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IMPROVING FAMILY STABILITY FOR THE WELL-BEING OF AMERICAN CHILDREN

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TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2020

UNITED STATES CONGRESS,
JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:15 p.m., in Room 106, Hart Senate Office Building, Hon. Mike Lee, Chairman, presiding.

Representatives present: Beyer, Schweikert, and Herrera Beutler.

Senators present: Lee.

Staff present: Robert Bellafiore, Carly Eckstrom, Sol Espinoza, Harry Gural, Colleen Healy, Beila Leboeuf, Rachel Sheffield, Kyle Treasure, Emily Volk, Scott Winship.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. MIKE LEE, CHAIRMAN, A U.S. SENATOR FROM UTAH

Chairman Lee. Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us today for this hearing of the Joint Economic Committee. Today's hearing is going to focus on one of the most important topics that we could ever cover, and that relates to the most fundamental unit of society, which is the family.

As most members of this Committee are certainly aware, the American family is in a precarious state. Although the vast majority of Americans still desire to marry, the marriage rate has declined. And it has been declining for decades, and stable family life has disappeared for millions and millions of American children.

The trends in family life in America are a little concerning. Whereas just 5 percent of children were born to unmarried mothers in 1960, 40 percent of children are born to unmarried mothers today. Meanwhile, 30 percent of children today live without one or both parents, twice the proportion of children that lived without one or both parents 50 years ago.

Over the past few years, the Social Capital Project within the Joint Economic Committee has worked to document these trends in American associational life, that is defined as the web of social relationships through which we pursue joint endeavors—our families, communities, workplaces, and religious congregations.

The Project recognizes the family as a crucial source of these relationships, which is why our policy agenda aims to make it more affordable to raise a family, and to increase the number of children raised in happily married families.

While the Project has often emphasized the social value that stable family life provides, the declines in family stability have economic, physical, and emotional consequences as well that are very significant for those affected.

For a variety of reasons, children raised in single-parent families are far more likely to experience child poverty, less likely to graduate from high school or attend college, and less likely to be connected to the labor force as adults.

In addition, children raised in single-parent families are less likely to have positive relationships with their parents, and are far more likely to experience physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.

Conversely, children raised by two married parents in a healthy relationship are likely to be happier, healthier, and better prepared for life. This of course does not define every circumstance, and one should not deem oneself subject to one fate or another depending on one's family circumstances.

Nevertheless, the statistics are informative and we should look to draw from them. The positive outcomes associated with stable home life are outcomes that Americans want for all children, regardless of their background and regardless of the home that they happen to have been born into.

But, tragically, the decline of the family is concentrated among some vulnerable groups, including minorities, and lower-income families. For example, over two-thirds of births to Black mothers, and over half of births to Hispanic American mothers, occur outside of marriage. And minority women are much more likely to see their marriages end in divorce.

Meanwhile, two-thirds of births among non-college educated women occur outside marriage, and non-college educated adults are also less likely to stay married once they have gotten married, if they have gotten married.

Although these trends are most stark for certain disadvantaged groups, they affect us all. What factors have driven these declines is something that we need to ask. What is it that has driven these declines in American family stability?

Well, the breakdown of the family is at least partly caused by cultural changes that have reverberated throughout our society, including changing romantic norms that led to greater relationship ambiguity, cultural individualism that too often emphasizes the desires of individuals over the well-being of the family, and the retreat from religion which is one of the strongest supports of marriage and family life.

But while cultural factors may have contributed to declining marriage rates over time, the Federal Government has also played an active role. For example, our government penalizes marriage through the welfare system and the tax code. And in some cases, through the way that the tax code and the welfare system happen to interact.

Our Federal Government should not be in the business of punishing marriage. Instead, it should support policies that strengthen marriage, and thus improve the likelihood of family stability for children.

State and local leaders should also seek ways to strengthen marriage and increase family stability. At a bare minimum, govern-

ment should have as its object not to discourage or punish marriage under any circumstances.

Some of us have been working toward that goal. Today we will hear from expert panelists who will speak to the state of the American family and discuss various policies and solutions for some of the current challenges facing families. I look forward to hearing their testimonies on this crucial topic.

And I now recognize our new Vice Chair, Mr. Beyer, for his opening remarks, and congratulate him on his selection as Vice Chair.

[The prepared statement of Chairman Lee appears in the Submissions for the Record on page 40.]

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DONALD BEYER JR., VICE CHAIR, A U.S. REPRESENTATIVE FROM VIRGINIA

Vice Chairman Beyer. Thank you, Chairman Lee, very much.

This is my first hearing as Vice Chair of the Joint Economic Committee. I feel very privileged to be a member of the Committee and have the opportunity to work on issues that are of real importance to most Americans. I would like to thank former Vice Chair Carolyn Maloney for her leadership, and I would really like to thank Chairman Lee for his hard work, his commitment, and his collegiality. I look forward to working with you.

Today we are focused on family stability and the connection to the well-being of American children. We all share a commitment to the same goal: delivering the best outcome for children, families, and the economy. And the question is: How do we get there?

I feel so fortunate listening to Chairman Lee's statistics about having a 33-year marriage, and 4 kids and 2 grandkids, I am completely committed to, and I am really lucky that they all still live right here in the Metropolitan Area.

I want to start with the good news. Teen pregnancy, which leads to poor health and poor economic outcomes for mothers and children is at an all-time low. Between 1991 and 2015, the teen birth rate dropped by almost two-thirds, thanks at least in part to the Affordable Care Act. This is an issue I have worked on for many years. I think we can all feel good about the substantial progress that has been made.

Part of the impetus for today's hearing may be that marriage rates have declined in the past several decades. A good portion of that decline is the result of economic challenges. If you are struggling financially, your wages have not gone up and you have lost your job, getting married is neither feasible nor practical. Perhaps less noticed is that divorce rates have also been falling. Since its peak in the 1980s, the divorce rate has fallen to a 40-year low.

