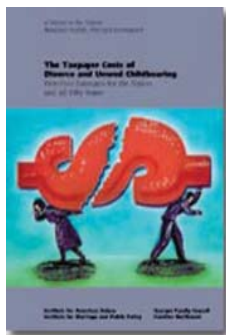


## New Study Details High Cost of Family Breakdown

A coalition of four family policy groups recently released the results of a new study showing that family breakdown is costing Michigan \$1.5 billion annually. “The Taxpayer Costs of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing” includes extensive research, public policy recommendations, methodology explanations and data tables for the nation and each state.



“This study documents for the first time, that divorce and unwed childbearing – besides being bad for children – are also costing taxpayers a ton of money,” said David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute for American Values. “Even small improvements in the health of

marriage in America would result in enormous savings to taxpayers.”

MFF issued a press release outlining the impact on Michigan taxpayers. “Marriage is a private relationship, but there is also a profound public dimension involved,” said Executive Director Brad Snavelly. “This report confirms what we’ve known for years – that our state benefits greatly from stable marriages and that we’re paying a high price for family fragmentation.”

The report also conservatively estimates that marriage would lift 60-percent of impoverished households out of poverty. Families in the

U.S. and Michigan that are considered impoverished by the Census Bureau are overwhelmingly headed by single parents – usually a female.

“There are three important conclusions from this report,” said Snavelly. “First, marriage is more than a personal, private relationship – it is also an important public good – which has a profound impact on both our personal and public life. Second, there is an undeniably strong correlation between unmarried households and poverty. Finally, it is proper for government leaders to seek ways to encourage healthy marriages and discourage family fragmentation.”

Download the report and view MFF’s press release at [www.michiganfamily.org](http://www.michiganfamily.org).

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## Churches Respond to Foster Care Crisis

MFF has partnered with Bethany Christian services to promote adoption in churches throughout the state. “Project Open Arms” seeks to educate churchgoers about the importance of the Biblical call to care for the orphans of our state.



A brochure is available that contains information about the initiative. MFF will be contacting pastors and churches in the coming months with more details. Visit our website to download the brochure, or contact our office at (517) 374-1171 for more information.

## 2008 Top Priorities

- Project Open Arms Adoption Initiative
- Parental Rights Legislation
- Healthy Marriage Initiative
- Adoption Legislation
- Michigan Association for Sexual Health

## Contraceptive Distribution and Abortion Referral in Schools

Governor Jennifer Granholm removed language from the K-12 education budget bill that penalizes schools if they provide contraceptives to minors or make abortion referrals. This is the second time in two years that the Governor has removed the language that has been Michigan law for over 20 years.

Senator Ron Jelinek, chair of the Senate Appropriations committee that approves school budgets, restored the language. The legislation now goes to the House for consideration. Michigan Family Forum and Right to Life of Michigan helped restore this provision in 2007 and we will continue to strive to see this language reinstated again this year.

“To the extent that the decline of marriage increases the number of children and adults eligible for and in need of government services, costs to taxpayers will grow. To the extent that increases in family fragmentation also independently drive social problems faced by communities - such as crime, domestic violence, substance abuse, and teen pregnancy - the costs to taxpayers of addressing these increasing social problems are likely to be significant.”

*Excerpt from “The Taxpayer Costs of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing”*

## Senate Considers Prison Reforms Targeting Incarcerated Parents

The Michigan Department of Corrections Appropriations Bill may include approval of a pilot program developed by the Salvation Army to reduce recidivism and keep incarcerated parents connected to their children. Michigan Family Forum is working with Senator Alan Cropsey’s office to include the program in the 2007-08 corrections budget.



Steve Johnson

“For many years, MFF has proposed this kind of programming in our legislative agenda. When we found out about the Salvation Army’s work in this area, it was a natural fit with what we were attempting to do legislatively,” said MFF’s Brad Snavely. “Incarcerated parents, especially fathers, often lose contact with their children and family support system. Society

as a whole benefits when families remain intact and fathers stay connected with their children - even while incarcerated. Results include lower rates of crime and recidivism.”

Michigan faces skyrocketing prison costs and leads the Midwestern states in dollars spent on corrections. Lawmakers, including Senator Cropsey, have expressed interest in reforming Michigan’s corrections system to bring costs more in line with other Midwestern states while finding ways to reduce recidivism.

Working in cooperation with the Michigan Department of Corrections, the Salvation Army program is designed to provide life skills training with an emphasis on fatherhood, helping inmates utilize the support of their families. “Where possible, supervised family visits would establish a new support system, making it less likely a man would become a repeat offender,” according to Stephen Johnson, correctional ministries director for The Salvation Army Eastern Michigan Division.

## Author and Marriage Educator Trains Ministry/Community Leaders

Dr. John Van Epp, author of “How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk (or Jerkette)” and developer of the “P.I.C.K.-a-Partner” pre-marital education program, recently trained a group of ministry and community leaders in Dearborn. More than 50 participants learned how to offer practical guidance and tools for finding a compatible mate. MFF coordinated the training on behalf of the Michigan Healthy Marriage Coalition.

