

Jean M. Benhoff - Baltimore County

RE: House Bill 666 and cross filed with Senate Bill 0566

Position: Support/Favorable

My Testimony:

*What is timelessly true and cannot ever be changed no matter what!! This should be your position, not creating dependency. Praise the 2 Parent Family, not what your Bill proposes! Support for my position:*

## ***Can Government Save the Family?***

A symposium with Sen. John Ashcroft, David Blankenhorn, James Dobson, Gov. John Engler, William Galston, Kay James, D. James Kennedy, Rep. Steve Largent, Dan Quayle, Paul Weyrich

Sunday, September 1, 1996 10 min read By: [William A. Galston](#)

What can government do, if anything, to make sure that the overwhelming majority of American children grow up with a mother and father?" *Policy Review* asked a number of family experts across the political spectrum to address this question, considering state and local government as well as the federal government.

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**Rep. Steve Largent**  
***Encourage Parental Involvement***

In the classic movie *King Kong*, the giant ape lifts the tiny heroine into his hairy hands with a puzzled look on his face, as if to say, "She's small and cute, but now what do I do with her?" Similarly, what can or should that giant leviathan known as "government" do to provide children with parental guidance? My first thought is the same one I had when I saw the massive Kong delicately hold the fragile heroine: "I hope he doesn't hurt her."

Government should always keep in mind that no one loves children more than their parents. There are many in Washington who believe otherwise, and think that *they* know what's best for your children. The best thing that government can do to ensure children grow up with a mother and father is to recognize that parents -- both a mother *and* a father -- are fundamental to a child's upbringing in the first place.

Government needs to encourage and solicit -- not frustrate -- parental involvement in the education of children. In the early 1930s, there were more than 130,000 school boards in the United States. Today, there are fewer than 15,000. We need to encourage parental participation by restoring local school boards for each and every school and empowering them -- together with faculty and administrators -- to determine educational policies and curricula. We must also enact school choice and voucher plans to give parents more control over their children's education.

Finally, we must stem the tide of divorce, including so-called "no-fault divorce." Nothing harms children more than losing the support and involvement of either parent, a frequent result of divorce. We should give the institution of marriage greater respect and protection. A marriage ought to be difficult to enter and even more difficult to leave. How about requiring a waiting period before every wedding?

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We need to acknowledge that government -- in any form -- can never provide what children need most: love. Only two people are qualified for that -- Mom and Dad.

[Steve Largent](#), a Republican, represents the 1st District of Oklahoma.

**James Dobson**

***Revive the "Marriage Culture"***

A distressing number of children in this nation will go to bed tonight without the participation of both a mother *and* father in an important family ritual: reading a bedtime story, saying nighttime prayers, and being tucked in with reassuring goodnight kisses. This experience is more and more often a solo act for one reason: the slow death of a marriage culture. It is being replaced by a culture of divorce and illegitimacy, each of which now exists, for the first time in our nation's history, in equal proportion to their opposites. It is paramount that we re-establish an appreciation of the value and virtue of marriage, both for the individual and society. As recent history shows, this work cannot rest on the ever-expanding shoulders of government (also known to some as "the village").

When Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote his report on the declining health of the black family in America, few authorities took his warning seriously -- except his boss, President Lyndon Johnson. Largely influenced by Moynihan's work, Johnson's "Great Society" swelled a small government bureaucracy of 45 domestic social programs to a leviathan of 435 by the end of his administration. Yet for all this "help," things have only gotten worse since then. What can be done?

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**Tax policy ought not merely to level the playing field for married couples; we should tilt it in their favor**  
**-- James Dobson**

There are four obvious imperatives for government. First, it should clearly define marriage as a lifelong commitment between a man and woman. Second, states should reform no-fault divorce laws. Third, government should end our confiscatory tax structure, which undermines the financial stability of families. Our tax policy ought not merely level the playing field for married couples; we should actually *tilt it in their favor*. Fourth, the federal and state governments should reform welfare in order to end current incentives for conceiving children outside of marriage.