Young Americans today want to get their economic footing before they get married. They correctly understand that they must get an education or training to achieve financial success. They want to get a firm foothold on a career and earn a degree of financial stability.

Again, I have a daughter almost 28. She has been dating the same guy for 6 years. Their wedding date is still a year-and-a-half away, as they try to get established and get their feet on the ground. But the longer they wait to get married, it is not because they are anti-marriage, it is because they are pragmatic. They are

pro-success. They are adapting the current conditions, not wishing for a return to the past.

And the reality is that the traditional male breadwinner model of the past failed to work for so many, as wages have stagnated and the cost of housing and college have soared higher and higher.

My friends on the other side sometimes talk about the so-called "breakdown of family" and "increase in households headed by single mothers." It is true that as people delay marriage, there are more babies born to unmarried parents, and that holds across demographic groups and race. And it is true in the United States and elsewhere.

What the research also shows is that children raised by loving adults do well. There are lots of loving and supporting arrangements. It is also true that fathers today spend significantly more time caring for their children than in previous generations. I know I changed many more diapers than my father did. In fact, three times as much as in 1965.

On average, the households with the highest incomes are married with both spouses working. But not every household is going to look like that, and the government should be working to support children in all types of families, especially those with access to only limited financial resources.

The real challenges facing families—whether they live in small rural communities, or large metro areas—are economic. Forty-four percent of workers earn just $18,000. And many are working two and three jobs. Millions of American families are one accident, one car breakdown, one trip to the emergency room away from financial crisis or ruin.

When people are living paycheck to paycheck, when wages are basically where they were 40 years ago, is it any wonder that adults postpone marriage?

Step number one, then, is to do more to help people build their financial base. Increase the minimum wage. Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit. Provide affordable, quality child care. Protect nutritional supports. Ensure workers have real bargaining power to negotiate wage increases, predictable hours, and better working conditions.

We know that children from families who benefit from expanded Earned Income Tax Credit are more likely to graduate high school and enroll in college. And, similarly, access to SNAP leads to better educational and health outcomes. If we care about child outcomes, we should invest in programs that drive those outcomes higher.

Making paid family leave a reality for women and men will be another important step. I am very pleased that our Congress recently adopted the National Defense Authorization Act which gave Federal workers 12 weeks paid leave to care for a newborn or adopted child. And I am looking forward to expanding that to the private sector.

Finally, part of the challenge for families is our government has not kept pace with the way people are living their lives. For example, the share of multi-generational households is growing, but our policies have not changed. Grandparents, aunts and uncles are taking care of kids, and they are often doing it because the cost of child care is unbelievable. And they are doing a great job.

But often they cannot access family leave or food assistance, or other important supports that would help. We need to catch up.

I thank all the witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to your testimony.

[The prepared statement of Vice Chair Beyer appears in the Submissions for the Record on page 40.]

Chairman Lee. Thank you, Mr. Vice Chairman. I would now like to introduce our very distinguished panel of witnesses.

First we have Dr. Brad Wilcox. Director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, a Visiting Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, and a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Family Studies.

Dr. Wilcox's research focuses on marriage, fatherhood, and cohabitation, specifically examining how family structure, civil society, and culture influence the quality and stability of family life. He is the author of multiple research studies and books. His research has been featured in numerous outlets, including The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Atlantic, Slate, NPR, and NBS's Today Show.

Welcome, Dr. Wilcox.

Next we have Ms. Kay Hymowitz, who is the William E. Simon Fellow at the Manhattan Institute, and a Contributing Editor at City Journal.

Ms. Hymowitz writes extensively on childhood and family issues, poverty, and cultural change in America. Her writing has appeared in The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The New Republic, and numerous other outlets.

Ms. Hymowitz sits on the board of The Journal's National Affairs and The Future of Children, and has been interviewed on numerous radio and TV programs.

Welcome, Ms. Hymowitz.

Next we have Dr. Betsey Stevenson, who is a Professor of Public Policy and Economics at the University of Michigan. She served as a member of The Council of Economic Advisers from 2013 to 2015 where she advised President Obama on social policy, labor markets, and trade issues. And she served as the Chief Economist at the U.S. Department of Labor from 2010 to 2011. Dr. Stevenson's research explores women's labor market experiences and the economic forces shaping modern families. She is a columnist for Bloomberg View, and her analysis of economic data and the economy are frequently covered in both print and television media.

Welcome, Dr. Stevenson.

And we have Dr. Rashawn Ray, who is a Rubenstein Fellow at the Brookings Institute, and Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Dr. Ray's research focuses on racial and social inequality with a particular focus on police-driven relations and men's treatment of women. Dr. Ray has published over 50 books, articles, and book chapters. He has written for media outlets such as The New York Times, Huffington Post, and NBC News, and has appeared on C–SPAN, MSNBC, Al Jazeera, NPR, and Fox.

Thank you for being here today, Dr. Ray.

We appreciate all of you joining us here today, and you are now recognized for your testimony. We will have you speak in the order that you were introduced.

Dr. Wilcox, you are first.

STATEMENT OF DR. W. BRADFORD WILCOX, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL MARRIAGE PROJECT AND PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA

Dr. Wilcox. Thank you. Chairman Lee, Vice Chair Beyer, distinguished members of the Committee, there is good news and bad news to report about marriage and family life in America.

The good news is, as Figure 1 in my testimony indicates, is divorce is down dramatically since 1980. What is more, non-marital childbearing has also reversed course since the Great Recession. Less divorce and less non-marital childbearing equal more children being raised in intact married families, as Figure 2 shows.

Also, this uptick has been strongest for Black children, as we see in Figure 3. That is kind of the good news from my testimony today.

The bad news is, the Nation still remains deeply divided when it comes to family structure and family stability. Single parenthood is about twice as high for children from families with less education, and for Black children. This form of family inequality leaves many working class and poor children doubly disadvantaged, navigating life with less money, and an absent parent.

