

Senate Bill 30  
Community and Family Advancement Committee  
Tuesday, June 23, 2015

Good Afternoon, Chairman Derickson, Ranking Member Howse and members of the Community and Family Advancement Committee. My name is Angela Cornelius Dawson, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Ohio Commission on Minority Health. The Ohio Commission on Minority Health has a primary focus on the prevention of cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, infant mortality, substance abuse and violence. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony for Senate Bill 30 in support of the Ohio Family Stability Commission, as a key strategy to reduce child poverty, unwed births and likelihood of behavioral problems to include violence and delinquency.

According to the Heritage Foundation “Child poverty is an ongoing national concern, but few are aware that its principal cause is the absence of married fathers in the home.” Marriage remains America’s strongest anti-poverty weapon, yet it continues to decline. As husbands disappear from the home, poverty, unwed births, and public assistance dependence will increase, and children and parents will suffer as a result. When compared to children in intact married homes, children raised by single parents are more likely to have emotional and behavioral problems; be physically abused; smoke, drink, and use drugs; be aggressive; engage in violent, delinquent, and criminal behavior; have poor school performance; be expelled from school; and drop out of high school. Many of these negative outcomes are associated with the higher poverty rates of single mothers.

This delinquent behavior often results in increased incarceration rates for youth, which are reflected in our projected expenditures of \$457 million for the Ohio Department of Youth Services in the upcoming biennium.

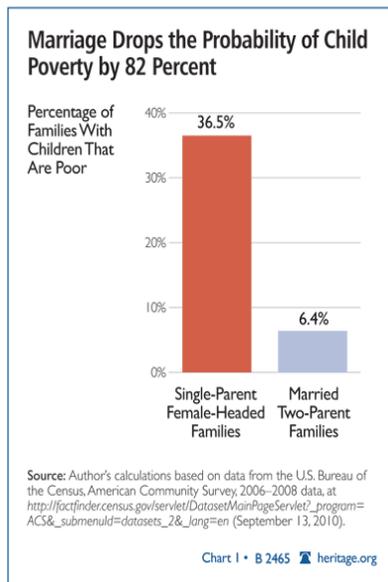
It is important to note that there are thousands of single parents who are successfully raising children who are well adjusted, and become productive citizens. They are to be congratulated on their efforts to ensure that they have addressed multiple barriers, and committed to supporting their children’s success. This effort is not intended to condemn single parent households, but rather to understand the significant impact marriage has on reducing child poverty. Without the sheer determination of these single parent households, the impact of the dysfunction associated with fatherless homes would be significantly higher.

The goal of the Ohio Family Stability Commission is to create a strategic plan to reduce single parent households, and develop recommendations to address the numerous challenges which frequently impact these households.

Since marital decline drives up child poverty and public assistance dependence, this cost is generally absorbed within the over \$15 billion spent annually in Ohio for public assistance services that address social issues largely connected to single parent homes and absent fathers.

The research indicates that since the poor aspire to healthy marriage but lack the norms, understanding, and skills to achieve it, it is reasonable for government to take active steps to strengthen marriage. Just as government discourages youth from dropping out of school, it should provide information that will help people to form and maintain healthy marriages, and delay childbearing until they are married and economically stable.

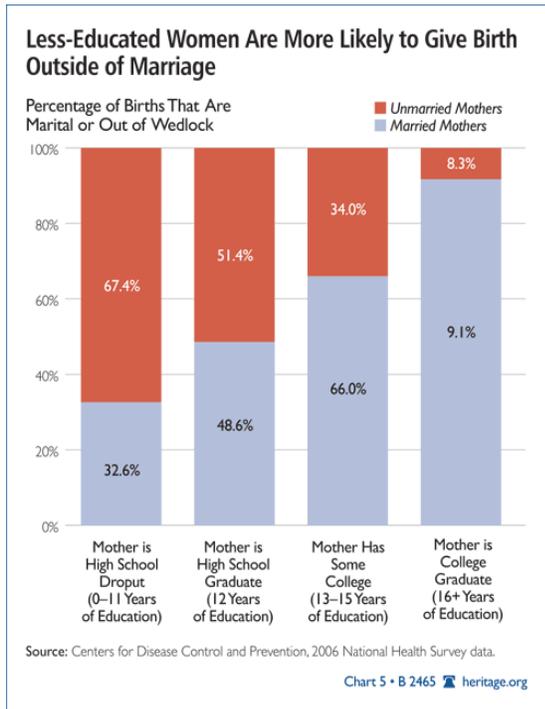
According to the U.S. Census, the poverty rate for single parents with children in the United States in 2008 was 36.5 percent. The rate for married couples with children was 6.4 percent. Being raised in a married family reduced a child's probability of living in poverty by about 80 percent. (See Chart 1.)



