Reduction Act of 2005*, signed into law February 8, 2006, reauthorized the TANF program through September 30, 2010. The reauthorization includes a total of \$750 million for programming related to marriage promotion. Specifically, \$500 million was appropriated over five years to support "programs designed to help couples form and sustain healthy marriages," and up to \$250 million was appropriated over five years to be used for "programs designed to encourage responsible fatherhood." These funds may be used for three main purposes: promote and sustain healthy marriages, foster responsible parenting, and providing economic stability. Once again, three of the four purposes the legislation were related to family formation—namely to promote marriage, reduce out-of-wedlock births, and encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.¹⁷

As part of this second wave of grants, the grant period shifted from three years to five years. Wade Horn, who was then overseeing the program, commented that the shift was needed as "one of the things we learned from early projects, particularly in healthy marriage, is that three-year grants were not enough."¹⁸

Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs: Selling Marriage to Students

In addition to the marriage-promotion initiative, the welfare reform law of 1996 added Title V, Section 510(b) of the Social Security Act which established a new funding stream to provide grants to states for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. Under Title V, HHS allocates \$50 million in federal funds each year to the states. States that choose to accept these funds must match every four federal dollars with three state-raised dollars and are then responsible for using the funds or distributing them to community-based organizations, schools, county and state health departments, media campaigns, or other entities.

Like the Healthy Marriage Initiative, the Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage program came with a strict set of parameters under which funded programs could operate, including an eight-point definition of "abstinence education." According to this new federal definition of "abstinence education," programs that accept these funds must have as their "exclusive purpose teaching the social, psychological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity." This eight-point definition also contends that "a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard of sexual activity," and that, "sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects."¹⁹

The Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage program was not the federal government's first foray into abstinence-until-marriage programs. That came more than a decade earlier with the 1981 creation of the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA). AFLA was established to promote "chastity" and "self-discipline." While the program has always had a pregnancy-prevention component aimed at discouraging premarital sexual behavior among teens, since the advent of the Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage program, funds within AFLA have been explicitly tied to the strict eight-point definition of "abstinence education."

When the Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage program began, programs were not required to address each of the eight points in the federal definition as long as they did not contradict any of the points. As such many states and community-based organizations used the funds to run after school programs, media campaigns, and youth-development initiatives that focused on some of the definition's less ideological points such as teaching "young people how to reject sexual advances and how alcohol and drug use increase vulnerability to sexual advances," or teaching "the importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sexual activity."

A number of conservative lawmakers felt that these programs diluted the abstinence-only-until-marriage message and did not capture the true intent of the law, which was to promote marriage. In October 2000, these lawmakers created yet another funding stream to support abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, the Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) grant program. CBAE, which is now the largest of the federal funding streams for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, has always been the most restrictive. Programs funded under CBAE have always been required to teach all eight points in the federal definition of "abstinence education." Moreover, CBAE funds are controlled directly by the

federal government, bypassing the states and ensuring that the marriage message remains tantamount in the programs.

In recent years, as funding for CBAE programs has grown, so has its restrictive nature and its focus on marriage. Perhaps the first indication of this came in Fiscal Year 2005 when control of this funding stream within HHS was moved from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau to ACF, the more conservative branch that is, not surprisingly, also responsible for the Healthy Marriage Initiatives.

In January 2006, ACF released a new program announcement for the CBAE funding stream. The new program announcement, which showed once again that ACF has a total disregard for the diversity of America's families and for responsible spending, shifted from promoting abstinence among teens as a way to reduce "risky behavior" to promoting abstinence because it "improves preparation for a stable marriage." This signified a further step in the federal government's path toward marriage promotion under the guise of a public health strategy.

The new guidelines go beyond prescribing marriage, however, suggesting that sexual abstinence prior to marriage is the magic elixir to a more perfect life. The guidelines credit sexual abstinence before marriage with leading to a happier life, including having a healthier marriage; having more money; having healthier future children; being a more "responsible" parent; being honorable and having integrity; attaining a better education; having fewer psychological disorders; avoiding drug, alcohol, and tobacco use; committing fewer crimes and staying out of prison; and having a longer life span.²⁰ The problem with ACF's proclamations, however, is that they have no basis in sound evidence and very little grasp on the reality endured by the vast majority of America's youth.

In addition, the new guidelines mandate that "throughout the entire curriculum, the term 'marriage' must be defined 'only as a legal union between one man and one woman as a husband and wife,' and the word 'spouse' refers to 'only a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife.'" This stipulation is comes directly from DOMA. By excluding lesbian and gay people from this definition, and therefore from the "expected standard of sexual activity," the guidelines are unabashedly admitting that abstinence-only-until-marriage programs are intended only for heterosexual students.²¹

With the new guidelines, CBAE grants (like Healthy Marriage Initiative grants), also changed to a five-year grant cycle. By guaranteeing funds through at least Fiscal Year 2010, ACF helped secure the status of the marriage-promotion industry well beyond the Bush administration.

Similar new guidelines for the Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage program were released by ACF in 2006 for Fiscal Year 2007. These guidelines made Title V stricter by stating that all proposals must "describe measures the State will use to assure that the proposed abstinence education program's curricula, and any additional materials [m]eaningfully represent *each* of the Section 510(b)(2) A-H elements" (emphasis added). In previous years, states had some limited flexibility to craft programs which emphasized specific points of the definition. While still quite rigid, under these guidelines, states could create programs that better reflected the needs and realities of their young people. This limited flexibility allowed states to avoid more ideological and non-evidence-based points of the definition, and instead focus on more positive youth development approaches, such as the importance of delaying sexual activity and the negative influences of drug and alcohol use on risky sexual behavior, and did not necessarily require a strict focus on heterosexual marriage.

The new guidelines also suggested that programs focus on young people ages 12–29, once again underscoring the fact that these programs were designed to promote marriage and prevent "out-of-wedlock" births.

Every state, with the exception of California, has at one time accepted Title V funds. As of October 2007, however, due to the overly restrictive nature of the programs, 13 states have withdrawn from the Title V program or will be discontinuing their participation in the next two fiscal years. In states such as California, Maine, and New Jersey, it is essentially illegal to teach these programs in publicly funded schools because of the states' own comprehensive sexuality education laws. This will leave over \$16 million, or more than one-third of the annual budget for this funding stream, unspent—funding that could be better used by

states on evidence-based, comprehensive prevention efforts that meet the public health needs of their young people and respect the diversity of America's families.

In April 2007, a federally funded report, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research Inc. on behalf of the HHS, found no evidence that abstinence-only-until-marriage programs increased rates of sexual abstinence. In addition, 13 states have evaluated their Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage programs and the results range from finding the programs ineffective to finding them to be harmful.

Despite the decision of states and the research, the Bush administration remains steadfast in its support of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. This was clearly articulated—perhaps in error—by HHS Secretary Michael Leavitt in his hearing before the Energy and Commerce Committee on February 6, 2007. In response to a question by Congresswoman Hilda Solis (D-CA), Leavitt said that abstinence-only-until-marriage programs are “part of the ideology of the administration and you can expect that we will continue to offer those proposals.”²²

FOLLOWING THE MONEY:

How the Federal Government Created a Marriage-Promotion Industry

Through these funding streams, and additional ones that have been created even more recently such as the Compassion Capital Fund, the Bush administration has built a multi-million-dollar industry with the sole purpose of selling heterosexual marriage to the American public. Whether it is an abstinence-only-until-marriage program that has high school students planning their future wedding, or a marriage education program for unwed couples, the government's message is clear—heterosexual marriage is the only appropriate adult relationship.

HMI and Other Initiatives: Pushing Marriage as the Answer

Since 2002, over 300 marriage-promotion programs have been funded by ACF through the HMI.²³ In the first round of grants, \$61 million were awarded through the following offices within ACF: the Administration for Native Americans, the Children's Bureau, the Office of Child Support Enforcement, the Office of Community Services, and the Office of Refugee Resettlement. The grants pay for a range of activities including public-advertising campaigns, education in high schools, marriage education and relationship skills programs, pre-marital education, divorce-reduction programs, and marriage-mentoring programs.