This family inequality is rooted in shifts in our economy, our culture, and our public policy. We know, for instance, that men without college degrees have seen their spells of unemployment climb in recent years, undercutting their marriageability. Since the 1960s, American culture has de-emphasized the values of virtues that sustain strong marriages in the name of a kind of expressive individualism.

Declines in religious and secular civic engagement have been concentrated among working class and poor Americans, robbing these families of the social support they need to thrive and endure.

Finally, as Joe Price at BYU and I have shown, means-tested programs from the Federal Government often end up penalizing marriage among lower-income families today, particularly working class families.

This family divided America matters because the American Dream is in much better shape when marriage anchors the lives of children and the communities they grow up in. My use of the term "marriage" here is deliberate. No family arrangement besides marriage affords kids as much stability as does this institution, as Figure 4 indicates.

Now I cannot here summarize the voluminous literature on family and child well-being, but suffice it to say that children are more likely to thrive in school, and steer clear of poverty when their parents are married. And Figure 5 tells the score on the latter point.

Family structure also matters to our communities. Scholarship by Harvard economist Raj Chetty and his colleagues tell us that neighborhoods with more two-parent families are significantly more likely to foster rags-to-riches mobility for poor kids.

In all these ways, the research tells us that the American Dream is much stronger in communities with more married families—communities like the ones the Chairman and the Vice Chair hail from.

Unfortunately, many communities today do not have the family stability found in Alpine, Utah, or Old Town Alexandria. So what should we do to renew marriage in communities where family life has become more fragile?

The first thing we should do is to end marriage penalties in our means-tested programs. Currently, such penalties in programs such as Medicaid and the ITC can reach as high as 32 percent for a family's total income. This is unconscionable.

Congress should eliminate these penalties by doubling income thresholds for programs serving low-income married families.

The second thing that we should do is to strengthen career and technical education, recognizing that most young adults today will not get a four-year college degree. Our education system devotes far too little attention to this group. We need to scale up career and technical education to boost the earnings, the self-confidence, and the marital prospects of young men and young women who are not on the college track.

A third thing we should do is to expand the Child Tax Credit to help families cover the expenses of rising costs of raising young children. And to reduce the financial stresses that can cause marital instability, Congress should expand the Child Tax Credit to $3,000 per child, and extend it to payroll tax liabilities or provide families with fully refundable credit.

And this credit should be paid out on a monthly basis, to give families month-to-month support in addressing the financial challenges of raising a family today. To limit the expense, this expansion should be limited to children under six.

Finally, we should be launching civic efforts to strengthen marriage. I would like to see a campaign organized around what Brookings scholars Ron Haskins and Bill Soho call "The Success Sequence," where young adults are encouraged to pursue education, work, marriage, and parenthood, in that order.

Ninety-seven percent of young adults today who have followed the sequence are not poor. A campaign organized around the sequence could meet with the same success as the recent national campaign to prevent teen pregnancy.

Measures like these are necessary to bridge the divide in family structure and stability across the U.S., a divide we can all agree is both unacceptable and un-American.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Wilcox appears in the Submissions for the Record on page 43.]

Chairman Lee. Thank you. Ms. Hymowitz.

STATEMENT OF MS. KAY HYMOWITZ, WILLIAM E. SIMON FELLOW, MANHATTAN INSTITUTE, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR, CITY JOURNAL, NEW YORK, NY

Ms. Hymowitz. Chairman Lee, Vice Chair Beyer, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify today.

I am the William E. Simon Fellow at the Manhattan Institute. Much of my research over the past 23 years has been on the decline of marriage, its causes, its impact on children, and its relation to poverty and inequality.

Today I would like to focus on what is perhaps an underappreciated part of this story, what some family scholars call "the marriageable men problem."

Let me begin by describing the mass movement of American women into the workforce that began in the mid-20th Century. It launched an extraordinary social revolution and its ripple effects we are still trying to fully understand.

In 1950, about one in three women were in the labor force. The numbers for prime age women rose dramatically over the following decades and peaked in 2000 at 76.7 percent. Today, after a moderate reversal during the Great Recession, it has returned to its historical high.

Even more striking was the shift in the work patterns of women with children. In the past, women who did work almost always left the labor force when they gave birth. Today, working motherhood is the new normal. As of 2017, 71.3 percent of mothers of children under 18 were in the labor force, and that included 63 percent of mothers with children under 3.

In January, the Labor Department announced that for the last quarter of 2019 women were a majority of those in the non-farm payroll positions, something that could be said of no other country in the OECD.

This revolution that I am describing has brought countless benefits to women. In order to prepare themselves for the workforce, they have spent more years pursuing an education. This has given them the chance to use the full range of their talents and to pursue their individual interests. It has been widely and accurately reported that women are now more likely to graduate from college than men are.

As a result, over 40 percent of women in the labor force have a college degree, compared to only 36 percent of men. Women have also poured into graduate schools and now earn more masters and Ph.D. degrees than men do.

Sixty percent of doctors under 35 are women. More than half of law school graduates and associates are also women. We hear a great deal about the injustice of our gender gap, but research that fully takes into account occupation, number of hours worked, seniority, and time away from the job find an unexplained gender cap of only a few percentage points.

I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge that there are still many obstacles for women. There is still that income gap, even if it is far smaller than generally understood. As the #MeToo movement reminds us on a regular basis, harassment and discrimination are an ongoing problem.

Women still do more of the child care in married-couple homes, and for the 23 percent of homes led by a single mother they do all of that work.

Despite all of these impediments, the opportunities for women to exercise their talents, to be financially independent, to leave an

abusive marriage, to buy their own homes, and to build wealth are extraordinary and unprecedented.

The opportunities for them to find a desirable husband or partner—that is, a man with whom they might want to raise children—turns out to be another matter. The problem is especially acute for our lower-skilled population and minority population as well. In 1960, more than 90 percent of adult women over 35 had married. The most common explanation for the decline of marriage and mother-father families at the lower end of the income ladder is the moribund economic fortunes of low-skilled men.