According to the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, in 1964, 93 percent of children born in the United States were born to married parents. Since that time, births within marriage have declined sharply. In 2007, only 59 percent of all births in the nation occurred to married couples. The flip side of the decline in marriage is the growth in the out-of-wedlock childbearing birth rate, meaning the percentage of births that occur to women who are not married when the child is born. In 2008, 40.6 percent of all children born in the U.S. were born outside of marriage. Out-of-wedlock births are often confused with teen pregnancy and births. In fact, few out-of-wedlock births occur to teenagers. Of all out-of-wedlock births in the United States in 2008, only 7.7 percent occurred to girls under age 18. Three-quarters occurred to young adult women between the ages of 19 and 29. The decline in marriage and growth in out-of-wedlock births is not a teenage issue; it is the result of a breakdown in relationships between young adult men and women.

In 2008, 1.7 million children were born outside of marriage in the United States. Most of these births occurred to young adult women with a high school degree or less - women who will face

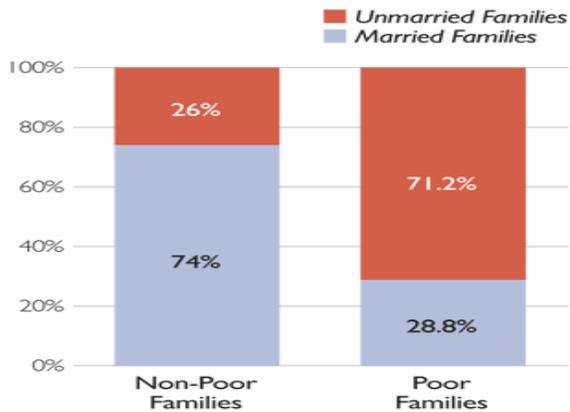
many barriers as single parents. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006 American Community Survey, as Chart 5 shows, more than two-thirds of births to women who were high school dropouts occurred outside of marriage. Among women who only had a high school degree, slightly more than half of all births were out of wedlock. By contrast, among women with at least a college degree, only 8 percent of births were out of wedlock, and 92 percent of births occurred to married couples.



The rise in out-of-wedlock childbearing and the increase in single parenthood are major causes of high levels of child poverty. Since the early 1960s, single-parent families have roughly tripled as a share of all families with children. As noted, in the U.S. in 2008, single parents were six times more likely to be poor than were married couples.

Not surprisingly, single parent families make up the overwhelming majority of all poor families with children in the U.S. Overall, single-parent families comprise one-third of all families with children, but as Chart 6 shows, 71 percent of poor families with children are headed by single parents. By contrast, 74 percent of all non-poor families with children are headed by married couples.

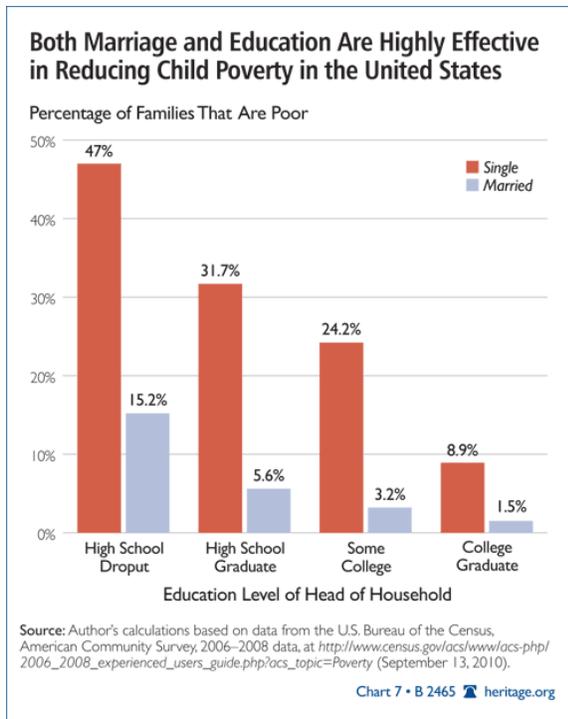
## 71 Percent of Poor Families With Children Are Not Married



Source: Author's calculations based on data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2006–2008 data, at [http://www.census.gov/acs/www/acs-php/2006\\_2008\\_experienced\\_users\\_guide.php?acs\\_topic=Poverty](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/acs-php/2006_2008_experienced_users_guide.php?acs_topic=Poverty) (September 13, 2010).