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But the real recovery of a marriage culture requires tools that the government doesn't possess or even recognize. Our nation needs both a vision for the purpose of marriage and the personal and spiritual resources to build strong unions. These can only be provided by our faith-based institutions, which are divinely commissioned and uniquely gifted to undertake this work. Without this vital contribution, many children will never enjoy the irreplaceable benefits of a home with a mother and a father. Consequently, society will suffer.

*James Dobson, a psychologist, is the founder of Focus on the Family, in Colorado Springs, Colorado.*

**Gov. John Engler**

***Acknowledge the Limits of Government***

Government policy should follow the Hippocratic Oath. Government policies should in no way discourage the formation and preservation of families, nor add momentum to the powerful centrifugal forces breaking our families apart. Here are three reforms at the top of my list:

Tax reform. Government must reduce the tax burden on families and eliminate the marriage penalty in the tax code. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, real average weekly wages are 5.5 percent lower today than during the Reagan years. As a result, many families are in debt. Spouses are entering the work force to help

make ends meet, and they raise total family income by about one-third. Yet these families must also pay almost 28 percent of their income to the federal government. In effect, mothers are having to work just to pay off Washington.

It is useful to put the burden on our families in historical perspective. In 1954, the last year Republicans controlled the White House and both houses of Congress, federal taxes amounted to less than the tithe to your local church -- 8 percent of total family income. Often one parent chose not to work. Today, however, few families are free to make that choice, and government tax policy has burdened them unnecessarily.

Welfare Reform. Remember the stories about couples splitting up so welfare benefits would keep coming in? That was due to the "100-hour rule," which kept intact couples from working more than 100 hours per month. Unfortunately, it's still federal law. Michigan was one of the first states to apply for and receive a waiver from the federal government to exempt two-parent families from this destructive policy. The 100-hour rule is just one example of where federal welfare policy is wrong. Until states are free to undertake far-reaching reform, the system will continue to fail families.

Divorce reform. Because of the terrible impact of easy divorce on women and children, state lawmakers are taking a second look at their no-fault laws. In Michigan, Iowa, Pennsylvania, and a half-dozen other states, Republicans and Democrats alike are seeking to make the decision to get divorced a more considered one.

A national leader in turning back no-fault divorce has been Jessie Dalman, a Michigan state legislator. She has sponsored 12 bills that would deny a divorce if only one spouse wants it -- unless that spouse could prove infidelity, desertion, alcoholism, physical or mental abuse, or other serious problems. Her legislation would also require participation in a pre-divorce program for all parties in an uncontested divorce where young children are involved.

In addition, Dalman's legislation seeks to reduce the number of impulsive marriages by requiring a 30-day waiting period and encouraging every couple to receive counseling before their wedding day. A state marriage license would cost \$20 for those who get counseling, \$100 for those who do not.

It is essential that our society rethink the no-fault revolution. Over the past quarter-century, easy divorce laws have helped tear apart American families. As a society, it is time to refocus more on the needs of children and less on the desires of parents. We must make it harder for children to be victimized by a no-fault system that gives all the legal clout to the party that wants to break the marriage.

It is essential that Washington acknowledge the limits of government. It never has been, nor will it ever be, a substitute for the family. Family renewal must, in the end, come from within the family. Despite well-publicized divorce statistics, I am hopeful that our nation can slow down the forces of disintegration. The brisk sales of works like *The Book of Virtues*, the recognition that "Dan Quayle was right," the growing impact of groups like Focus on the Family and Promise Keepers -- all these signs give me encouragement.

[John Engler](#) is the Republican governor of Michigan.

## **D. James Kennedy**

### ***Praise the Two-Parent Family***

Government's first and most immediate task is to stop undermining the two-parent family. Whatever government subsidizes, it will be inundated with. In the 1930s, when government subsidized pigs, the Midwest was up to its hips in pigs. Today, we are subsidizing illegitimate children, and the result is a social catastrophe.

Government ought to dismantle every welfare program that promotes single-parent families. The litmus test is simple: Any program that encourages out-of-wedlock births and supplants fathers should be eliminated.