There is some disagreement about just how bad this is, and I will not elaborate on that debate here. But there is little question that the economic fortunes of those men relative to women have worsened. I see my time is running shorter than I thought, so let me rush through to this.

What does all this have to do with marriage? After all, the traditional family model with the male breadwinner and the homemaker wife has been in decline for decades. Yet, still women want to marry men who earn more than they do. And what we are finding instead is many men, about 10 percent of the prime age workforce, dropping out of the labor market entirely. And they are also having a great deal of trouble in school. Can I continue?

Chairman Lee. Yes, go ahead.

Ms. Hymowitz. So what we have, then, is a mismatch between what women might want and the men available. It is especially large for minority and especially African-American women.

A Pew Survey confirmed that never-married women place a high premium on finding a spouse with a steady job. Yet the number of never-married employed men between 25 and 34 per 100 women plunged from 139 in 1960 to 91 in 2012, even though there are considerably more men than women in that age group.

The ratio for Black men and women is considerably worse. There are only 51 employed young Black men for every 100 young Black women. The share of Blacks who have never been married has quadrupled over the past half century from 9 percent in 1950 to 36 percent in 2012. With these ratios, it is not surprising.

In short, despite women's extraordinary gains over the past decade in educational achievement, income, and occupations, both sexes still expect husbands to earn at least as much as their wives do. Women who cannot find such men, will choose not to marry. Judging from their behavior thus far, either they will become single mothers, or not have children at all. Which leads me to the following conclusion:

To ensure that more children grow up in stable two-parent families, we have to focus our attention on young men, particularly less educated minority men, and I would suggest three areas of attention.

First, the Nation's schools have to pay more attention to their boy problem. Boys are already behind the girls when they enter school. They read and write later than girls. And the gaps widen over time. Educators often find boys lose interest in their classes by middle school, as reading material becomes more challenging.

Relatedly, boys are two times as likely to be suspended as girls, and 40 percent more likely to drop out of high school. Educators

have been invested in improving the outcomes in science and math for girls over the past decades. They need to show the same commitment to addressing boys' lagging reading skills—testing out new approaches that might improve their performance.

To cite just one potential avenue, there is intriguing evidence that boys benefit from more structured reading instructions than many schools offer today.

The second change needed to improve boys' outcomes is increasing both the number and prestige of trade schools. And Brad Wilcox just spoke about that, so I will leave that point aside.

And the third area of attention is admittedly less amenable to government policy but is no less crucial to addressing the marriageable men problem. And that is, the reaffirmation of the importance of fathers and male contributions to the household.

These days, according to surveys, girls and young women have stronger career aspirations than men do. It sounds surprising at first, but think about it. Society has come to accept single motherhood. In fact, it is the norm in many disadvantaged communities.

I would propose that this seeming social progress has had the unintended effect of telling boys and men that their contributions to family life and the household economy are of no great consequence. Why study, plan, show up for work on time, or go to work when you are sick of your boss if no one is depending on you and no one cares?

Thank you for your attention.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Hymowitz appears in the Submissions for the Record on page 54.]

Chairman Lee. Dr. Stevenson.

STATEMENT OF DR. BETSEY STEVENSON, PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS AND PUBLIC POLICY, THE GERALD R. FORD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, ANN ARBOR, MI

Dr. Stevenson. Thank you [off microphone].

Chairman Lee. Hit the button.

Dr. Stevenson. It is my pleasure to speak with you today about American families. I am an Economist who has spent the better part of the last three decades studying American families and economic forces and public policies that have shaped them. In trying to understand not just what makes families thrive, but what has been the forces that have led families to change, and change they have.

You have heard much about how they have changed. My written testimony outlines a lot of the forces, so I am not going to spend a lot of time on that. But I do want to give you some good news that is often overlooked. Which is, that at no other time in history have so many people over the age of 60 been married.

You might say, well, here we are talking about children. Why should I care about a bunch of old people being married? But there is a part of the country where marriage is thriving. It is thriving at older ages, and it reflects the fact that marriage is still the ideal for Americans.

Americans, unlike those in many other countries, still want to marry when they feel that they can succeed in their marriage. And

what we see with these successful marriages at older ages is that—and what I have shown in my research, is that marriages succeed when people have the time and the income to spend in their marriages.

And so let me talk a little bit about what has caused some of the changes in marriage and family life. The first thing I want to highlight is just the increase in life expectancy. The large increase in life expectancy is important to understand the kind of trends that Ms. Hymowitz just talked about regarding women is labor force participation.

A woman today can no longer think she is going to spend the majority of her life taking care of children. She is going to live 20 years longer as an adult, and so she needs to think about how she is going to combine paid work with motherhood. That does not necessarily mean combining paid work with having young kids at home. She needs to figure out whether she is going to work while she has young kids at home at the same time, or try to re-enter the labor force when her kids have left the home.

Unfortunately, public policy is failing to help women make these decisions and support them in the ways in which they need to combine work with motherhood, given their increased longevity.

Many scholars have pointed to a bifurcation in families because women with more education are marrying later and having children even later, well into their 30s, while those with less education often have children prior to marrying and often still in their 20s.

First let me say that, while many bemoan the lack of a second parent, research has shown that many of the problems identified among single parent families stem from insufficient income. The fundamental problem for children in single parent families stems from insufficient income and socioeconomic stress.

The shift to marrying and having children at older ages, as was mentioned by Vice Chairman Beyer, does reflect the desire by many people to establish their careers and achieve financial stability prior to having children.

Women's wages and careers tend to flatline once they have children and, as a result, women with potentially steep upward trajectories in their career and wages are waiting as long as they possibly can. Despite the fact that women are the majority of college educated workers and the majority of non-farm payroll job holders, they still face these challenges once they have children.