In addition to these program grants, ACF committed over \$26.8 million for contracts and grants to conduct research and evaluation on healthy-marriage services and related topics and established two additional initiatives which focused on African-American and Hispanic/Latino communities.²⁴ These projects were designed to test “new strategies to support healthy marriage and parental relationships with the goals of improving the well-being of children, promoting paternity establishment, and increasing the financial and emotional support to children.”²⁵

The HMI grants also included a five-year, \$10 million grant to Public Strategies, Inc., a public-relations and public-affairs contractor in Oklahoma City, to develop and maintain the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center. The new center is designed “to serve as a central library of information for the general public, practitioners, policy makers, and researchers.”²⁶ In addition to the HMI grant, Public Strategies also received \$700,000 to operate the center from separate funding streams, and a \$1 million grant to serve low-income, expectant parents. Public Strategies boasts offices in Oklahoma City and Denver and “the largest staff (60+) in the country focused day-in and day-out on managing and delivering marriage education services.”²⁷ This is not the first time that Public Strategies has been involved in marriage initiatives. Since 1999, Public Strategies, led by Mary Myrick, managed the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI) which is said to be one of the nation's “most ambitious and diverse programs among the more than 25 states that have marriage programs.”²⁸ OMI incorporates both secular and faith-based models and leadership development into its programs and has extended its education and counseling programs into prison systems.

A second round of grants came when the *Deficit Reduction Act of 2005* reauthorized TANF. This round provided \$750 million over five years for marriage-promotion activities. Many of the grants support programs aimed at adults—both single individuals and couples. For example, the “Minnesota Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Project” “encourages stable family formation by providing couple mentoring by minority couples to parent couples near the birth of their children.” Couples are recruited from in-hospital paternity programs and pre- and post- natal programs at local hospitals.²⁹ The “Healthy Marriages—Strong Families Initiative” in Washington, DC is a collaborative project between East Capitol Center for Change and the East River Strengthening Collaborative, a community-based child-welfare agency that serves at-risk, African-American families. The project received a four-year grant of \$600,000 (\$150,000 per year) to provide a public education campaign on the benefits of marriage and healthy relationships and to host an annual “Black Marriage Day” celebration. The project also offers workshops and other programming based on the *African-American Family Life Education Program* which provides marriage enrichment and parenting education for African-American family leaders.³⁰

A similar project targeting Native-American families, “Project SNAFU (Saving Native-American Family Units),” received a three-year grant of close to half a million dollars to provide relationship-skill building classes to Native-American married couples with children, married couples raising Native-American children within the community, and tribal members. The classes include effective communication, conflict resolution, healthy relationship skills, and parent accountability.³¹ The First Nations Community Health Source in Albuquerque, New Mexico received a three-year grant of just over \$300,000 for their “All My Relations Project” which also targets Native-American individuals. This project provides marriage-enrichment/education activities and services for couples, single parents, and youth. This project also uses traditional healing and peacemaking to assist troubled marriages/relationships or families.³²

A number of organizations and projects across the country are using the *PREP (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program)* curriculum including: Better Family Life, Inc. (which receives over \$1,000,000 per year), the Center For Self-Sufficiency, Inc. (which receives over \$1,000,000 per year), the Healthy Marriages Program of El Centro run by Catholic Charities of Trenton, New Jersey (which received \$150,000 per year), the Marriage First Project of Illinois (which received \$150,000 per year), the Michigan Healthy Marriage Initiative Demonstration Project (which receives over \$1,000,000 per year), the St. Ann’s Native American Healthy Marriage Initiative (which will receive almost \$1,000,000 over five years), and the United Way of Jackson County (which receives over \$1,000,000 per year).³³

The curriculum tells its students that marriage education is important because “Most people, rich or poor, male or female, and regardless of cultural background, want fulfilling, lasting marriages.” The curriculum is used in federally funded programs targeting African-American, Latino, and Native-American communities and all types of individuals including unmarried cohabitating couples, unmarried pregnant women, unmarried fathers and expectant fathers, TANF-eligible recipients, blended family TANF recipients, prisoners, community college students, and high school students. Clearly, the needs of these populations are varied, and it is disappointing that government funds are being used to support a generic message that could not possibly take into account the diversity of these populations.

A 2003 *New Yorker* article provided an in-depth look at a marriage-promotion program funded through Oklahoma’s Marriage Initiative. (Oklahoma was one of the few states that invested a significant amount of their original TANF funds under welfare reform into marriage-promotion programs.) The program, conducted in a church basement, recruited single women from a local housing project called Sooner Haven and used a video produced by the authors of *PREP*, Scott Stanley and Howard Markman. The article explains that the video portrays “couples working through the sort of conflicts that are seldom encountered in Sooner Haven. (Spouse hogs home computer. Spouse procrastinates about cleaning the guest bedroom.)” Despite this “cultural disconnect,” Stanley and Markman “say that their course encourages not just healthy marriage but individuals who are ‘less reliant on government services including welfare, health care, and earning and saving more money.’”³⁴

In a series of slides, the curriculum's first lesson likens marriage to a puppy. It explains that, "You fall in love with the front end of a puppy," but that "every puppy has a back end." The leader describes the classes to come saying, "In our time together, we want to look at how to keep in touch with the front end—that part of each other you both fell in love with. We also want to do a lot of work to help you have confidence that you can handle the back end of the relationship well over time so you can keep enjoying the front end."³⁵

Other projects target young people and use curricula and materials that have been developed for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. Abstinence for Singles received a five-year grant of close to one million dollars per year for the purpose of conducting a public-advertising campaign to reach all residents in its geographic location. The project will provide youth-oriented relationship education for 500 high school juniors annually using the *Aspire* and *Project Reality* curricula and for 500 high school seniors annually using the *Juggling Act* curriculum (which promotes the importance of economic self-sufficiency).³⁶

SIECUS reviewed *Aspire* and found that the curriculum is predicated on the unwavering belief that all people should marry and that all sex outside of marriage is wrong. Every discussion and activity is designed to ensure that young people reach the same conclusion. Young people are told that marriage is more important than college or career because "College is for a few years, and you may have a number of careers. But marriage is for life."³⁷ The curriculum then explains that marriage is the only safe place for sexual behavior: "Marriage serves as a protective barrier around a relationship. It's like being at home by the fire on a cold rainy day. Inside the house you can play games, roast marshmallows in the fireplace, drink hot chocolate, and have fun. It's possible to do these things outside of the house, but you're exposed to the elements—you're not protected."³⁸ Finally, students are warned that those who have had sex outside of marriage lack character and are no longer marriage material: "That person [of your dreams] will be looking for someone with strong positive character qualities as well. If you don't have them, they may well prefer to be with someone else."³⁹

Recapturing the Vision International, Inc. received a five-year grant of over half a million dollars per year to provide education on the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting to 520 high school students, as well as to provide marriage education, marriage skills, and relationship skills programs for non-married pregnant women and non-married expectant fathers. The goal of the project is to "increase the percentage of youth and young adults who are armed and fortified with the necessary skills and knowledge that enable them to make informed decisions about healthy relationships." The program uses two curricula that have been state approved, *Vessels of Honor* and *Capturing the Vision*, and also includes field trips, speakers, and bi-weekly visits by married couples.⁴⁰

The Rockdale Medical Center in Georgia received a five-year grant of over half a million dollars per year to implement the "Marriage Appreciation Training Uplifting Relationship Education (MATURE)" project. MATURE "integrates educational strategies that support healthy marriages through the provision of 15 lessons." It will serve 2,000 9th–12th grade students in the tri-county area of DeKalb, Newton, and Rockdale Counties of Georgia, using the curriculum, *Pairs for Peers and Connections: Relationships and Marriage*.⁴¹

In addition to the HMI grants awarded by ACF, HHS also announced in October 2006 that it would be awarding other marriage initiative grants through three additional funding streams. The first of these is the Compassion Capital Fund (CCF).⁴² CCF was created in 2002 to carry out the Bush administration's Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and provide technical support at the local level. In 2006, CCF awarded \$58 million to 420 faith-based and community organizations, including Worth the Wait, Inc., which has also received well over \$1 million in federal abstinence-only-until-marriage funding since Fiscal Year 2002.⁴³ CCF also gave out 53 mini-grants ranging from \$39,772 to \$50,000 for a total of more than \$2.6 million. The mini-grants are designed to help faith-based and community organizations with build capacity in the area of marriage promotion.⁴⁴ The Community Services Block Grant Healthy Marriage program is the second funding stream providing additional marriage-promotion money. It awarded \$161,000 in grants to seven organizations, including \$95,400 to the Wedded Bliss Foundation in Washington, DC. Finally, the Office of Refugee Resettlement will dole out a total of \$4 million a year for five years in Healthy Marriage grants.

Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs: Mandating Marriage for Young People

In addition to these grants for marriage-promotion projects, the federal government spends close to \$200 million dollars each year selling the concept of marriage to middle school and high school students. As explained earlier, grants come from one of three funding streams; the Adolescent Family Life Act (which receives \$13 million per year), the Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage program (which provides a total of \$87.5 million combined federal and state dollars and is controlled by each state that chooses to accept the funds), and the Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) funding stream (which receives \$113 million dollars and is controlled directly by the federal government).

