

Supreme Court Considers Marriage Amendment Case MFF Files Amicus Brief in Defense of Marriage

The Michigan Supreme Court held a hearing in November to determine whether Michigan's voter-approved marriage amendment prohibits state employers from providing benefits to partners of same-sex employees. The ACLU filed the suit on behalf of twenty-one homosexual public employees arguing that voters intended only to protect the definition of marriage, not take away benefits from same-sex couples.

"The plaintiff's argument is unconvincing since it's impossible to know what voters may or may not have thought about the amendment's language," said MFF Executive Director Brad Snavely. "The Court must simply decide

whether the amendment's wording prohibits state-funded domestic partner benefits granted on the basis of a union similar to marriage. The amendment language, 'or similar union for any purpose,' was printed on the ballot and voters clearly approved of it by a strong majority."

The Supreme Court is expected to issue a ruling by the summer of 2008. In the meantime, some state employers, such as Michigan State University, have developed policies that still provide benefits for some

unmarried couples without recognizing a union "similar to marriage."

Michigan Family Forum, in conjunction with the Alliance Defense Fund, filed an Amicus (Friend of the Court) Brief in support of the marriage amendment. Visit our website, www.michiganfamily.org, to read the brief in its entirety.



Michigan Supreme Court

New Publication Available from MFF



The Marriage Resource Directory provides contact information and descriptions for organizations that provide marriage retreats, counseling and education programs. This new resource, which identifies both faith-based and secular programs, places a particular emphasis on southeast Michigan. Contact information for domestic violence programs is also included.

To order a copy of this, or other publications, see the enclosed response card.

2008 Top Priorities

- Project Open Arms Adoption Initiative
- Parental Rights Legislation
- Healthy Marriage Initiative
- Adoption Legislation
- Choose Freedom Abstinence Initiative

- 2 • AG Endorses MFF's "Family Guide to Internet Safety"
- Unmarried-Couple Adoption Bill Stalled
- Project Open Arms Launched
- 3 • Unmarried Household Study: Children at Risk
- Rights Restored in School Aid Law
- MFF Helps Form Abstinence Association
- 4 • Thank You, Rep. Moolenaar

AG Launches “CSI”, Endorses MFF “Family Guide to Internet Safety”



*Attorney General
Mike Cox*

Earlier this year, Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox launched a Cyber Safety Initiative, or “CSI”, designed to teach kids how to recognize the language of Internet predators and protect themselves online. Staff from the Attorney General’s office have been visiting school districts this fall to train teachers on the program. More than 80 districts have participated.

Michigan Family Forum recently updated our popular “Family Guide to Internet Safety” and the Attorney General has endorsed it as a useful tool for parents, teachers and community leaders. The Guide can be used as a complementary resource for families whose children participate in the Attorney General’s program.

Single copies are available free of charge by returning the enclosed response card or downloading from our website, www.michiganfamily.org. Bulk quantities are also available for a small charge to cover printing and shipping. Contact MFF’s office to request bulk copies.

“One in seven children who use computer chatrooms has been approached over the Internet by pedophiles. And nearly 90 percent of solicitations of youth were made in either chatrooms or through instant messaging.

Michigan Family Forum’s Family Guide to Internet Safety is an excellent resource to help you learn more about protecting your children.”

Attorney General Mike Cox

Same-Sex/Unmarried Couple Adoption Bill Stalled in House

HB 4259 is a bill introduced in the Michigan House that would allow two unmarried adults to legally adopt a child. The adults would not have to be related to each other, opening the door for cohabiting and same-sex couples to legally adopt children.

MFF has been one of the few groups speaking out against this legislation. While supporters of the bill continue to argue that its passage would be in the best interest of children in the state’s foster care system, MFF disagrees. “There is no evidence to suggest that allowing unmarried adults to adopt would significantly impact the number of

children in our foster care system,” said MFF Executive Director Brad Snavely. “Michigan should not retreat from the presumption that married parenting is best for children. We can aggressively seek adoptive homes for foster children without compromising this principle.”