Modern families do have a role for fathers. Fathers are playing a bigger role than they have ever played in American families. They are more likely to be actively engaged parents. They are increasingly playing the role of a primary care giver. They are deeply engaged in everyday acts of child rearing such as changing diapers, giving bottles, bringing children to and from school, and going to doctors' appointments.

I read an article in The Journal of Pediatrics recently that talked about how pediatricians need to recognize the important role fathers play in providing health care to their young children, because that has not been traditionally where pediatricians are expecting it to come from.

Let me stop and say what I think are the very important ways that you can help support American families through policy.

I am going to start with the very first one, which is: If you want two-parent families, the first thing you need to do is ensure that the mother survives childbirth. And the fact that we have the highest rate of maternal mortality in the developed world, and it is continuing to rise, should be alarming to all of you. I have outlined some policy options, and there are more that I would be even happy to talk about. This should be a first priority.

Providing paid family leave is really important for children. Research has been very clear that that bonding time with both mothers and fathers is best for children. And I have been for the past several years part of a bipartisan working group on paid family leave run jointly by the American Enterprise Institute and Brookings.

We have come up with a bipartisan policy recommendation for paid leave, and I would be happy to walk through what those bipartisan characteristics of a Federal paid family leave policy would look like.

Affordable high-quality early childhood education and child care are crucial for today's children. When we first introduced our K–12 educational system, or expanded our primary system to high school, we had no idea how important early learning was. We now know that we are sending too many kids to kindergarten too far behind without having adequate investment in their early learning.

There is much research on the importance of early childhood learning. It is discussed in my written testimony and I would be happy to talk with you further about that.

Also, I would just like to emphasize the importance of recognizing and supporting broader kinship relationships. Finally, to echo what has already been said by both of our panelists, the importance of higher wages for our lower—lowest earners, expanding the child tax credit to make it fully refundable; expanding the EITC to noncustodial parents as well as increasing it; raising the minimum wage. These are all things that would both help support children and their families. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Stevenson appears in the Submissions for the Record on page 60.]

Chairman Lee. Thank you, Dr. Stevenson.

Dr. Ray.

STATEMENT OF DR. RASHAWN RAY, DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN FELLOW IN GOVERNANCE STUDIES, THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION, WASHINGTON, DC

Dr. Ray. Yes, Chair Lee, Vice Chair Beyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Economic Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today.

You have already heard a lot of trends and stats, so I will not repeat those. I have some of those in my written testimony as well, including some very compelling graphs by one of my University of Maryland colleagues, Dr. Phillip Cohen, that shows trends in families over the past 120 years or so.

But what I do want to talk about is some of the interesting trends and ways to interpret it. So similar to the issue facing Americans at the turn of the 20th Century, families are currently

pooling funds together to deal with stagnant wages, rising housing costs, and rising health care costs.

As of 2017, roughly 15 percent of households were composed of extended family members, many of whom are together out of necessity—not necessarily by choice. In 1960, 65 percent of households were composed of married parents where the father worked and the woman worked inside of the household as a caregiver and houseworker. Currently, those households represent about 21 percent of all households. Although research shows that people's attitudes have not necessarily changed dramatically of their ideal of a man working and a woman staying at home, this is not the reality for most American families. And we have to be very realistic about that.

In 1968, nearly 90 percent of unwed parents were in single-mother households. Over the past 50 years or so, this has actually decreased. What we are currently seeing is about 35 percent of unmarried parents are in cohabiting households. This means that people are in households together, but they are not married. That is a very, very important trend that we need to pay attention to. People definitely want to be married. People desire to be married. And I will talk a little bit more about that in a second.

As it related to the stereotype of deadbeat fathers, particularly for Black men, there is a recent study that is extremely important that shows Black men compared to men of other racial groups are more likely to bathe their children, play and read to their children, take children to activities, help with homework, and talk with their children about their day.

When it comes to noncustodial fathers, Black men are actually more likely to participate in the household. I want you to think about what would happen if we actually had equitable opportunity for jobs. We would see an even bigger increase. And I think that racial gap that we see at times in participation in the household would actually continue to dwindle.

I think there are some other ways to further interpret a family. Dr. Pamela Braboy Jackson and I, published a recent book called How Family Matters: The Simply Complicated Intersections of Race, Gender, and Work.

We collected data with 46 Black, White, and Mexican-American families living in middle America. We found some very, very interesting patterns.

First, we found that Black Americans were more likely than Whites and Mexicans to include grandparents when it came to being part of their family. That is because they were more likely to actually live with grandparents and extended family members.

Whites and Blacks were also more likely to mention siblings, and Mexicans were more likely to live in extended family relationships. These are not necessarily cultural family arrangements as much as they are survival strategies for the economic market.

Second, we found that the traditional family arrangement of the father working and the woman staying at home was primarily reserved for very high-end earners. Instead we found that high-end earners were able to play chess, if you will, if we use that game analogy, whereas working class and poor families were forced to play checkers. They were actually having decisions made for them.

What we want are policies that allow people to have more choices in the sort of things that they are able to do.

The final thing we found is that single parents were actually the savviest when it came to the families in our study. Unfortunately, they had limited resources to be able to do the things that they wanted to do. So overall we found that, yes, there are some positives. Families are surviving, but they are also floundering and we need resources to actually do something about that.

I think there are three—you have heard some of these before. I want to repeat them.

First, we need an actual living wage. According to a recent Joint Economic Committee Report, wages were nearly $3 less in today's dollars than in 1968. Families simply cannot live on that. It is simply too low. And we need to do something about it. Across race, we see an even wider disparity.

Second, high-quality jobs need to be given, and we need family-friendly benefits. Families need earners with high-quality jobs. Currently, we hear a narrative about low unemployment. The low unemployment does not necessarily mean much if the jobs do not allow people to put food on the table. And we are seeing that in particular in places where we see stagnant job growth—cities like Baltimore, Detroit, Philadelphia, St. Louis—and we have to be realistic that these are predominantly Black cities where we are seeing Black men in particular who are actually out of the labor market.

