

# **FAMLI**

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FATHERHOOD  
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**Brandon Lerch**

Wednesday, November 22, 2005

U.S. Senate Leadership  
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Frist:

Healthy marriage is a key ingredient in the well-being of children, adults, and society. The erosion of marriage during the past forty years has had vast negative effects throughout the nation and lies at the heart of many of the problems with which society and government currently grapple.

Today one third of all children are born outside marriage. Of those born inside marriage, a great many children will experience parental divorce before age 18. The erosion of marriage is the predominant cause of child poverty in our society. Marital decline is also the principal cause of welfare dependence; more than three quarters of means-tested welfare aid to children goes to single parent families.

Growing up without a father in the home has harmful long-term effects on children. Compared with similar children from intact families, children raised in single-parent homes are more likely to become involved in crime, to have emotional and behavioral problems, to fail in school, to abuse drugs, and to end up on welfare as adults.

Marriage brings benefits to adults as well as children. Extensive research shows that married adults are happier, are more productive on the job, earn more, have better physical and mental health, and live longer than their unmarried counterparts.

In recognition of the widespread benefits of marriage to individuals and society, the landmark federal welfare reform legislation enacted in 1996 set forth clear national goals: to increase the number of two-parent families and to reduce out-of-wedlock childbearing. Regrettably, in the years since this reform, most states have done little or nothing to directly advance these objectives.

Recognizing this shortcoming, President Bush has sought to fulfill the original goals of welfare reform by proposing a new model program to promote healthy marriage as a part of welfare reauthorization. The proposed program would seek to increase healthy marriage by providing individuals and couples with:

- Accurate information on the value of marriage in the lives of men, women, and children;
- Marriage-skills education that will enable couples to reduce conflict and increase the happiness and longevity of their relationship; and

- Experimental reductions in the financial penalties against marriage that are currently contained in all federal welfare programs.

The healthy marriage initiative would provide \$200 million per year in federal funds for marriage strengthening activities, but would not involve any new costs. All funds would be re-directed from existing TANF bonus funds that have proven ineffective.

All participation in the President's marriage program would be voluntary. Specific activities would include: marriage education and relationship skills training for unmarried low income couples prior to conception or at the time of childbirth; pre-marital education for engaged couples; and marriage enhancement and skills training for married couples to decrease the probability of divorce; and public education campaigns on the value of marriage and techniques to increase marital quality.

The initiative would utilize existing research-based marriage-skills education programs that have proven effective in decreasing conflict and increasing happiness and stability among couples. These skills can help unmarried couples who are likely to bear children out-of-wedlock to form happy stable marriages; they can also dramatically improve the quality of relationships of currently married couples.

For decades, government has ignored this vital institution. In low income communities, government welfare policy actively undermines marriage.

Tragically, government spends hundreds of billions each year to pick up the pieces when marriage fails, yet does virtually nothing to preserve or strengthen marriage. The healthy marriage initiative represents a bold departure from this pattern of failed policy: for the first time government will work to strengthen marriage. The new policy will address the root causes of social problems rather than palliating symptoms.

Despite its great promise, the healthy marriage initiative remains stalled in Congress. Over the last three years, the House has repeatedly enacted welfare reform reauthorization legislation which included the healthy marriage initiative; however, the Senate has consistently failed to act on welfare reform.

We urge the Senate to act on this vital issue immediately.

Sincerely,

*America's Foremost Healthy Marriage Experts and Advocates*

*(please see attached list of signers and their organizations)*

cc: The Office of Senator Harry Reid, Minority Leader  
The Office of Senator Mitch McConnell, Majority Whip  
The Office of Senator Richard Durbin, Minority Whip  
The Office of Senator Charles Grassley, Finance Committee Chairman  
The Office of Senator Max Baucus, Finance Committee Ranking Member  
The Office of Senator Mike Enzi, HELP Committee Chairman  
The Office of Senator Edward Kennedy, HELP Committee Ranking Member

Dr. Keith Wiebe	American Association of Christian Schools	Chattanooga, TN
Nisa Mohammed	Black Marriage Day	Washington, DC
Richard Bott, Sr. and Richard Bott II	Bott Radio Network	Overland Park, KS
Jim Comenzo	Creating Healthy Relationships	Philadelphia, PA
Thomas McClusky	Family Research Council	Washington DC
Peter Brandt	Focus on the Family	Colorado Springs, CO
Mark Buss	Marriage Matters of Iowa	Le Mars, IA
Leslee Unruh	National Abstinence Clearinghouse	Sioux Falls, SD
Addie Richburg	National Alliance of Faith and Justice	Washington, DC
Rev. Richard Cizik	National Association of Evangelicals	Washington, DC
David Popenoe	National Marriage Project	New Brunswick, NJ
Bob Reccord	National North American Missions Board	Alpharetta, GA
Dr. Frank Wright	National Religious Broadcasters	Manassas, VA
Don Adams	PAIRS Foundation (Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills)	Reston, VA
Rev. Herbert Lusk	People for People	Philadelphia, PA
Diane Sollee	Smart Marriages and Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education	Washington DC
Dr. Richard Land	Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission	Nashville, TN
Dr. Janice Shaw Crouse	The Beverly LaHaye Institute	Washington, DC
Kay Reed	The Dibble Fund	Berkeley, CA
Micah Clark	American Family Association of Indiana	Indianapolis, IN
Diane Gramley	American Family Association of Pennsylvania	Franklin, PA
Doug Stiegler	Association of Maryland Families	Pasadena, MD
Dr. Dinh Thang Nguyen	Boat People SOS	Falls Church, VA
Brett Williams	California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists	San Diego, CA
Dennis Stoica	California Healthy Marriages Coalition	Orange County, CA
Lori Odhner	Caring for Marriage	Bryn Athyn, PA
Larry Cirignano	CatholicVote.org	Boston, MA
Jay Laffoon	Celebrate Your Marriage	Alma, MI
Reverend William Owens	Coalition of African American Pastors	Memphis, TN
Barbara Foster	Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives	Tallahassee, FL
Ann Gries	Community Marriage Builders	Evansville, IN
Desmond Coffee	Community Marriage Initiative	Dover, NH
Karen Testerman	Cornerstone Policy Research	Concord, NH
Phillip Waugh	Covenant Marriage Movement	Forest, VA
Sandra Peterson	Delaware Healthy Marriage Coalition	Montchanin, DE
Julie Bock	Downriver Marriage Resource Center,	Riverview, MI
Rev. Graydon Jessup	Eastside Christian Church	Fullerton, CA
Vivian Koob	Elizabeth's New Life Center	Dayton, OH
LeRoy Thomas	Emmanuel MBC West	Dayton, OH
Carlos E. Salgado	enFAMILIA	Miami, FL
Tom Dressel	Every Marriage Matters	Oregon City, OR
David Bydalek	Family First	Lincoln, NE
Laurie Jenkins Anderson	Family Formation Project	Minneapolis, MN
Cynthia Dorman	Family Life Council	Greensboro, NC
Winnie Honeywell	Family Life Ministry	Houston, TX
Choong Keun Lee	Family Saver Center	Orange County, CA
George Doub	Family Wellness Associates	Scotts Valley, CA
John Stemberger	Florida Family Policy Council	Orlando, FL