The steady influx of federal money has created both a demand for curricula and materials that promote the importance of marriage and pre-marital abstinence and an industry happy to produce them. Today, there are a number of organizations that exist solely to create abstinence-themed materials ranging from books, videos, and curricula to jewelry, underwear, and souvenirs. Many of these organizations receive money directly through the federal abstinence-only-until-marriage funding streams while others benefit indirectly by selling their materials to federally funded organizations. Because these materials are so readily available and so many funded programs choose to use commercially created curricula rather than create their own, students across the country are being exposed to many of the same curricula. More often than not these curricula rely on fear and shame, include medical misinformation, and contain biases about gender, sexual orientation, and family type. Curricula used nationally in federally funded programs include: *Aspire*, *Choosing the Best LIFE*, *Choosing the Best PATH*, *Choosing the Best SOULMATE*, *Game Plan*, *Navigator*, *Sex Respect*, *WAIT (Why Am I Tempted?) Training*, *Why kNOw*, and *Worth the Wait*.

The Tennessee-based organization Why kNOw Abstinence Education, Inc. currently receives over \$400,000 per year in federal funding. The organization was formerly a division of AAA Women's Services, Inc., a crisis pregnancy center. Why kNOw uses a curricula of the same name that claims that the tradition of lifting the bride's veil shows that "the groom [is] the only man allowed to 'uncover the bride,' and that it demonstrates "her respect for him by illustrating that she [has] not allowed any other man to lay claim to her."⁴⁵

Several federal grantees, including Crisis Pregnancy Center in Nevada which received over \$400,000 in CBAE funds in Fiscal Year 2006, use the abstinence-only-until-marriage curriculum *Worth the Wait*. The curriculum devotes an entire lesson, entitled "Planning for a Healthy Marriage," to promoting marriage. In this lesson, students complete handouts in which they describe the perfect spouse and conditions for an ideal marriage. The curriculum states that, "the purpose of this lesson is to encourage students to think about their future and what kind of individual they want to marry."⁴⁶

The recently published abstinence-only-until-marriage curriculum *Aspire: Live Your Life. Be Free.* is already quite popular with federal grantees. It is used by the Abstinence and Marriage Education Partnership in Illinois, which received \$800,000 in CBAE funds in Fiscal Year 2006 and The Crisis Pregnancy Center of Anchorage and Eagle River in Alaska, which received over \$650,000 in CBAE funding in Fiscal Year 2006. *Aspire* focuses on marriage to the exclusion of most other topics and presents one set of beliefs on the topic as universally accepted truths. In one exercise, "Sweet as Sugar," the teacher is instructed to give each student a piece of chocolate that looks identical, tell them to eat it, and ask who liked it. Students may be surprised that not everyone enjoyed the chocolate until the teacher explains the twist behind the exercise. "I handed out sweetened chocolate to some and unsweetened chocolate to some. I deceived you because you all thought the chocolate would taste good because it looked the same. In the same way, our society thinks sex is good for everyone at anytime, but we are deceived. Sex is like the chocolate I handed out. The unsweetened chocolate represents sex outside of marriage. The sweetened chocolate represents sex within marriage. What chocolate would you rather have?"⁴⁷

Scott Phelps, the author of *Aspire*, also co-authored two other abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula, *A.C. Green's Game Plan* and *Navigator: Finding Your Way to a Healthy and Successful Future* which are used by many Title V and CBAE grantees. *Game Plan*, for example, is used by the Catholic Diocese of Orlando,

which received \$800,000 in CBAE funds in Fiscal Year 2006, and The Pinellas Crisis Pregnancy Center, which received \$600,000 in CBAE funds in Fiscal Year 2006. *Game Plan* discusses sexual behavior and abstinence exclusively in terms of marital status with the clear message that any sexual activity outside of marriage is morally wrong as well as physically and emotionally dangerous. The curriculum explains: “If teens wait until ‘later’ but not until ‘marriage,’ they are still subject to all the risk factors associated with sex outside of marriage. The only difference is that those risk factors will come ‘later.’”⁴⁸ Throughout the curriculum, marriage is not only presented as the only positive venue for sexual activity but as the ultimate goal. In keeping with the sports metaphor, the section on marriage is called “Winning the Prize” and teens are told, “It’s the big day. You have trained all your life for this day—your wedding day.”⁴⁹

Crossover Grantees: Consolidating the Money and the Message

Given the similar ideologies, it is not surprising that the marriage-promotion and abstinence-only-until-marriage industries have converged with organizations receiving millions of dollars of federal funding across multiple funding streams. In fact, close to 20 percent of all Healthy Marriage Initiative grantees receive at least one other source of federal abstinence-only-until-marriage funding.⁵⁰

One such organization is Teen-Aid based in Spokane, Washington which received \$1.3 million of federal funding in Fiscal Year 2006—a three-year CBAE grant of \$800,000 per year and a five-year HMI grant worth close to half a million dollars per year. Federal funding makes up close to 100 percent of Teen-Aid’s annual budget. In fact, prior to the influx of federal funding, Teen-Aid’s budget was approximately one-third of what it is now.

Teen-Aid is one of the oldest federally funded abstinence-only-until-marriage programs and has produced several curricula, including *Sexuality, Commitment & Family* and *Me, My World, My Future*. SIECUS reviewed these curricula and found that they rely on fear and shame, include inaccurate and exaggerated information about condom failure, and contain biased messages about gender, sexual orientation, family structure, and pregnancy options. The program’s strong preference for marriage is also quite clear. For example, *Me, My World, My Future* looks at the consequences of divorce from the parent’s perspective and says single parents “...often cite special difficulties in child rearing (e.g. financial stress, inability to spend adequate time with children, the difficulty in providing positive role models to allow for balanced social development).” It also suggests that families involved in remarriage may have additional difficulties and conflicts.⁵¹ In the early 1990s, Washington State’s Department of Health rejected Teen-Aid’s curriculum for being “incomplete, incorrect, misleading, and/or confusing.”⁵² Yet, Teen-Aid continues to receive over a million taxpayer dollars every year.

Teen Aid’s marriage-promotion program is designed “to equip small communities and rural populations with the skills its residents need to raise the awareness of the value and importance of marriage and reduce the divorce rate in this geographic area.” The project will implement a public-advertising campaign to reach all the residents in its target population; provide relationship-skills presentations to 1,500 local high school students in their Economics and Consumer Science classes; teach relationship skills to 100 non-married pregnant women and non-married expectant fathers; provide marital education classes to 200 pre-marital, 200 married, and 50 struggling couples; and provide a marriage mentoring program to a minimum of 50 engaged and/or married couples.⁵³

Another agency receiving federal funding through multiple funding streams is Longview Wellness Center, Inc., which received over \$3 million in federal grants in Fiscal Year 2006. The organization received a five-year grant of \$1.5 million per year through HMI and is a double grantee through CBAE receiving one three-year grant of \$752,224 per year (2003–2006) and another three-year grant of \$800,000 per year (2005–2008). According to ACF, in a partnership with 11 other organizations, “The [HMI] program grant funds will be used to educate 5,400 high school and college students in the *SOUL MATE* curriculum annually; engage 800 couples annually in the *Prepare/Enrich* marriage program; hold enrichment weekends for 96 married couples annually; assist 288 couples annually who have high conflict marriages; and engage 50 mentor couples annually who will work with high-risk couples.”⁵⁴

SOULMATE is a curriculum for students in grades 11 and 12 produced by Choosing the Best, Inc. and is part of the *Choosing the Best* curricula series. SIECUS has reviewed two of the curricula produced by Choosing the Best, Inc.: *Choosing the Best LIFE* (for high school students) and *Choosing the Best PATH* (for middle school students). These reviews found that the curricula name numerous negative consequences of premarital sexuality activity and suggest that teens should feel guilty, embarrassed, and ashamed of sexual behavior.⁵⁵ Choosing the Best, Inc. was started in 1992 by Bruce Cook who served briefly as the Board Chairman of the Georgia Department of Human Resources but was removed from that position in 2005 after it was exposed that he was using his position to promote Choosing the Best, Inc. products and curricula.⁵⁶ *Choosing the Best* curricula are used by federal abstinence-only-until-marriage grantees in nineteen states.