So we really need to do something about these jobs. Working Americans should not necessarily have to get a payday loan when their kids get sick, or when their kid accidentally breaks their arm. But unfortunately, that is what is happening.

If I could just take one more minute, I want to make a couple more points.

First is that, based on job growth potential, Black men are under-represented in the best 15 occupations for men, and under-represented in the bottom 15 occupations for men. This is because jobs have a lot to do with the geographic area where people are. Cities that are predominantly Black are depleted with economic opportunities, and we really need to focus on that.

The final thing I will say is related to affordable health care. I recently worked on a study with Black Onyx Management. We did this study in Kosciusko County, Indiana. If you know anything about that, it is considered one of the orthopedic capitals of the United States. It is predominantly White and rural.

One of the things that I found there was extremely troubling. Nearly 25 percent of the parents reported leaving a job because of child care. And for families that made less than $50,000 compared to those who made over $100,000, they were 75 percent more likely to report that paying for childcare was difficult.

I want to just end with my own family story. I typically would not do this, but I would be remiss in this setting. I grew up in a single-parent household, and I have never seen my biological father before. I am currently married to my high school sweetheart, with two beautiful, very intelligent boys. How did I get here?

Well part of it is my mother's lineage. My mother became pregnant with me while she was in the military. She got pregnant by

a sergeant on her base. She had to make a decision. Was she going to have an abortion? Was she going to give me up for adoption to my grandparents? Or was she going to get out of the military and raise me?

This was a very, very difficult decision. She decided to raise me. But she turned down a unique opportunity. My mother was admitted to West Point in the late 1970s as a Black woman. This is also coupled with the fact that my grandfather, a 21-year Veteran, Purple Heart, Bronze Star recipient, was a Drill Sergeant.

So now you have to come home and tell your father that you are going to raise a kid after you got pregnant in the military? Well, my mom did it. She put herself in nursing school, worked a full-time job, two part-time jobs. We were on welfare. We lived in subsidized housing. When we lived in Atlanta, I was part of a majority to minority bussing program. I got to go to a better school that had a gifted program that I was admitted to. I think one of the main reasons why I am actually here today.

All of these programs that I am describing were not available to the kids in my neighborhood. They also are not primarily available to families today. And what we need are more resources and more policies to allow a woman like my mother, Joslyn Talley, to have a son who then gets on the success sequence based on policies that allow her to do the things she needs to do to raise her child.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Ray appears in the Submissions for the Record on page 73.]

Chairman Lee. Thank you, very much. We will now begin rounds of questions by members. I will go first, followed by Vice Chair Beyer, Representative Schweikert, and then Representative Herrera Beutler. And we will proceed from there.

Dr. Wilcox, I want to start with you. In your testimony you point out that in recent years in the United States there has been some positive shift with regard to family dynamics, indicators of family stability, including some declining divorce rates, and at least a slight uptick in the number of children being raised in intact two-parent families.

Can you describe to us, just briefly, what these stats are and what factors account for them?

Dr. Wilcox. Since 1980, the divorce rate has declined about 30 percent, and through now and about 1970 levels, and Dr. Ray's colleague, Phillip Cohen, suggests we are going to see even more declines in the divorce rate. So that is sort of one indicator that speaks to your question.

Since the Great Recession hit, we have seen a modest decline, a very modest decline, in the share of kids born outside of marriage as well. And that is probably going to continue apace.

And when you put those two things together, obviously, less divorce, less non-marital child rearing, that means that there are more kids being born and raised in a stable married family. So we've seen from 2014 to the present, an increase in the share of kids in intact married families from about 61.8 percent in 2014 to in 2019 62.6 percent. It is a modest increase, obviously, but if you look at kind of the longer trajectory, we have seen a decline for many, many, many years in the share of kids in intact married

families. And it is nice to see, from my perspective, a slight uptick in the share of kids being raised by their own married parents.

Chairman Lee. Thank you. Something else you said there that I wanted to follow up on. In your testimony you mentioned that upper income Americans overall tend to subscribe to a marriage-centered ethos. And that is something they want for themselves and for their children and for their grandchildren.

At the same time, though, a lot of these same Americans, the people on the top economic echelons, are most likely to reject a marriage-centered ethos. How do you explain this disparity? And what can you tell us about what impact that has on others in our culture?

Dr. Wilcox. So my colleague, Dr. Wendi Wong and I, looked at a sample of California adults. It was done by YouGov a few months ago, and in that survey we found on the one hand that college-educated California adults were much more likely to embrace an idea of family diversity, to sort of celebrate family diversity, and also to say that there was no problem morally with women having a child on their own. That was sort of their public kind of orientation towards family on the one hand.

But then they also said sort of how much they personally valued having kids in marriage. And then of course we also tracked whether or not they were stably married. And when it came to their private orientation, they actually were more likely to value having their own kid in marriage than their less educated fellow California citizens. And they were also much more likely to be in a stable marriage compared to the less educated fellow California citizens.

So from my perspective, part of the story here—and of course there are lots of other things happening economically in California, among other places—but part of the story here is that our elites have publicly stepped away from embracing marriage, but recognize that for themselves, you know, for their spouse, and especially for their kids, it is typically the best way to do things.

And so what I would like us to see, you know, in precincts like this is that we need to be more honest about acknowledging publicly, and communicating publicly, not in a kind of judgmental way but just kind of in an educational way, about how much marriage matters for them, for their families, but also for the larger community and for the larger country.

Chairman Lee. Thank you. Ms. Hymowitz, in your testimony you talk about men's disconnection, and particularly disconnection by non-college-educated men from the labor force and their declining likelihood to marry, or to remain unmarried.

Do you think strong labor force participation and earnings increases—do earnings increases tend to increase men's likelihood of getting married, or wanting to get married?

Ms. Hymowitz. Well historically, yes. And the reason that I talked so much about the kinds of attitudes women have towards who they want to marry—they want to marry men with jobs—was to just reinforce that idea. That it is still that women want to work, many of them, most of them who are, but they also want to marry men who hopefully earn at least as much or more than they do. And there is significant research showing that.