Next, government should aggressively *promote* two-parent families. The Bible says that rulers have been established "for the praise of those who do good" (1 Peter 2:14, NKJV). Here are a few ways government can "praise" the two-parent family:

Make divorce more difficult to obtain. Reduce the tax burden on the family. Defend traditional (one man, one woman) marriage. Uphold parental authority over children. Empower parents with educational choice.

A century ago, the Supreme Court called the traditional two-parent family "the sure foundation of all that is stable and noble in our civilization; the best guaranty of that reverent morality which is the source of all beneficent progress in social and political improvement" (*Murphy v. Ramsey* [1885]). I pray for leaders at all levels to have the wisdom -- and the courage -- to stand on such principles today.

*D. James Kennedy is the president of Coral Ridge Ministries Media and the founder of the Center for Christian Statesmanship.*

**Sen. John Ashcroft**  
***Remove Perverse Incentives***

Government must encourage families to come together and stay together through cultural, not governmental, pressures. The most important role for government is to remove the perverse incentives of the welfare state.

Current policy encourages parents to abdicate financial and moral responsibility for their children to the government. Our entitlement system induces some irresponsible fathers to abandon their families, cavalierly confident that government will step in. If we resist the temptation to cure every societal ill with more government programs, I believe parental influence and responsibility will fill the void.

We must weed out invasive government policies, so that our culture can recuperate. Our current welfare system penalizes marriage and work and fosters dependency, and it must be reformed. We should also eliminate the marriage penalty in the tax code. In addition, we should modernize 60-year-old labor laws to grant working parents the opportunity for flexible work schedules, so that families can spend more time with their children.

*[John Ashcroft](#) is a Republican senator from Missouri.*

**William A. Galston**  
***A Modest Role***

We should be appropriately modest about the role of government in promoting family stability. Current rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock birth reflect deep cultural changes over which law and public policy have limited influence. Still, there are some responsible steps government at various levels should take.

Reducing out-of-wedlock birth. In the past decade, several promising programs to reduce pregnancy among unmarried young people have been developed at the local level. The federal government should create -- or help the nonprofit sector create -- a clearinghouse to inventory these programs, evaluate them rigorously, and provide reliable information to states, localities, and community-based organizations. Since recent research suggests a connection between the welfare system and out-of-wedlock birth, welfare reform should permit states to adopt new policies that reduce perverse incentives.

Making marriage pay. The federal tax code tilts against families. To correct this, we should dramatically increase the dependent exemption for young children and do what we can to eliminate the marriage penalty. In addition, tax credits for education and training should be made available to parents who leave the paid work force for extended periods to care for young children and then seek to return.

Restricting divorce. States should reshape their laws of divorce to make divorce more difficult when minor children are involved. I favor the elimination of unilateral no-fault in such cases, with the alternative of a five-year waiting period. In addition, as Maggie Gallagher, Elizabeth Scott, and others have suggested, states should stand behind the premarital agreements of couples who wish to make their own marriages harder to dissolve than state law requires.

*[William A. Galston](#) is a professor at the [School of Public Affairs](#) at the University of Maryland at College Park, the director of the [Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy](#), and a former deputy assistant to President Clinton for domestic policy.*

**David Blankenhorn**  
*Find the Will*

Can government do anything to reverse the trend of fatherlessness? Yes. Reform no-fault divorce laws, eliminating the right to unilateral divorce on demand. Lengthen waiting periods for divorce. Create financial and other incentives for engaged couples to participate in marriage preparation and for couples with troubled marriages to get counseling.

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**Government should hire people who will publicly insist that unwed childbearing is wrong.**  
**-- David Blankenhorn**

Reform school curricula that trivialize or denigrate marriage. Stop the practice of mainstreaming pregnant girls and teen mothers through the school system. Prohibit boys who impregnate girls from participating in sports and other extracurricular school programs. Enforce statutory rape laws. Put the current welfare system out of its misery and replace it with public and private efforts, including faith-based initiatives, that embody effective compassion and promote marriage.

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Eliminate the antimarriage bias in the Earned Income Tax Credit. Increase the value of the marriage deduction in the tax code. Calculate child-oriented tax exemptions and credits on a per-parent basis -- that is, permit households with two parents twice the exemption and credit value of one-parent households.

