

A \$112 Billion Carrot

By Jim and Audora Burg

Family fragmentation, specifically divorce and unmarried childbearing, costs U.S. taxpayers more than \$112 billion annually. That's the staggering outcome of research released Tuesday, to coincide with tax day.



The study was conducted by four policy and research groups, including Institute for American Values and Georgia Family Council.

The report, “The Taxpayer Costs of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing: First-Ever Estimates for the Nation and All 50 States,” breaks down the total by state. Michigan ranked eighth in the nation, with a \$1.6 billion share of that \$112 billion price tag.

Researchers’ estimates of the federal, state and local costs to taxpayers arising from family fragmentation include funds spent for the justice system, food stamps, housing assistance, Medicaid, child welfare, WIC, Head Start, and school lunch and breakfast programs.

“These numbers represent real people and real suffering,” said Randy Hicks, president of Georgia Family Council, in the press release. “We fight problems like racism, poverty and domestic violence because we understand that the stakes are high.”

Those “stakes” are the real people hurt by family fragmentation, especially the women and children who fall into poverty as a result of divorce or unmarried childbearing.

In Michigan, of the 469,000 children living in poverty, 316,000 of them live in a single-mother household.

Potential risks to children raised in those families, in addition to poverty, include mental and physical illness, infant mortality, lower educational attainment, juvenile delinquency, conduct disorders, adult criminality, and early unwed parenthood.

That’s grim. But there is hope, both from the economic standpoint as well as the

social.

According to the report, "even very small increases in stable marriage rates would result in very large returns to taxpayers. For example, a mere 1 percent reduction in rates of family fragmentation would save taxpayers \$1.1 billion annually."

How might "reduction in rates of family fragmentation" be achieved? Consider the medical paradigm and the documented benefits of preventive medicine. The old aphorism, "an apple a day keeps the doctor away," is well-accepted folk medicine. Measures can be taken to preserve health, to prevent illness. That's in the physical realm.

Might it also be true in the family realm? Perhaps more so. Funds are being spent essentially after the fact, to pick up the pieces of broken families. What if some of that money were allocated as an up-front investment in strengthening existing marriages and interventions for families in crisis?

That's happening in Texas, for one. The report cites that state's recent two-year, \$15 million appropriation for marriage education and related marriage programs.

That's a lot of money, yes, but compared to Texas' nearly \$3 billion share of that \$112 billion? Chump change, with a staggering return on investment ratio.

Feedback posted to Journal's Web site:

I blame the system wrote on Apr 21, 2008 8:37 AM:

" It's too easy for people to get on Welfare. They should have to be drug tested on a regular basis. I get so tired of working my butt off to support people who sit around at home just having babies that we have to pay for. They should have to get a job within so many months or get kicked off Welfare all together. I was a single mom for a while, because my HUSBAND cheated on me and then filed for divorce. Our son was only 18 months old at the time. I didn't run to welfare either. I worked at my same job and lived in the house. He left. That's what he wanted. So don't point the finger at women. Men do the same stuff to. There are just as many Dead Beat Dads as there are Dead Beat Moms. You can't point the finger a one gender. It takes two to tango! "

patriotdad2004@yahoo.com wrote on Apr 20, 2008 7:24 AM:

" Many of the costs of divorce are the incentives for women to divorce. The problem is a problem of faithless women not faithless or abusive men. Women file for divorce 70 to 85% of the time. The U.S.Dept of Health website says that real abuse is present in only 6 -8% if homes. Women are rewarded for faithlessness.

20 - 40% of children born to wedded couples are not the husband's biological children. Address the incentives and the role of faithless women and we will greatly reduce the costs.

Single motherhood is the single greatest form of abuse of children. 95% of men and almost 100% of women in our prison systems come from single mother homes (remember who files for divorce most). The same commonality, singlemother homes, skyrocket the bad outcomes for children. Those children are many times more likely to be drug addicts, prostitutes, welfare mother, mentally ill, abused, molested and murdered. And our government actually incentivizes divorce through social security funds used to imprison fathers who are sick, hurt, etc.. How does that help the children or costs. Education has not worked in Texas. Look at thenumbers. "

Robert Gartner wrote on Apr 19, 2008 9:02 AM:

" Both my children were conceived with a lie, e.g. they got pregnant on purpose. Both knew the systems in place to "help" these pregnant women, e.g. most of those mentioned in the article. Both knew they would get free 'help' from the states attorney generals,(AG), in my case, Texas, to undermine and destroy any continuing relationship a father, me, would have with his children. Both knew they would not be questioned as to their fitness-to-parent by this same AG. Both knew a father would be put into financial bondage because of their actions.

Funny, it has taken this long, especially taking a rear view of the so called Welfare Reform Act of 1996. THis act failed to account for the government's own role in the destruction of family and humanity. It failed to account for and own the indoctrination to the commodification of babymaking, instead in its DENIAL choosing to coin a new term, the Deadbeat DAD, and thus shame him with posters on billboards, cereal boxes, and pizza trays.

Some solutions to this part of the end of America are simple. The government should tell these women that half the childs' time and life will be offered to its father. outofspace... "