According to promotional materials, *Choosing the Best SOULMATE* “stresses the importance of commitment in many areas of life, including marriage, and helps students understand the problems of cohabitation. The lesson concludes with students being asked to take a commitment and abstinence pledge.”⁵⁷ Research on virginity pledges—a cornerstone of most abstinence-only-until-marriage programs—found that they fall far short of their intended goal and have potentially dangerous effects for the young people who take them. For a select group of young people, pledges did delay the onset of sexual intercourse for an average of 18 months (a goal still far short of the average age of marriage). However, the same researchers also found that pledgers have the same rate of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) as their peers who had not pledged, were one-third less likely to use condoms to prevent STDs, and were less likely to seek medical testing and treatment, thereby increasing possibility of transmission.⁵⁸

Longview Wellness Center is part of the East Texas Abstinence Program, a coalition that conducts abstinence-only-until-marriage programming for young people ages 12–18.⁵⁹ The East Texas Abstinence Program runs *Virginity Rules*, a website aimed at young people which features videos, radio clips, and billboards. One of the videos, “Jeopardize,” features four young contestants playing a form of the television game show *Jeopardy*:

Contestant number three: “I’ll take emotional consequences for four hundred.”

Host: “Guilt, anger, fear, low self-esteem.”

Contestant number three: “What is ‘How do you really feel after having sex as a teen?’”

Host: “Correct!”⁶⁰

The organization also produces 30-second television spots that show youth from the coalition speaking about their pledge to remain abstinent until marriage.⁶¹ In one spot, a young woman states, “I pledge my virginity for my future husband. I pledge so my reputation won’t be questioned.”⁶²

WAIT Training is another grantee which will receive over \$1.5 million a year over the next five years—a five-year, \$1 million per year HMI grant and a five-year, \$600,000 per year CBAE grant. The Colorado-based organization also produces a curriculum by the same name. SIECUS reviewed *WAIT (Why Am I Tempted) Training* and found that it contained little medical or biological information and almost no information about STDs, including HIV/AIDS. Instead, it contains information and statistics about marriage, many of which are outdated and not supported by scientific research. It also contains messages of fear and shame and biased views of gender, sexual orientation, and family type. For example, the curriculum explains that “the prominence of divorce, out of wedlock births and casual cohabitation have so steadily devalued marriage that many question its true value, purpose, and practicality. Some have even relegated it to nothing more than a religious ideal.” It goes on to say that “Marriage has been unfairly given a bad rap, and if we hope to effectively tackle the challenges of poverty, drug and alcohol abuse and crime, we can’t afford to ignore the significance of marriage.”⁶³

WAIT Training will use its marriage-promotion grant funds to provide a public-advertising campaign reaching approximately 150,000 people, particularly Hispanic and African-American populations; relationship education in high schools to 20,000 students; training to 150 teachers; relationship education using the *WAIT Relationship and Parenting* program to three hospitals and 10 agencies that serve pregnant and parenting teens; pre-marital education to a higher percentage of engaged couples using *PREP* and other curricula; marriage enhancement training using *PREP* and other curricula to 35 community-based

organizations who will then provide this training to married couples; and training for 300 married couples who will then serve as mentors for 300 struggling couples.⁶⁴

The Best Friends Foundation, based in Washington, DC, another multi-grant recipient, received over \$4 million in federal funding between 2003 and 2007. Currently, the organization receives a five-year HMI grant for over half a million dollars per year and a five-year CBAE grant for over three-quarters of a million per year. Best Friends Foundation was founded and is run by Elayne Bennett, wife of William Bennett, former Secretary of Education under President Ronald Regan. The organization has also had several well-connected board members, including Alma Powell, wife of former Secretary of State Colin Powell.

The Best Friends Foundation runs a number of programs, including the “Marriage is Manly” media campaign, after-school groups (*Best Friends* for young women and *Best Men* for young men), and a peer mentoring programs. The *Best Friends* program states, “the decision not to have sex until marriage is the best one.”⁶⁵ According to its website, more than 3,000 girls in Washington, DC public high schools have participated in the *Best Friends* program.⁶⁶ The *Best Men* program is seven years old and has programming for youth in sixth through twelfth grades.⁶⁷ *Best Men* provides abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, mentors, team-building sports, and music activities.⁶⁸

The South Carolina-based Heritage Community Services received close to \$1.4 million in federal government grants in Fiscal Year 2006 through three separate funding streams. It receives a five-year grant of \$150,000 per year through HMI, a five-year grant of \$600,000 per year through CBAE, and over \$600,000 through the Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage program. The organization, run by Anne Badgely, is supported almost entirely by state or federal government grants; in Fiscal Year 2005, 99 percent of its budget (a total of \$3.06 million) was comprised of government grants. The organization has formed affiliates in numerous states across the country and is promoting its program internationally. According to Heritage Community Services, its materials are now being used in schools in Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and the Caribbean.⁶⁹ It claims that more than 100,000 young people have been through the Heritage curriculum.⁷⁰

Heritage Community Services’ main curriculum, *Heritage Keepers*, purports to teach about character, values, and goals, and to promote abstinence from “risky behavior.” SIECUS reviewed the program’s written materials, however, and found that the program relies on clearly biased information and excludes information on sexuality-related topics such as STDs, condoms, contraception, sexual orientation, and pregnancy options. In addition, the curriculum presents gender stereotypes as true and depicts non-traditional families as troubled. For example, the curriculum cites statistics such as “a divorced male is 3.4 times more likely to die from any cause than a married male, and a divorced female is twice as likely to die from any cause than her married counterpart.”⁷¹

Heritage Community Services’ website also includes a section on how marriage benefits both individuals and society. The website states that “marriage appears to reduce the risk that children and adults will either be perpetrators or victims of crime.”⁷² It also inaccurately concludes that “married women appear to have a lower risk of domestic violence.”⁷³ The “Teen Pulse” section of the website has a “Questions & Advice” section which offers information about sex and relationships, such as, “feeling in love or even planning to get married may create a sense of intimacy, or even commitment. However, such relationships can be fairly easily dissolved and can never offer the security and protection of marriage.”⁷⁴

Heritage Community Services will use its marriage-promotion grant to support the “Homebuilders” project. This project will be run out of the Lowcountry Crisis Pregnancy Center (of which Anne Badgely is the founder and executive director) and primarily serve at-risk, low income African-American couples. The project will serve 450 to 500 people over the four years of the grant. The project’s marriage education services are based on the “Building Strong Families” model, an ACF initiative used “to develop and evaluate programs designed to help interested unwed parents achieve their aspirations for a healthy marriage and a stable family life.” Homebuilders will also use “the FOCCUS Premarital Inventory,” and the *Marriage Savers Mentoring Program*.⁷⁵

Heritage Community Services is also connected to another multi-grant recipient, Maine Character Resources (formerly Heritage of Maine and Character Counts in Maine). Maine Character Resources (MCR) is an abstinence-only-until-marriage organization that provides “character-based health programs that empower families to preserve their teens’ sexual health through knowledge, skills, and success.”⁷⁶ It was established in 2003 and has secured close to one million dollars in federal funding in Fiscal Year 2006, half through HMI and half through CBAE. Maine Character Resources has adapted the *Heritage Keepers* program for its students.

Its curriculum includes a virginity pledge that students are asked to sign on the last day:

The time has come for you to decide what you are going to do about abstaining from sexual activity outside of marriage...Now is the time for you to make the commitment for the very best for yourself, to wait for the commitment of marriage to have sex...Make this commitment for yourself, for those you love and the ONE you marry.⁷⁷

In 2005, the state of Maine refused to allow MCR (then Heritage of Maine) to conduct its programs in Maine schools because its curricula do not meet the state’s comprehensive health education requirements.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, MCR’s website encourages parents, community groups, and schools to invite the organization in. The website informs visitors that “because our services are funded by grant resources there is no cost to your school or agency” and suggests that interested individuals “coordinate with other parents and co-sign a letter of request asking to bring *Heritage Keepers*’ authentic abstinence program to your school.”⁷⁹

The organization plans to use its marriage-promotion funds for a public-advertising campaign and to provide education in high schools on the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting. The project will use the *WAIT Training*, *CCM*, and *Mvelopes* curricula. The organization “expects to impact teen awareness of the value of healthy marriage, increase teen knowledge about the skills and behaviors that will improve their chances of having a stable and healthy marriage, modify behavior of high school adolescents in the areas of communication and conflict resolution to create positive behavior change, and lead teens to the educational and skill-building relationship resources available on [its] web site.”⁸⁰

In addition to these organizations, numerous crisis pregnancy centers across the country are also benefiting from the convergence of HMI and abstinence-only-until-marriage funding. Crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs) typically advertise as providing medical services and then use anti-abortion propaganda, misinformation, and fear and shame tactics to dissuade women facing unintended pregnancy from exercising their right to choose.