Having said that, there are indications—there is at least one study that I am aware that suggests that it is not just a matter of, at this point, of making sure men are earning better, more money at better jobs. It is a study of men in, I believe it was North Dakota, who got jobs in the fracking industry and started to make very decent incomes. And what they found in that study was that over time the birth rate went up, the marriage rate did not.

So that suggests to me that it is not enough simply to talk about the good jobs, as important as that is.

Chairman Lee. That said, do you suspect if marriage rates were higher today, do you think labor force participation rates among men would be higher?

Ms. Hymowitz. Well, it is hard to know which comes first.

Chairman Lee. Right, right.

Ms. Hymowitz. So I would say that, given that women are—and I think men have internalized this as well—given that women want to marry men who do have jobs, that is going to have to come first.

Chairman Lee. Mr. Beyer.

Vice Chairman Beyer. Mr. Chairman, thank you. And I thank all of you very much. It is a fascinating hearing. I really appreciate your testimony.

Dr. Stevenson, you point out in your testimony that women's careers and wages plateau after they start having children, so there is an economic incentive to put this off as long a possible. And now we have a slight majority of jobs held by women. And given that they are a growing majority of college graduates, their role in the workforce is only expected to grow.

We also have this issue, as you pointed out, that the child rearing part of their marriage becomes ever smaller as we live longer. But what we have not figured out as a society is how to not penalize women for having children.

So what changes could come from the government to recognize this plateau phenomenon, this forced delay in child bearing?

Dr. Stevenson. Well thank you very much for that question. One challenge is that it is very difficult in our labor force to pause your career, to get the flexibility that you may need, or to be able to take the leave that you may need. Researchers have shown that there are really quite substantial penalties for women who want to take, say, a year or two out of the labor force off when they have small kids at home. And that is because we exist in a society in which taking maternity leave, or paternity leave, is unusual. Since most workers are not taking much time off, they are competing against people who do not take time out of the labor force.

So I think the first thing is creating a social norm that people are going to stay home for some amount of time, be it eight weeks as we recommended with the bipartisan working group. That was a compromise. I think the research shows that children do better when there is a parent at home with them for six months, and that could be split between mothers and fathers. So three months of paid leave for mothers, and fathers would give six months at home for a new child.

If that was the norm, it would be easier for people to be able to continue to get ahead. When you are in a career, for instance if you are a lawyer and other people at the law firm are not taking the

paid leave, it does not matter whether the paid leave is offered or not offered. You feel like you will be penalized in terms of being able to continue your trajectory.

We also see that there is implicit discrimination. Sometimes women go back to work after having a kid. Colleagues try to be kind and helpful, so they do not give women opportunities because the colleagues do not want to get in the way of the mother raising her children. But the result is that the mother's career plateaued.

And also one other thing, when we are thinking about training programs, and job placement services, we should be thinking about the full range of people with skills. Often our job placement services are really reserved for people with the least amount of skills. And so we just don't really have any services for workers trying to reenter the labor force.

If you were a college graduate, perhaps a middle wage working woman who decided to take three or four years out of the labor force while you are raising your young children, there is really no support from the government to help you figure out how to make your way back into the labor force. And that is really problematic for them.

Vice Chairman Beyer. Thank you very much.

Dr. Ray, many have talked about the increased role that grandparents play in helping raise the kids. But it is not really supported by our Federal policies. What should policymakers do to recognize the role of grandparents, aunts and uncles in providing care for kids?

Dr. Ray. That is a great question. I think one of the biggest things is there needs to be more flexibility in the way we think about the policies associated with children. Currently, most policies are directly tied to the parents. I mean even before this session we were talking about what does it mean to sign onto a birth certificate, and how that follows people throughout life.

There needs to be more flexibility and more malleability in grandparents' ability to take on some of the resources and tax breaks associated with raising children. And I think those are some of the things—one of the big things that needs to change.

Vice Chairman Beyer. Okay, thanks. Dr. Stevenson and Dr. Ray, you both made clear that Americans value and embrace marriage, and even put it on a pedestal, and it is not a question of not wanting to get married, but a question of whether people can afford to get married.

Dr. Wilcox has talked about a cultural program, comparing it to not smoking, for example. What is the evidence that these programs can work, should work, that the government could weigh in to encourage people to get married?

Dr. Stevenson. So, you know, I am sure you are aware that Congress does fund marriage promotion programs. There have been a number of evaluative studies of marriage promotion programs, including programs that involve putting advertisements on buses that said, you know, marriage is great. Other programs that fund marriage counseling.

The evidence is simply that these programs do not work. I will say that parenting programs work really well, teaching people the skills—because that is where people simply need skills. The prob-

lem with marriage is not that people do not have the skills for marriage, or that they do not value marriage. It is really that they do not think they can afford marriage.

If I may, one of my most highly cited research papers was explaining the decline in the divorce rate. So I would like to tie this back to answering Mr. Lee's earlier question. One of the reasons that we saw the divorce rate spike so high in the 1970s was because people had started marrying at younger ages. And those marriages are often not very stable, for lots of reasons.

People do not know what their life is going to look like at young ages. Their preferences are not yet very stable. And neuroscience now tells us they are not even fully really a grown up until about age 24 or 25 when your brain finishes its development.

But what really happened in the 1970s was people married thinking that their marriage was going to look one way, and it looked a very different way. They married thinking the wife was going to stay home, and the husband was going to support her. And that is not how society evolved.