Partly due to MFF’s willingness to speak out against this legislation, the bill has been stalled since being reported from the House Judiciary Committee in May. To view the bill, visit www.michiganlegislature.org and enter “4259” in the “Bill Number” field.

Project Open Arms Offers Hope for Orphans

Michigan Family Forum is partnering with Bethany Christian Services on an initiative to promote adoption in Michigan churches. “Project Open Arms” will seek to network churches together with Christian adoption agencies to help find homes for Michigan’s nearly 7,000 orphaned foster children.

The key components of the project include:

- Building a coalition of Christian organizations
- Orphan care advocacy in churches
- Facilitating adoptions.



“MFF believes every child is valuable and that the church needs to rise up and carry out the Scriptural mandate of James 1:27 to care for the orphans in our midst,” said MFF Executive Director Brad Snavely.

Several churches have already signed up to receive more information when it becomes available. If you are interested in promoting adoption in your church, please notify MFF using the enclosed response card.

THE FORUM

THE FORUM is published by Michigan Family Forum. MFF is a private, non-profit research and education organization dedicated to strengthening families in Michigan through sound public policies.

If you would like more information about Michigan Family Forum, or if you know of other people who would like a free subscription to THE FORUM, please call our office or visit our website.

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Study Confirms Unmarried Households Put Children at Risk

A recent Associated Press story entitled “Child Abuse the Dark Underbelly of Cohabitation” told the tragic story of three children who were murdered by their mother’s live-in boyfriend. “This is the dark underbelly of cohabitation,” said Brad Wilcox, a University of Virginia sociologist. “Cohabitation has become quite common, and most people think, ‘What’s the harm?’ The harm is we’re increasing a pattern of relationships that’s not good for children.”

The federal government’s methods for gathering child abuse statistics make it difficult to track exactly how many cases of abuse are at the hands of a stepparent or unmarried partner. However, studies have found that children living in households with unrelated adults are

nearly **50 times** (emphasis ours) as likely to die of inflicted injuries as children living with two biological parents. Some experts believe cohabiting households are more prone to violence because there is no established biological connection between the live-in adult and child or because some partners view the children as obstacles to their relationship with the child’s parent.

“It may be unpopular in today’s culture to say marriage is the ideal setting for raising a child,” said MFF Executive Director Brad Snavelly, “but clearly the evidence points to that fact. Kids deserve to be raised in a safe, loving and stable environment. The best chance for that to happen is within the context of marriage.”

“Of all the institutions of society, marriage is the most fundamental, most far-reaching and most vital. It preceded society; it made society possible; it binds society together. It is the basis of social order and improvement, and the chief support of morality, religion and law.”

Frank Gaylord Cook, Reform in the Celebration of Marriage, Atlantic Monthly, May, 1888

From MFF’s publication, “What Every Child Needs: The Unique Contributions of Fathers and Mothers.”

Parental Rights Provisions Restored in School Aid Law

In early 2007 when the budgeting process began for the state of Michigan, Dan Jarvis, MFF Director of Research and Public Policy, noticed a small but significant change to the appropriations bill for public schools. The governor’s executive budget proposal had removed language that prohibits schools from making abortion referrals or distributing contraceptives.

MFF and Right to Life of Michigan worked with lawmakers to ensure that the language was restored. We are pleased to report that the final bill recently signed by the governor



Rep. Bruce Caswell

retains the language prohibiting schools from this activity. After being alerted to this proposed change by MFF, Representative Bruce Caswell (R-Hillsdale) played a key role in restoring the language. “I am proud to have helped reinstate this language,” said Rep. Caswell. “These sensitive

decisions should be made by families, not institutions.”

Stay Informed!

A MEMBERSHIP OF MICHIGAN FAMILY FORUM
FORUM ONLINE

The FORUM ONLINE weekly email gives you a brief update on family-related issues.