“The turnout at these MFF-sponsored trainings has been outstanding,” said Dr. Van Epp. “It’s encouraging that so many individuals will have the tools and training to help prepare couples for stable marriages. The communities they serve and Michigan as a whole will benefit when couples learn how to communicate effectively and handle conflict in their marriages.”

## 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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## House Considers Bill to Balance Rights of Adopted Children/Birth Parents

Rep. Lisa Wojno has introduced a bill to clarify the rights of adopted children and their birth parents. HB 4896 would allow an adopted child access to their sealed birth record from the state once they reach the age of 21. However, birth parents could also choose to file a "Contact Preference Form" as part of the child's sealed birth record. The form would give the birth parent(s) the option of open contact, contact through an intermediary, or the right to refuse contact at the time of the form's filing. It also establishes the location (Central Adoption Registry)



Rep. Lisa Wojno

where the birth parent can register if they choose to seek contact in the future.

"Connecting adopted children with their birth parent(s) is an important goal, but it can be a complex process," said Michigan Family Forum Director of Public Policy Dan Jarvis. "Michigan Family Forum supports this effort by Rep. Wojno because it seeks to find common ground by protecting privacy rights while at the same time simplifying the process for both adopted children and birth parents."

## 2008 Voter Education Initiative

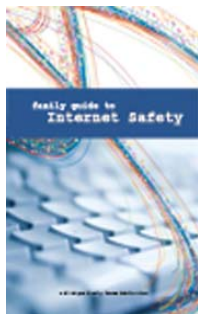
As the 2008 election approaches, Michigan Family Forum is again gearing up to educate voters in Michigan on key issues of importance to the family. Our popular Voter Guide is expected to be available in October. This comprehensive, non-partisan publication includes candidate profiles and answers to a set of questions dealing with family issues as well as other topics relevant to the current election. The voter guide is a unique resource in helping determine which candidates will best represent a voter's values.

Michigan Family Forum also has kits available for churches wishing to host a Voter Registration Drive. The kit includes promotional materials, registration forms, and instructions for hosting a registration drive in your church as well as other resources to help promote responsible Christian citizenship.

To request any or all of these materials, fill in the correct sections of the enclosed response card and return it to MFF in the enclosed envelope or email [info@michiganfamily.org](mailto:info@michiganfamily.org).

## New Publication Helping Families

Michigan Family Forum's updated "Family Guide to Internet Safety" has proven to be a popular item. MFF has received numerous requests for printed copies of the booklet. Many users have indicated they are especially pleased that the Guide incorporates information about text-messaging and social networking sites. Other popular sections include those that contain step-by-step instructions for monitoring Internet use and establishing safety settings.



"We're pleased that so many churches, families, and schools are benefiting from the Internet Safety Guide," said MFF Executive Director Brad Snively. "We're also delighted that it has received the endorsement of Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox."

The Guide is available for free on MFF's website. Bulk copies are available for \$1.00 each plus shipping. Contact the MFF office at (517) 374-1171 to request bulk copies.

## Michigan Association for Sexual Health

The Michigan Association of Sexual Health recently received incorporation status and is moving forward in an official capacity. MASH is a state-wide organization aimed at networking, educating and promoting abstinence education programs. The board is comprised of eight representatives from across Michigan and is currently led by president Sara Keeler of Bethany Christian Services. MFF's Dan Jarvis is serving as chairman of the board and Stefan Hull as secretary.

## Stay Informed!

### FORUM ONLINE

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

### 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](http://www.michiganfamily.org)

## Hope vs. Despair

When it comes to the debate over the declining state of marriage and the family, two general perspectives have emerged – one offers hope, the other despair.

The evidence is overwhelming – marriage offers undeniable benefits for adults, children and all of society. Studies continue to confirm that marriage is an important public institution with far-reaching implications. The critical question is: How will we respond?

Consider some of the ways family fragmentation impacts society:

**Schools** According to the Educational Testing Service, a student's achievement is linked to four factors: single parent families, parents reading to young children, hours in front of a television and frequency of school absences.

**Poverty** Over 76 percent of the Michigan families living in poverty (totaling nearly

750,000 people) reside in unmarried households.

**Prisons** Studies have consistently shown that 80-85 percent of our prisoners were raised in a fatherless home and children of prisoners are 4-6 times more likely to be incarcerated themselves.

Some say, "There's nothing we can do to change the decline of marriage and the family. We simply have to figure out how to deal with the problems of the new American family." In other words, there's no reason to resist family disintegration – we should just plan to build more prisons, create a bigger safety net for the poor, and hope children become high achievers with less parental support. Considering the personal pain and the public cost (\$1.5 billion) of family fragmentation, that sounds like a recipe for despair!

At MFF, we offer a more hopeful response. We believe that with a little encourage-

ment the next generation will make smarter choices about their relationships. With some support, adults struggling in their marriages will find the strength to survive. When challenged, fathers will turn their hearts back to their children. Just as there is hope for families willing to work through the hard times, there is also hope for a society willing to reject the idea that family decline is inevitable.

The personal pain and public costs of family breakdown compel us to act. We don't have to agree on every solution, but doing nothing should not be one of them!

Will you help us offer hope to the next generation? We value your commitment to support MFF with your prayers and financial support.

Thank you for standing with us in this critical time for our state and nation.

*Brad Snavely*

*Brad Snavely  
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](http://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](http://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