CPCs receive a large portion of federal abstinence-only-until-marriage dollars and close to ten percent (\$4 million) of all HMI funding each year. One such organization, Elizabeth’s New Life Center, Inc., is based in Ohio. What was once an organization with a \$250,000 budget (1998) is now a multi-million dollar agency that received over \$2.5 million of federal funding in Fiscal Year 2006. This CPC received a five-year grant of \$1.75 million per year through HMI and a three-year grant of \$800,000 per year through CBAE, the largest award possible through that funding stream. According to ACF, “Elizabeth’s New Life Center (ENLC) is a faith-based, non-profit organization whose mission is to empower individuals to achieve sexual integrity and make healthy life choices respecting the value of each person...[It] was a founding member of the ‘Miami Valley Marriage Coalition’ and has provided marriage education as part of its services for a few years.”⁸¹ Northern Hills Pregnancy Care Center in South Dakota provides another example of a CPC receiving both HMI and abstinence-only-until-marriage funding. This CPC has received a five-year grant of half a million dollars per year from ACF for marriage-promotion activities in addition to receiving close to \$350,000 of abstinence-only-until-marriage funding each year through CBAE and Title V.

With more than \$2 billion federal and state dollars over the past quarter century, groups dedicated to promoting marriage have become more than a community of individual organizations with a shared goal. Well-funded marriage-promotion and abstinence-only-until-marriage programs have become a cornerstone of the social conservative agenda and a major priority for the Bush administration, and the groups that

provide and support these programs now represent a full-fledged industry. An industry that is ostensibly aimed at preventing teen pregnancy and out-of-wedlock births, but in reality promotes the ideology of heterosexual marriage in schools; that serves to stigmatize and demean LGBT youth and leave them, and all youth, woefully unprepared to make healthy decisions in their life; and that clothes itself in a mantle of public health while advancing an extreme social experiment. It is an industry that will only continue to grow if federal funding remains consistent.

A CONSERVATIVE SOCIAL AGENDA: How Extremists Moved Marriage Promotion to the Forefront

The need to promote heterosexual marriage was sold as both a public health and social welfare issue. The Bush administration and its supporters argued that a weakening of the institution of marriage was directly responsible for such divergent social ills as sexually transmitted disease, teen pregnancy, abortion, fatherless families, and poverty. A closer look at the architects of the movement and the conservative commentators who were paid to advertise it, reveals the true motives behind these programs.

The Architects: Fathering the Federal Marriage Movement

The ever-more-restrictive guidelines are not surprising when one looks at the architects of this marriage-promotion movement. These individuals included Dr. Wade F. Horn, Don Eberly, David Blankenhorn, Robert Rector, and Patrick Fagan.

Wade Horn was former president of the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) and a longtime leading voice of the “fatherhood” and “marriage movements.” Horn was affiliated with the conservative think tank, the Hudson Institute and previously served on the board of the ultraconservative Independent Women’s Forum. From 2001 until April 2007, Horn served as Assistant Secretary for Children and Families at the ACF. In a 1997 paper published by the Hudson Institute, Horn asserted that the government should “give preference to two-parent married households” when distributing such benefits as Head Start, public housing, job training, and tuition aid. “Only after all income-eligible married, two-parent families are offered the benefit should it become available for income-eligible single-parent families,” he wrote.⁸²

In his position as assistant secretary, Horn was responsible for overseeing a \$47 billion budget and 65 programs that included the Healthy Marriage Initiative and the vast majority of abstinence-only-until-marriage program funding. Just before leaving ACF, Horn was responsible for securing a “capacities building” grant for his former organization, NFI, in the amount of \$999,534 under a new program he started at ACF called the “Responsible Fatherhood Initiative.”

Don Eberly co-founded, with Horn and Blankenhorn, the National Fatherhood Initiative and, at one time, served as its president. He is also the former director of the Civil Society Project, whose mission is “to promote the renewal of voluntary social institutions and social ethics, through broad-based public initiatives and educational programs.”⁸³ The organization focused on promoting a smaller government, increasing the role that faith-based organizations, community groups, and private philanthropy can play, and initiating a “moral renewal.”⁸⁴

Eberly left NFI to briefly serve as Deputy Director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, created by President Bush in 2001. Just six months after the new faith-based initiative was unveiled, however, the *Washington Post* revealed that top-level administration officials had been conducting secret meetings with the Salvation Army. The goal of these meetings was to enlist the Salvation Army’s political and financial support for the then-flagging project. According to an internal Salvation Army document, in exchange for the organization’s support of the President’s faith-based initiative—which received approximately \$300 million a year in federal funding at the time—the charity received a “firm commitment” that the federal government would issue a regulation protecting it and similar organizations from state and city efforts to prevent discrimination against gays in hiring and domestic-partner benefits.

The *Washington Post* reported that the meetings “included Karl Rove, the president’s chief political strategist, and Don Eberly, who was then serving as Deputy Director of the new agency.”⁸⁵

NFI’s other cofounder, David Blankenhorn, served as the organization’s founding chairman, and currently serves as honorary chairman of the NFI Governing Board. He is also the founder and president of the Institute for American Values, an organization “devoted to contributing intellectually to the renewal of marriage and family life and the sources of competence, character, and citizenship in the United States.”⁸⁶ Blankenhorn’s work at NFI, as well as his book *Fatherless America*, was instrumental in crafting welfare reform and fatherhood initiatives through HHS under both the Clinton and Bush administrations.⁸⁷

Blankenhorn and the NFI have drawn criticism for promoting fatherhood rights and the perpetuation of marriage in the presence of domestic violence and child abuse, and even going so far as to suggest that marriage and fatherhood reduces domestic violence.⁸⁸

Blankenhorn is also a vocal opponent of same-sex marriage. In his most recent book, *The Future of Marriage*, he argues that supporting same-sex marriage weakens marriage as a valuable social institution. While acknowledging that no one “can scientifically prove that allowing gay marriage causes the institution of marriage to get weaker,” and admitting that “correlation does not imply causation,” in a bit of circular logic, Blankenhorn argues that:

Certain trends in values and attitudes tend to cluster with each other and with certain trends in behavior... The legal endorsement of gay marriage occurs where the belief prevails that marriage itself should be redefined as a private personal relationship. And all of these marriage-weakening attitudes and behaviors are linked.⁸⁹

Finally, Robert Rector and Patrick Fagan of the Heritage Foundation round out the architects of the federal marriage movement. 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.”⁹⁰ Rector, senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation, played a major role in crafting the welfare reform legislation, and, in particular, the Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage program. According to Rector, “The collapse of marriage is the principal cause of child poverty and a host of other social ills.”⁹¹

In a recent documentary, Rector explained the true motivations behind the abstinence-only-until-marriage programs very clearly: “The abstinence education program was designed to...rebuild the foundations to teach about self-control and about relationships as a pathway to stable marriage. Stable marriage being the vehicle to dramatically reduce job poverty, dramatically reduce welfare dependence.” Rector added that, “It is important to recognize that abstinence education at the federal level is not primarily an STD prevention program. It is rather a marital preparation program...Also, it is not about pregnancy prevention.”⁹²

Working closely with Rector on marriage promotion is Patrick Fagan who is the former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services under President George H.W. Bush and currently serves as the William H. G. Fitzgerald Senior Research Fellow in Cultural and Family Issues at the Heritage Foundation. At Heritage, Fagan focuses on examining the impact of family life and religious practice in the areas of health, mental health, education, crime, and income.⁹³ In a recent article, he makes the case, based on research by Rector and others at the Heritage Foundation, that “virgins make the best valentines.” Fagan argues that 80 percent of those who are virgins prior to entering into a stable, monogamous relationship remain in that relationship. In comparison he suggests that marriages among people who have had one or more prior sexual partners are half as likely to result in such a stable, monogamous relationship. Fagan argues that having just one additional partner is the cause for this lower rate of success in marriage. Fagan also noted that “virgins” make the “best mothers—for raising children well means developing their capacity

to be married parents who know how to stay married and how to select a mate who can do the same—a long-term task made for two parents who love each other.”⁹⁴

The Advertisers: Propagandizing for the Movement

In addition to working with conservative organizations and groups to design the program, the administration sought the help of individual journalists and commentators to “advertise it.” Without disclosure, these writers used federal funding to spread propaganda.

According to the *Washington Post*, syndicated columnist Maggie Gallagher received a \$21,000 contract with HHS to write positive articles on the \$300 million marriage initiative.⁹⁵ Her work under the contract to promote the president’s proposal included drafting a magazine article for Wade Horn (who was overseeing the initiative for HHS at that time), writing brochures for the program, and conducting a briefing for department officials.

