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Marriage Breakdown Costs Taxpayers at Least \$112 Billion a Year First-Time Research Reveals Staggering Annual Taxpayer Costs for Divorce and Unwed Childbearing

WASH. D.C. In first-ever research, a new report quantifies a minimum \$112 billion annual taxpayer cost from high rates of divorce and unmarried childbearing. It identifies national, state and local costs which account for more than \$1 trillion in the last decade. This landmark scholarly study, entitled “The Taxpayer Costs of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing: First-Ever Estimates for the Nation and All 50 States,” was released on April 15th at the National Press Club by four renowned policy and research groups—Institute for American Values, Georgia Family Council, Institute for Marriage and Public Policy, and Families Northwest.

“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 a small improvement in the health of marriage in America would result in enormous savings to taxpayers,” he continued. “For example, a 1 percent reduction in rates of family fragmentation would save taxpayers \$1.1 billion.”

“These costs are due to increased taxpayer expenditures for anti-poverty, criminal justice and education programs, and through lower levels of taxes paid by individuals whose adult productivity has been negatively affected by increased childhood poverty caused by family fragmentation,” said principal investigator Ben Scafidi, Ph.D., economics professor at Georgia College & State University.

“Prior research shows that marriage lifts single mothers out of poverty and therefore reduces the need for costly social benefits,” said Scafidi. “This new report shows that public concern about the decline of marriage need not be based only on ‘moral’ concerns, but that reducing high taxpayer costs of family fragmentation is a legitimate concern of government, policymakers and legislators, as well as community reformers and faith communities.”

“This report now provides the basis for a national consensus that strengthening marriage is a legitimate policy concern,” said Blankenhorn. “The report’s numbers represent an extremely cautious estimate, a lower-bound figure, and have been vetted by a group of distinguished scholars and economists who have attached their names as advisors to this report.”

“These numbers represent real people and real suffering,” said Randy Hicks, president of Georgia Family Council. “Both economic and human costs make family fragmentation a legitimate public concern. Historically, Americans have resisted the impulse to surrender to negative and hurtful trends. We fight problems like racism, poverty and domestic violence because we understand that the stakes are high. And while we’ll never eliminate divorce and unwed childbearing entirely, we can certainly be doing more to help marriages and families succeed.”

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