Gloria M. Cavazos	Friendship of Women	Brownsville, TX
Kelly M. Rosati	Hawaii Family Forum	Kaneohe, HI
Teri L. Covert	Healthy Families San Angelo	San Angelo, TX
Carmela Treanor	Holy Family Cathedral	Orange, CA
Ryan McCann	Indiana Family Institute	Indianapolis, IN
Joy Kennel	Indiana State University Foundation	Terre Haute, IN
John Williams	Lasting Love Couples Learning Center	Clifton, NJ
Mark Gungor	Laugh Your Way America!	Stevens Point, WI
Elizabeth Lang-Arthur	Life Support	Darlington, SC
Wil & Jacquie Chevalier	LifeBranch Institute	Laguna Hills, CA
Richard T. McMillan	Lifeway Individual & Family Therapy	Yorba Linda, CA
Richard Albertson	Live the Life Ministries	Tallahassee, FL
Debbie Preece	Madison County Coalition for Healthy Marriages	Huntsville, AL
David L. Jamison	Marriage & Family Wellness Center	Rochester, MN
David & Claudia Arp	Marriage Alive International	Great Falls, VA
Dr. Rev. Edward Santana-Grace	Marriage and Family Education and Skills Training Institute	Bethlehem PA
Patty Howell & Ralph Jones	Marriage Education Institute	Leucadia, CA
Mark & Janet Frink	Marriage Enrichment	Newton, IA
Ron McLain	Marriage Mentoring Ministries	Pinedale, CA
Mike & Harriet McManus	Marriage Savers	Potomac, MD
Ken Schaefer	Married 4 Keeps	Santa Ana, CA
Judy Parejko	Mediation and Marriage Education Center	Menomonie, WI
Brad Snavely	Michigan Family Forum	Lansing, MI
Forest Thigpen	Mississippi Center for Public Policy	Jackson, MS
Dr. Craig Loving	Mountain View Lutheran Church	Thornton, CO
Ed & Gloria Beserra Jr	My Friend's House	Whittier, CA
Len Deo	New Jersey Family Policy Council	Parsippany, NJ
Dr. Andrew Behnke	North Carolina Latino Parent Education Network	Raleigh, NC
Norma Tilton	Our Father's Heart	Churchville, MD
Dr. Susan Heitler	Power of Two Marriage Skills Workshops	Denver, CO
Dr. Ric Solano and Dr. Rosemary Clarke	Relationship Co.	Albuquerque, NM
Dr. M.P. Wylie	Relationship Research Foundation	Irvine, CA
Kevin J. Kervick	Responsive Community Resources	Souderton, PA
Dr. Jim Le Shana	Rose Drive Friends Church	Yorba Linda, CA
Dr. Keith J. Edwards	Rosemead School of Psychology, Biola University	Los Angeles, CA
Dr. Carolyn Rich Curtis	Sacramento Healthy Marriage Project	Sacramento, CA
Kent Ostrander	The Family Foundation	Lexington, KY
Julaine K. Appling	The Family Research Institute of Wisconsin	Madison, WI
Susan Dutton Freund	The Foundation for a Great Marriage	De Pere, WI
Ruth Lambert	The Institute for Family Life and Preservation	Indianapolis, IN
Penny Hudson	The Marriage Education and Resource Center	LaGrange, KY
Dr. Tim Alan Gardner	The Marriage Institute	Westfield, IN
Aaron Larson	The National Healthy Marriage Institute	Vienna, VA
Dr. Bernard Guerney, Jr.	The National Institute of Relationship Enhancement	Bethesda, MD
Pat Ennis	The Third Option	Syracuse, NY
Anthony Walker	The Vann Institute	Manhattan, KS
Meg Haycraft	TWOgether	Skokie, IL
Melanie Reese	Utah Commission on Marriage	Salt Lake City, UT
Todd Molter	Whittier Area Community Church	Whittier, CA
Al Laws, Jr.	WIN Family Services	Baltimore, MD