Gallagher received an additional \$20,000 from the Bush administration in both 2002 and 2003 for writing a report titled “Can Government Strengthen Marriage?” for NFI. NFI paid for the report using grant money it received from the Department of Justice. Gallagher, president of the Institute for Marriage and Public Policy and a co-author of *The Case for Marriage*, also drafted an essay for Wade Horn, titled “Closing the Marriage Gap,” which ran in *Crisis*, a magazine that promotes “Christian humanism rooted in the teachings of the Catholic Church.”⁹⁶

According to OMB Watch, a nonprofit research and advocacy organization aimed at increasing government transparency and accountability, for more than 50 years federal appropriations laws have banned the expenditure of appropriated funds on publicity and propaganda unless specifically authorized by Congress. “This regulation prohibits covert propaganda that does not identify the government as a source, information intended for ‘self-aggrandizement’ or ‘puffery,’ and materials that serve a solely partisan purpose.” For years, this federal prohibition has reflected the view that the government should not use its own resources to influence public opinion in political or policy issues.⁹⁷

Still, Gallagher publicized the policy, encouraged HHS to implement it, and commissioned polls to contradict other columnists who had found that the public was unsupportive of this initiative.⁹⁸ “The Bush marriage initiative would emphasize the importance of marriage to poor couples” and “educate teens on the value of delaying childbearing until marriage,” she wrote in *National Review Online*, stating that this could “carry big payoffs down the road for taxpayers and children.”⁹⁹ In a column that ran in the *Myrtle Beach (SC) Sun News*, Gallagher wrote that Bush’s welfare-reform bill would encourage “stable marriages,” and that it was a “scandal” for Democrats to reject the President’s plan.¹⁰⁰

In addition to Gallagher, Mike McManus, who writes a weekly column syndicated in 30 to 40 newspapers, received at least \$4,000 from HHS for his own work to support the federal government’s marriage initiative in 2003 and 2004. McManus is also the co-founder and president of a non-profit group, Marriage Savers. Founded in 1996, Marriage Savers is “a ministry that equips local communities, principally through local congregations, to help men and women to: prepare for lifelong marriage, strengthen existing marriages, and restore troubled marriages.”¹⁰¹ Marriage Savers was paid \$49,000 by a group that received an HHS grant to promote marriage to unwed couples who are having children.¹⁰² Marriage Savers states on its website that, “The central domestic problem of our time is the disintegration of marriage. The 9/11 act of terrorism killed 3,000 people. However since 9/11 there have been 4 million divorces involving 4 million children. That is 1,333 times worse.”¹⁰³

Since January 2003, when the consulting deal began, McManus touted Bush’s marriage initiative in several of his columns. In at least three of the columns, McManus quoted Horn, a former member of the Marriage Savers Board of Directors who, as the HHS official overseeing the initiative was also the manager of the contract under which Marriage Savers received funding.¹⁰⁴

LEGALIZED DISCRIMINATION:

How the Marriage-Promotion Industry Impacts LGBT Youth and Families

The architects and advertisers of this movement brought together a number of acknowledged social facts in order to advance their conservative agenda. First, they pointed to what they saw as the weakening of the institution of marriage in recent history. More adults were choosing not to get married, more couples (including gay and lesbian couples) were choosing to cohabitate without marrying. More marriages were ending in divorce. And more parents were having children outside of a marriage relationship. Then, they pointed to the social research that showed that children in single-parent families are more likely to be poor, and that divorce and remarriage can have negative impacts on young people's mental health and future well being. From there, they argued that clearly a lack of respect for marriage was at the root of all of the country's social ills and that the solution to these problems was to increase the number of people who got married.

What remained unspoken but quite clear, however, was the understanding that marriage-promotion programs were meant to promote two-parent families with the benefits of marriage only so long as the parents were of the opposite sex. It is no coincidence that the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act* (PRWORA) and the *Defense of Marriage Act* (DOMA) were passed within days of each other in the late-Summer/early-fall of 1996. These were hallmark pieces of legislation for the Gingrich Congress of 1995; legalizing discrimination of LGBT people in an unprecedented way. Within the span of a few days, federal law dictated that welfare dependency and same-sex relationship were a threat to “an abstract construct of ‘the family’—read, the heterosexual, married family—which was posited as ‘the backbone of this country’ and ‘one of the essential foundations on which our civilization is based.’”¹⁰⁵ In their report for the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce, *Leaving Our Children Behind*, Sean Cahill and Kenneth T. Jones noted: “It’s ironic that even as welfare reformers portrayed single mothers and cohabiting unmarried couples as selfish and narcissistic for *not getting married*, these same politicians and pundits denounced gay and lesbian couples as self-indulgent narcissists for *seeking to get married*.”¹⁰⁶

A closer look at the messages that are, and are not, included in marriage-promotion programs, the arguments used to promote these programs, and the reality for LGBT youth and families, shows that marriage promotion, like DOMA, is part of a concerted effort by the federal government to discriminate against LGBT individuals and families.

The Messages about Sexual Orientation: Stigmatizing LGBT Youth and Families

By promoting marriage, assuming heterosexuality, disparaging non-traditional families, and spreading fear, shame, and inaccurate information about sexual orientation, abstinence-only-until-marriage programs—one component of the marriage-promotion industry—assert that LGBT individuals and relationships are unhealthy and morally inferior. These programs depend upon and enforce an intensely intolerant and destructive conception of sexual orientation. The overt biases they include, the assumptions they make, and the discussions they refuse to allow all send powerful and disturbing messages to young people of all sexual orientations.

Some abstinence-only-until-marriage programs explicitly discourage same-sex behavior. *FACTS* explains that, “Young persons may sense affection and even infatuation for a member of the same sex. This is not the same thing as ‘being’ homosexual. Any same sex ‘sexual experimentation’ can be confusing to young persons and should be strongly discouraged.”¹⁰⁷

Other curricula speak volumes by mentioning gays and lesbians only in terms of sexually transmitted diseases and treating gay and lesbian individuals as nothing more than disease vectors. *Sex Respect* inaccurately suggests that “AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), the STD most common among homosexuals, bisexuals and IV drug users, has now made its way into heterosexual circles.”¹⁰⁸ It goes on to say, “Homosexual activity involves an especially high risk for HIV transmission.”¹⁰⁹ In fact, the majority of HIV infections worldwide result from heterosexual transmission, HIV infection among heterosexuals is neither recent nor rare, and sexual behaviors that fall under the phrase “homosexual activity” such as mutual

masturbation and oral sex are no more risky for same-sex couples than for heterosexual couples. Indeed, women who have sex with women are at even lower risk for HIV than heterosexual men or women.

Most abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, however, never mention sexual orientation. Instead, they assume that all students in the class, and even all people in the world, are heterosexual. One program defines sex by saying, “The word sex is frequently used to refer to the physical and personal act of male and female genital union, sexual intercourse.”¹¹⁰ Others suggest that heterosexual attraction is innate. *Heritage Keepers* explains that, “The strong attraction between men and women is part of what makes marriage so wonderful.”¹¹¹ *Choosing the Best LIFE* asks and answers this question: “What do guys talk about in the locker room? (Girls) What do girls talk about at sleepover parties? (Guys).”¹¹² Classroom activities such as games and role playing scenes reinforce this bias by deliberately denying the existence of LGBT relationships. These tactics spread the inaccurate and stigmatizing message that all young people will and should be attracted only to people of the opposite gender, and that homosexual attraction is unnatural and deviant.

While most curricula simply ignore the possibility that there will be gay and lesbian students in the classroom, the author of one popular program argues that it is appropriate for all students. On the “Frequently Asked Questions” section of its website, WAIT Training insists that its curriculum is appropriate for use with gay and lesbian students stating “they need to be abstinent, learn about healthy relationships and how to love well.” *WAIT Training’s* focus on marriage as the only appropriate context for sexual behavior, however, essentially tells lesbian and gay students that they can never have a sexual relationship. The organization attempts to address this criticism on its website when it answers the concern “But gays and lesbians don’t marry,” by saying, “Who says they don’t? The marriages that are performed for gays and lesbians are not legal. That is a political issue and is not our issue.”¹¹³

Despite this apparent attempt at tolerance, the curriculum maintains an emphasis on heterosexuality by using male and female pairs in every scenario and example, and by discussing sexuality only in terms of heterosexual individuals and relationships. While visitors to the organization’s website may learn that gay and lesbian individuals marry, albeit not legally, students in the *WAIT Training* course will not even hear the terms gay and lesbian. Such a program is not, in fact, appropriate for gay and lesbian students who are essentially ignored, nor is it appropriate for heterosexual students who also need to learn honest and complete information about sexual orientation.