A MEMBERSHIP OF MICHIGAN FAMILY FORUM
FORUM FLASH

The FORUM FLASH special alerts keep you informed on the latest legislative issues and gives you a quick and easy way to contact your local leaders.

To participate in these informative services, register in the Action Center on our website. Your information is confidential and will not be sold or distributed to outside parties.

www.michiganfamily.org

Abstinence Leaders Gather to Form Professional Association

MFF HELPS FOUND GROUP DEDICATED TO ADVANCING THE ABSTINENCE MOVEMENT IN MICHIGAN

Key leaders from the Michigan abstinence movement gathered in September to discuss the formation of a formal state wide abstinence education association. These leaders, many of whom have participated in Michigan Family Forum’s Peer Education Summits, were able to define key bylaws and put a structure in place for the association’s establishment. A Board of Directors has been nominated and is set to convene early in 2008.

The association will exist to provide long-term support, networking and up-to-date information to members of the abstinence movement. “A state-wide association is a goal that MFF has always had in its sights,” said MFF’s Dan Jarvis, “and it’s great to see this dream become reality. This association can provide unity, support and structure, and in turn influence, to the incredibly important abstinence movement and message.”

Standing on Principle

At Michigan Family Forum, we strive to promote a positive, principled, pro-family agenda based on sound public policy.

Our "Putting Families First" agenda includes 22 recommendations to strengthen the family. Many of these proposals are being embraced by lawmakers and some will eventually be enacted into law. Over our 17 year history, dozens of our ideas have passed with bipartisan support in the House and Senate. While we're proud of this record, our most effective work is often done behind the scenes, stopping or altering bills that would undermine the family. There are two examples from 2007.

First, we led an effort to stop legislation to require a vaccine for the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) for all sixth-grade girls. After legislators heard from MFF and concerned

parents, sponsors chose a more parent friendly approach - withdrawing their mandate in favor of a voluntary, "information only" bill. This will allow families to make the best decision for their child - free from government interference.



Second, MFF rescued an important parental rights protection in the law. While researching the Governor's budget our Public Policy Director, Dan Jarvis, noticed that language prohibiting schools from making abortion referrals or distributing contraceptives had been removed. Once this omission was discovered, we worked to restore this critical provision.

The foundation for these successes was laid back in 1995, when MFF helped pass a law affirming parental rights. The law simply says, "It is the natural, fundamental right of parents and legal guardians to direct the care and education of their children."

This statement expresses an important societal value – the presumption that parents, not government, know what's best for their children. Every time we defend parental rights, we build on this principle.

As we look ahead to future battles over the institution of marriage, the redefinition of parenthood, and the coarsening of our culture, we will continue to stand on principle. I hope I can count on you to stand with us in these battles.

If you believe in the values we are defending, I invite you to prayerfully consider investing in our work this year. If you already support MFF, thank you – you are helping us make a significant difference!

May God richly bless you and your family now and throughout 2008!

Brad Snavelly

*Brad Snavelly
Executive Director*

MFF needs your support

Michigan Family Forum is a 501c3 organization funded by donations from involved, caring people like you. If you can help financially support MFF's efforts to strengthen families in Michigan, please return the enclosed donation card with your contribution or give us a call at (800) 644-9111.

MFF also offers an on-line giving option. Visit www.michiganfamily.org and click on the MasterCard/Visa logo.



Packed with research and helpful information, MFF's Family Resource Guides are valuable tools in addressing marriage and family issues. Check out these and other resources on our website, www.michiganfamily.org, or order a copy on the enclosed card.

FAMILY GUIDE TO INTERNET SAFETY

SEX EDUCATION: Rights and Responsibilities in Michigan Law

MICHIGAN ADOPTION RESOURCE GUIDE

Thank You

MFF would like to thank Rep. John Moolenaar for his leadership in planning the recent "Bella" Movie and



Dinner event in Lansing, which was co-sponsored by MFF. Thirty-eight legislators, spouses and key staff members enjoyed this inspirational evening. Thank you, Rep. Moolenaar!