Give priority to married couples in public housing. Reform adoption laws and procedures so that more children will be adopted, sooner, by married couples. Appoint and hire people who will publicly insist that unwed childbearing is wrong, that our divorce rate is far too high, and that our society should dedicate itself to increasing the proportion of our children who grow up with their two married parents.

The real question is not whether we know what would work, but whether we want to do what would work.

*David Blankenhorn is the president of the Institute for American Values and the author of [Fatherless America](#) ([HarperCollins](#)).*

**Dan Quayle**  
*Preserve, Protect, Defend the Family*

There is no question government has a role, albeit a minor one, to play in strengthening families. In recent years, the real problem in our society hasn't been so much that families have failed but that government has failed to act in the best interest of families. Some common-sense reforms would do much to correct the government's anti-family bias.

Taxes. The government could and should immediately repeal the marriage penalty, increase the tax exemption for children and index it for inflation, and repeal regulations prohibiting employers from paying "family wages." As a long-term solution, I support a modified flat tax that maintains the deductions for home mortgages and charitable giving.

Divorce. States should reassess their "no-fault" divorce laws, and make children's interests paramount in divorce proceedings.

Welfare. We should scrap our current system, which encourages illegitimacy and discourages work, in favor of new ways to help those truly in need. Senator Dan Coats's "Project for American Renewal" is a good place to start.

Adoption. The House of Representatives has passed reforms removing barriers to interracial adoption and making adoption easier in general. The Senate should pass this bill and send it to the president.

We also desperately need help from nongovernment institutions like the media and the entertainment community. They have a tremendous influence on our culture and they should join in when it comes to strengthening families.

*Dan Quayle, the 44th vice president of the United States, is the chairman of Campaign America.*

**Paul M. Weyrich**  
***Reverse an Anti-Marriage Bias***

In 1987, the Free Congress Foundation pioneered the development of cultural conservatism with a book called *Cultural Conservatism: Toward a New National Agenda*, by William S. Lind and William H. Marshner. This book suggests that, to strengthen American families, government could:

Raise the personal exemption (for dependents only) to its original, 1948 value, which in today's dollars would be more than \$6,000.

Make the child-care credit universal, so parents who care for their own children receive the same benefits as those who send their kids to day care.

Permit employers to offer a "family wage," that is, a higher wage to heads of families. The family wage was a major Victorian reform that was made illegal by a Department of Labor regulation issued in 1966.

Eliminate "no-fault" divorce.

Assign children their own guardian *ad litem* in any divorce proceeding. The guardian would represent the children's interest in having the parents stay together.

Limit cash welfare benefits to intact families and offer "matching grants" to heads of intact families with full-time jobs whose income is insufficient to support a family.

Fund programs in which volunteers build homes for sale (not rent) to the poor, with the proviso that these homes may only be sold to intact families.

Current government policies reflect a consistent bias against traditional families. The proposals above depend upon the willingness of those who make government policy to favor such families and regard them as

essential to the nation's future. In the face of the influence of "political correctness" (which is to say, cultural Marxism) in both political parties, that most basic change will be the most difficult to bring about.

*Paul M. Weyrich is the president of the [Free Congress Foundation](#).*

**Kay James**  
***Do No Harm***

Government's first obligation is to do no harm. For 60 years, Big Government has engaged in massive intrusion into the family -- with disastrous consequences. It is time to get out of the way.

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**Government should not grant no-fault divorces more readily than drivers' licenses**  
**-- Kay James**

What the government should not do has been obvious to conservatives for many years. It should not maintain a tax system that punishes two-parent families and forces both parents to work; it should not grant "no-fault" divorces more readily than drivers' licenses; and it should not maintain a welfare system that rewards illegitimacy and punishes women who get married.

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Ronald Reagan used to say that "government does not solve problems; it subsidizes them." Social engineering, whether done by liberals or conservatives, is still social engineering. Imagine the horrific programs the federal bureaucracy would create to "help" the family. First, it would redefine "family," then "mothers," then "fathers." Could they really even settle on a definition of a child?

*Kay James is the dean of the Robertson School of Government at [Regent University](#), in Virginia Beach, Virginia.*

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