While most abstinence-only-until-marriage programs ignore the same-sex marriage debate completely, they nonetheless send powerful messages to young people about families. These curricula suggest that non-traditional families are socially and morally inferior to those in which married heterosexual parents live with their children. *FACTS* teachers are instructed to put the following statements on the board for students to read:

- Divorce is the leading cause of childhood depression.
- Seventy-five percent of adolescent patients of chemical abuse centers are from single-parent families.
- Sixty-three percent of youth suicides are single-parent children.
- Seventy percent of teenage pregnancies are single-parent children.
- Children of divorce are 5 times as likely to be suspended from school; 3 times as likely to need psychological counseling; and they are absent from and late for school more.
- Three out of four juveniles in youth correction facilities are from single-parent families.¹¹⁴

Sex Respect, another abstinence-only-until-marriage curriculum, asserts that “having two parents was not a social invention. In the nature of conception, cells from both a man and a woman are involved. It follows that in meeting the human needs of children, it is best when a father and mother are involved, too.”¹¹⁵ And, *Why kNOW* tells students that, “Single women are trying to be both mother and father. The absentee dad has become a norm in many communities. It is interesting that domestic violence, child abuse and increased poverty have also increased in proportion to the decline in the sanctity of marriage.”¹¹⁶

These messages not only exclude LGBT and other students who may never marry or have children, but also imply that the children of LGBT parents are inferior to those with married heterosexual parents. By idealizing one type of family and disparaging all others, these programs put the burden of divorce and separation on children and aggressively promote bias against LGBT students, future LGBT parents, and the children of LGBT families.

The Social Welfare Argument: Fostering Myths about Gay and Lesbian Parents

The messages found in the fear-based abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula supported with federal tax dollars are not surprising; they are the exact messages that supporters of marriage promotion used to justify their programs.

The architects of the marriage-promotion industry point to social research on children to make their case for marriage. Most social scientists do, in fact, agree that children who grow up in a two-parent family have more advantages than those who grow up with one parent. As one researcher explained, children from single parent households are "...more likely to drop out of high school, less likely to attend college, and less likely to graduate from college than children raised by both biological parents. Girls from father-absent families are more likely to become sexually active at a younger age and have a child outside of marriage. Boys who grow up without their fathers are more likely to have trouble finding (and keeping) a job in young adulthood. Young adult men and women from one-parent families tend to work at low-paying jobs."¹¹⁷

Given these facts, the conservative architects argue, clearly it is important to promote two-parent, married families. This argument inaccurately assumes that the fact of having only one parent at home is the direct cause of these potentially negative outcomes. In fact, research suggests that "as much as half of the apparent disadvantage of growing up in a single-parent family is due to the lower incomes these families typically have."¹¹⁸

Regardless of whether these arguments in favor of two-parents families are accurate or fair, what supporters of these programs deliberately fail to acknowledge, is that many children of gay and lesbian couples are growing up in two-parent families. And, in fact, the research shows that children of same-sex couples fare similarly to their peers.

One study of children of artificially inseminated lesbian couples and heterosexual couples found the peers to be "remarkably similar" in intellectual functioning and behavioral adjustment. Although the differences were not statistically significant, the children of lesbian parents actually scored better in 17 out of 24 of the assessments used.¹¹⁹ A similar study compared children whose families had used the Sperm Bank of California. Children of lesbian couples showed the same social competence and low levels of behavior problems as those with heterosexual parents. Both parents and teachers thought both groups were equally well adjusted and developing in normal fashion.¹²⁰ A 1996 meta-analysis of previous research studies on the children of homosexual and heterosexual parents confirmed that there are no difference in terms of satisfaction with life and cognitive and moral development.¹²¹

Two more recent studies analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health which followed a group of young people over the course of many years. The first found no differences in young people's psychosocial and school adjustment. In addition, children of same-sex and opposite-sex parents had similar experiences of romantic relationships, attractions, and sexual intercourse. In fact, the only statistically significant difference researchers did find suggests that greater school connectedness was significantly correlated with same-sex parents.¹²² For the second study, the same researchers compared adolescents with lesbian parents with their peers who had heterosexual parents and found no significant differences in terms of negative behaviors such as tobacco use, alcohol use, marijuana use, risky behavior, and delinquent behavior.¹²³

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) concludes that, "There is ample evidence to show that children raised by same-gender parents fare as well as those raised by heterosexual parents. More than 25 years of research have documented that there is no relationship between parents' sexual orientation and any measure of a child's emotional, psychosocial, and behavioral adjustment. The data have demonstrated no

risk to children...Conscientious and nurturing adults, whether they are men or women, heterosexual or homosexual, can be excellent parents.”¹²⁴

Marriage promotion was sold as a solution to the problems facing children in single families. If the genuine motivation behind these programs was to increase the number of children raised by two parents, the architects of this industry would have included gay and lesbian families in the messaging and services offered under marriage promotion. Instead, they have made life for young people in gay and lesbian families more difficult by deliberately discriminating against them and including inaccurate, biased, and shame-inducing messages about sexual orientation and these families in the curricula used by these programs.

The Poverty Argument: Ignoring What Would Truly Help LGBT Families

Marriage-promotion programs were passed with little public debate, but the debate that did occur revolved primarily around poor families as these programs were introduced under the rubric of welfare reform. The argument that supporters of these programs made once again focused on single-parent households, specifically households headed by single mothers. As Nancy Cott explains their logic, “Female-headed households with children are far poorer on average, than married-couple household, but proponents of the Personal Responsibility Act spoke as though the marriage ceremony itself magically solved the problems of poverty.”¹²⁵

This argument obviously makes a number of logical leaps not the least of which is mistaking correlation for causation. While poverty and marital status are indeed strongly linked, as noted by marriage scholar Theodora Ooms, “it is hard to distinguish cause from effect.”¹²⁶ The question still remains: “Are single parents poor because they are not married, or are they not married because they are poor?”¹²⁷ Andrew J. Cherlin, Professor of Public Policy at Johns Hopkins University and principal investigator of the “Three-City Study,” which looks at the consequences of the 1996 welfare reform law for parents and children in close to 3,000 families suggests, “...we cannot conclude from these differences that growing up in a single-parent family caused these unwanted outcomes. Both conditions—the number of parents in the home while growing up and problems in adulthood—could be caused by other factors. For example, poverty could cause parents to divorce and also prevent their children from attending college.”¹²⁸

Moreover, these arguments once again call out the disingenuous nature of these programs and the discriminatory nature of the federal government’s marriage policies. In fact, compared to different-sex couples with children, same-sex couples have fewer economic resources to care for their children. Same-sex parents have lower household incomes, lower home ownership rates, and lower levels of education than different-sex parents. The average household income for same-sex families with children is almost \$12,000 lower than for their different-sex counterparts.¹²⁹

Many researchers agree that this economic difference can, in part, be explained by the financial benefits of marriage that are being denied to same-sex partners and parents. For example, most married couples (especially couples in which one parent is not working in order to care for children) rely on employer-provided health insurance benefits which are extended to a worker’s legal spouse and children but not to unmarried partners. Far fewer employers offer domestic partner benefits. Some gay and lesbian parents also have difficulty getting health coverage for their children because “inequality in marriage laws and far from certain access to joint or second-parent adoption” means that some parents do not have the legal relationship to their children that employers and health insurance providers require.¹³⁰ Not only are same-sex couples often denied access to health insurance, but, if a family medical emergency should occur, they are not eligible for the *Family Medical Leave Act* which protects an employee’s job in the event of a medical emergency, birth or adoption. “Same-sex partners are not covered under this law, making it impossible for some gay or lesbian employees to keep their jobs and be with their partners during times of medical need—or with their children in the first weeks of their lives.”¹³¹

Other federal rules and regulations may also contribute to the economic status of gay and lesbian couples with children. If one member of the couple dies, both the partner and the couple’s children may be denied Social Security survivors benefits, “including those benefits designated for the care of a child.”¹³² The

income tax penalties faced by gay and lesbian families are, perhaps, the most ironic rules. The architects of marriage promotion seem to want to go back to a time where all young people had two parents, one of whom stayed at home taking care of the children and family. Gay and lesbian parents who do this, however, are penalized: “A same-sex couple where one parent stays at home with the children pays more in federal income taxes than a married heterosexual couple in the same circumstances (based strictly on an analysis of parenting-related and earned income tax credits).”¹³³

The government’s perpetuation of such regulations that unfairly financially penalize same-sex families, calls into question the very motive of marriage promotion and welfare reform. As Cahill and Jones argue, “Welfare is not only, or even primarily, about poverty policy. Welfare reform is also fundamentally about family policy and ideology—about promoting and privileging particular kinds of families, and about penalizing and stigmatizing others. It is also about the promotion of heterosexuality, but only a heterosexuality practiced within the context of marriage. Most alarmingly, welfare reform is about the discouragement and stigmatization of homosexuality and lesbian and gay families.”¹³⁴

The children of LGBT parents should not lack the government and social service supports that the children of heterosexual married couples receive. It is unconscionable that lawmakers are simultaneously selling marriage to poor women as a cure for poverty and deliberately denying benefits and support that could increase the income of same-sex couples with children.