Chart 6 • B 2465  heritage.org

The research clearly shows that marriage and education reduce poverty. The poverty rate among married couples is dramatically lower than the poverty rate among single-headed households, even when the married couple is compared to single parents with the same level of education. For example, as Chart 7 shows, the poverty rate for a single mother with only a high school degree is 31.7 percent, but the poverty rate for a married-couple family headed by an individual who is only a high school graduate is 5.6 percent: Marriage drops the odds of being poor by 80 percent.



Census data and the Fragile Families survey show that marriage can be extremely effective in reducing child poverty. But the positive effects of married fathers are not limited to income alone. Children raised by married parents have substantially better life outcomes compared to similar children raised in single-parent homes.

An extensive and growing body of research demonstrates a strong link between marriage, relationship quality, and health outcomes for children, adults, and the elderly. For the large majority of Americans their own ability to protect and promote their health and well-being, recover from sickness, and manage chronic illness, frailty and the process of dying is influenced by the kind of relationship they have with their spouse, parent or close relative. Married adults are physically and emotionally healthier and live longer than adults who are never-married, separated, divorced or widowed, and their children are healthier and live longer as well. Children raised by two biological married parents who have a reasonably good relationship have better health during their childhood and as adults than do children growing up in other family arrangements.

As people grow older, the marriage/health connection becomes dramatically stronger. Married individuals are less likely to enter a nursing home or to pay for costly long term care, and less likely to have problems with activities of daily living. Relationship quality matters to the progress and outcomes of chronic disease. For example, men and women of “high quality” marriages live longer with cardiovascular disease, independent of the severity of illness, than do those in “low quality” marriages.

To combat poverty, it is vital to strengthen marriage; and to strengthen marriage, it is vital that at-risk populations be given a clear factual understanding of the benefits of marriage and the

costs and consequences of non-marital childbearing. To develop this understanding, government and society should establish a broad campaign of public education in low-income areas. This campaign should be similar in scope to current efforts to convince youth of the importance of staying in school or to inform the public about the health risks of smoking. While the costs of such an effort would be small, its impact could be considerable.

If society wishes to slow the growth of non-marital births and pregnancies, then the government must clearly communicate that, on average, having and raising children inside of marriage is more beneficial than having and raising a child outside of marriage. This can be done through multiple methods such as:

- Public advertising campaigns on the importance of marriage that are targeted to low-income communities;
- Providing marriage education programs in high schools with a high proportion of at-risk youth.
- Strengthening abstinence education programs that provide critical information on the value of marriage to adults, children, and society.
- Making voluntary marriage education widely available to interested couples in low-income communities.

Finally, the decline of marriage generates poverty in future generations. Children living in single-parent homes are 50 percent more likely to experience poverty as adults when compared to children from intact married homes. This intergenerational poverty effect persists even after adjusting for the original differences in family income and poverty during childhood.

Government is already deeply involved in the family lives of poor single parents and their children, through the provision of education, public assistance and human services. Currently, the government actively instructs youths in the value of education, substance use abstinence, employment, and delaying childbearing until the post-teen years. In this context, we can use our existing opportunities to provide education strategies to strengthen marriage.

The absence of any government effort to support marriage does not represent neutrality. As long as the current social silence concerning the benefits of marriage and the harm of out-of-wedlock childbearing persists, marriage will continue to erode in low-income communities.

I urge you to support the creation of the Ohio Family Stability Commission which will be comprised of a broad base of individuals with the expertise to build on the existing efforts to address this issue. The Ohio Family Stability Commission has a targeted goal to initiate the research needed to establish a baseline for the contributing factors to family instability, develop a strategic plan, and both monitor report the implementation of recommendations. This will allow Ohio to leverage our existing resources to reduce childhood poverty, single parent households, unwed births, juvenile delinquency and the high school dropout rate and increase the marriage rates in Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, I would like to inform you that I have profound bilateral hearing loss which will require me to repeat your questions for clarification. Thank you in advance for your accommodation. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

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