The Reality of LGBT Youth: Meeting the Needs All Young People

The discriminatory nature of the government’s marriage policies combined with the biased messages found in marriage-promotions programs, in particular abstinence-only-until-marriage programs for teenagers, threaten the well-being of both children of LGBT parents and those youth who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning their sexual orientation. LGBT students are at higher risk for violence in school, sexual risk taking, being harassed, abusing drugs and alcohol, and attempting suicide, simply because of their sexuality and the pressures to conform and the environment in which they share (or hide) their sexuality that come with it.

Many LGBT youth experience considerable ridicule, peer rejection, isolation, harassment, and/or depression at some point in their lives. In one study, over a third (37.8%) of students experienced physical harassment at school on the basis of sexual orientation and more than a quarter (26.1%) on the basis of their gender expression. Nearly one-fifth (17.6%) of students had been physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation and over a tenth (11.8%) because of their gender expression.¹³⁵ Studies of high school students found that those who were harassed because of their real or perceived sexual orientation were more likely than non-harassed youth to use crack, cocaine, steroids, and inhalants.¹³⁶

Studies indicate that LGBT youth often internalize negative societal messages regarding sexual orientation and suffer from self-hatred, as well as from social and emotional isolation.¹³⁷ At least 47% of gay and lesbian teens have seriously considered suicide, and 36% have actually attempted suicide.¹³⁸ In one survey, fully one third of gay, lesbian, and bisexual high school students reported attempting suicide in the previous year, compared to eight percent of their heterosexual peers.¹³⁹ In another study, gay and bisexual males were nearly four times more likely to attempt suicide than were their straight peers.¹⁴⁰ LGBT youth may also experience the rejection of their families, homelessness, mistreatment in school, and violence against them. According to the AAP, the “nationwide political and religious debate over same-gender marriage has intensified an already unstable climate for gay men and lesbians in our society. The lack of societal tolerance, acceptance, and support that gay and lesbian individuals, couples, and their children experience can and does affect their psychosocial and physical health and safety.”¹⁴¹

Although further research into the impact of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs on gay and lesbian young people is clearly needed, initial surveys suggest these programs are detrimental. Results from the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network’s 2005 National School Climate Survey showed a significant negative impact from programs that promote sexual abstinence until marriage. Nearly half (44.6%) of the students surveyed reported that their school followed an abstinence-only health curriculum,

and these students were more likely to have experienced verbal harassment on the basis of sexual orientation, and were more likely to have missed school in the past year because they felt unsafe. Students at schools that followed abstinence-only curriculum also reported having fewer supportive faculty/school staff.¹⁴²

Programs like this can start a cycle in which gay and lesbian young people are treated poorly and, as a result, become more likely to engage in risky behavior. A recent National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded study of Latino gay and bisexual men found a correlation between experiences of homophobia and the increased likelihood that the men would engage in behaviors leaving them at risk for HIV.¹⁴³

In contrast, studies show that LGBT youth who receive gay-sensitive HIV instruction in school tend to engage in risky sexual behaviors less frequently than similar youth who do not receive such accepting instruction. According to one study of high school students and HIV educators in Massachusetts, lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth did report a higher number of sexual partners, more frequent substance use prior to sexual activity, and higher rate of pregnancy than their heterosexual peers who were sexually active. However, those gay youth who received gay-sensitive HIV instruction in school reported fewer sexual partners and less frequent substance use prior to sexual activity than their fellow lesbian, gay, and bisexual peers who did not receive such instruction.¹⁴⁴

It is clear that LGBT youth, as well as young people growing up in families with LGBT parents, are in need of educational programs that help them understand sexual orientation, deal with pressures to conform, and prevent risky behaviors. In addition, all young people need education to help them understand the need for tolerance for all people and families. By promoting heterosexual marriage through HMI and abstinence-only-until-marriage grants and denying federal benefits to same-sex families, the federal government is not only denying our young people the education they need, but perpetuating harmful discrimination.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As illustrated, the social science research shows that it is simply not true that only married, heterosexual couples can successfully raise children. What is important for the wellbeing of all children is that they are loved, nurtured, supported, and cared for. These qualities of good parenting are not dictated by sexual orientation or marital status. Just as growing up in a household led by two heterosexual, married parents does not ensure that a child will become a happy, productive member of society, neither does growing up in a family of another form ensure he or she will not.

The federal government ought not to be in the business of funding far-right groups to promote one family structure. Nor should it legalize or legitimize discrimination by choosing to assist the children of heterosexual married couples over those who grow up in single-parent households or are raised by LGBT parents. Policymakers should not be more concerned with funding programs that meet their conservative, morally, and ideologically driven agenda than they are with funding activities that are based on the best evidence and research available. SIECUS makes the following five recommendations to policymakers to bring an end to these discriminatory practices and the waste of taxpayer money in the marriage-promotion industry.

- **End the Healthy Marriage Initiative and Other Marriage Programs.** The federal government should not dictate specific marriage programs for the states nor should it be directly involved in offering programs that promote marriage. Congress should end continued funding for the Healthy Marriage Initiative through its power of the purse and this President or the next should bring the Healthy Marriage Initiative to an end.
- **End all funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.** These programs have received over \$1 billion dollars under the Bush administration, all without any legitimate evidentiary support in their favor. They run counter to science, public health, public opinion, human rights, and

common sense. It is time for this social experiment to end and for an investment to be redirected toward programs that work and that meet the needs of all people.

- **Fund comprehensive sexuality education.** The federal government should establish funding for age-appropriate, medically accurate, comprehensive sexuality education that discusses abstinence and contraception, avoids gender stereotypes and the stigmatization of LGBT individuals, and addresses the prevention and relationship needs of all youth, including those who identify as LGBT or those that question their sexual orientation or identity. One way to achieve this would be to pass the *Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act* which would provide grants for comprehensive, evidence-based, risk-reduction sexuality education programs, including HIV-prevention interventions, that discuss abstinence, contraception, and other life skills.
- **Fund safe school initiatives.** The federal government must recognize its responsibility to ensure that all schools are safe places for students to learn. Current safe school initiatives fail to be universally recognized and adopted so that all youth, including LGBT youth, are free from harassment and violence in schools. Resource materials on harassment and violence related to sexual orientation and gender identity should be widely available in schools. Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) should be allowed to form in schools and state and federal authorities should support their creations. Training resources for teachers and school administrators should include sexual orientation and gender identity.
- **Extend government benefits to meet the needs of all families.** Federal benefits should be expanded so that all relationships and family types that provide care for children are supported. Services should also be made available to unmarried parents who may not decide to marry or cannot decide to marry but who would like to do a better job parenting their children together. Limited resources would be better spent expanding programs and adapting programs to the needs of more economically, racially, and culturally diverse groups of participants.

The privileging of families headed by married heterosexual couples over those led by single parents, LGBT parents, and unmarried heterosexual couples, and the possibility that children would be denied services and life-saving information based on the make-up of their families, is an egregious statement about the American government and our society. Limited taxpayer money should not be wasted on funding the promotion of heterosexual marriage and the legalized discrimination of LGBT youth, LGBT parents, and their children; and, the federal government should not be sponsoring such initiatives. Social policy, and by extension government funding, should focus on such programs as comprehensive sexuality education and safe school initiatives that respect the values and choices of all families, and allow families to define that term for themselves.

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- (A) has as its exclusive purpose, teaching the social, psychological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity;
 - (B) teaches abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage as the expected standard for all school age children;
 - (C) teaches that abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other associated health problems;
 - (D) teaches that a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in context of marriage is the expected standard of human sexual activity;
 - (E) teaches that sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects;
 - (F) teaches that bearing children out-of-wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child's parents, and society;
 - (G) teaches young people how to reject sexual advances and how alcohol and drug use increases vulnerability to sexual advances; and
 - (H) teaches the importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sexual activity.
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