And they took a look at their marriage and it did not seem to fit the society they were living in today. What we see now is people are better informed about what they are getting into when they get married. They know what they are looking for in a partner. And they are finding people that are going to be well-suited to them, but they really are waiting until they feel that they can afford marriage. Because marriage is not—is no longer about coming together, and one person is going to support me, and the other one is not, and therefore we are going to get financial stability out of it. But, rather, you do not want to commit to taking on somebody else's financial responsibility unless you know that you for sure can support yourself and perhaps can be the insurance and financial support for another person. Think about what the marriage vows say. They say we are going to take care of each other. We are going to insure each other——

Vice Chairman Beyer. Dr. Stevenson, if I can give Dr. Wilcox a chance to respond, too. Because you had made the case for launching specific efforts to strengthen marriage, and that specific efforts would certainly work in other places in our society.

Dr. Wilcox. Dr. Stevenson is correct, that a lot of the initial reviews of Federally funded marriage and relationship education were not promising in many different parts of the country, although there was success in Oklahoma in terms of both the quality and stability of outcomes for the Oklahoma programs. And of course they had had the most experience with this particular approach.

Although it is also important to note here that a newer review done by Alan Hawkins in 2019 finds success not just in Oklahoma but also in New York City on some of these marriage education approaches.

But the point I am making here actually is not really about having programs that are trying to target lower income couples, as with these particular approaches, but actually thinking more about kind of the broader cultural message we are sending to the public. You know, just like we did with smoking, like we did with teen pregnancy, I think we need to think about ways in which we can

get public service announcements. We can get Hollywood. We can get schools, and other institutions, on board with the message that, you know, it is helpful to sequence basically education, work, marriage, and parenthood in that order. And if more young adults kind of heard that message, I think they could change their pattern in that area much like they have changed their patterns around teen pregnancy and smoking.

So that is sort of the point here. And we have seen evidence, too, from Brookings, for instance, that MTV show "16 and Pregnant," that was one of the kinds of things that happened in the pop culture that helped to sort of shift us away from teen pregnancies.

So using that kind of cultural power and influence I think to stress the value of the sequence would be helpful in extending a model that we see among our own peers and their kids to the broader country. And, to all kinds of kids from all kinds of different backgrounds.

Chairman Lee. Representative Schweikert.

Representative Schweikert. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Vice Chairman Beyer. Thank you for asking that.

Can I take this slightly differently, because you are all freaky smart and I need sort of that input. First, can you confirm a piece of data that I have on my desktop saying that the majority of millennials will never marry. It does not mean they are not in long-term committed relationships. But the majority of millennials will not marry. Has anyone else seen that data set?

Dr. Wilcox.

Dr. Wilcox. There is a recent report from the Urban Institute that talks about a marked decline in marriage, but it would go from, you know, around 90 percent in previous generations to about 70 percent of millennials would be marrying over the course of their lives. So obviously a big decline, but still a majority of millennials are projected by the Urban Institute.

Representative Schweikert. I will send that to you, because I have spent some real time on its math, and I found it both fascinating and disturbing because it became an interesting conversation of: Is it the definition of marriage as we operate—you know, here is how you get a tax benefit, how you do this—or is it the long-term committed relationship. It is almost, forgive my ignorance, the common-law model.

But in our office we have a fixation——

Dr. Ray.

Dr. Ray. I was just going to say quickly, even if it is a decline in marriage among millennials, that does not mean that when they get married that those marriages will not be more successful.

Representative Schweikert. It was more just because on my committee, Ways and Means, so often we are parsing out things saying, okay, here is the benefit for having this piece of paper. Here are the benefits for raising the child. Even as Dr. Stevenson spoke about some of the benefits of an earned income tax credit.

I am just trying to get my head around what my population looks like that these sorts of things would actually benefit family stability?

Ms. Hymowitz. I just wanted to mention that the surveys that I have seen recently of younger people is that there is not a great

valuing of marriage. And many of them do not see it as essential. They want children, but they do not necessarily want to marry. There is a Pugh Survey on this. And I think there is another one——

Representative Schweikert. Which is why this becomes important to us up here. We are trying to design family formation policy, and then we are going to get to my real interest: My real question is what happens when society already has certain trends? Do we need to run out in front of those trends and make sure that we own the definitions, and the benefits, and those things that incentivize, or just deal with the reality of here are our demographics. Am I being fair?

Ms. Hymowitz. Well I guess the question is whether there is a way to influence——

Representative Schweikert. Yes. And as we know, some of the marriage studies gave me a moment of hope, because I looked at many of those before and I saw nothing that was statistically significant.

Can I go back to——

Dr. Stevenson. Can I just—I think what makes it really hard when we look at these studies like of millennials is that it is the case that people are postponing marriage to much greater ages. And so we are having to forecast, oh, they are marrying at such low rates at 28, 29, and 30, what are they going to do at 40, 41, and 42? And it is hard to forecast, but I will say that it does seem like people are very committed still to marriage.

And one of the things that we are seeing——

Representative Schweikert. But we——

Dr. Stevenson [continuing]. The number of children people have has gone down, but actually so has the rate of childlessness. So people are pushing things off, and then they get like one kid, and, you know, a late marriage.

Representative Schweikert. But that actually comes to what I really wanted to ask about, the fertility rates. Okay, we all know the United States has been below replacement rate since, what, 1971. Functionally, if you do the adjustments—you do not like that number?

Dr. Wilcox. Since the Great Recession, certainly, yes.

Representative Schweikert. Okay, let us go to the Great Recession. But it is not just us. We actually worked on a project in our office trying to see if there is any country—even Hungary where like with the third child they buy you a house, or with a fourth child—and in a number of northern European countries, even a couple of Asian countries, we see some of the experiments, and in Taiwan. Who has finally had success of breaking the Holy Grail to change fertility rates? And we found almost nothing that is actually statistically significant.

So in some ways we are having a conversation here about family formation and family health and family stability. Wonderful. On the other end, we have been trying to build economic models of what does the future of our economy look like, just even hitting population stability, plus, minus, you know, what a talent base for our current immigration systems would look like.

It is really hard to build those models. And the thing I was going to ask from all of you, because from my previous comment, you are all freaky smart, I disagreed with some of your things that were written in your papers, the benefits, but it is what it is.

If I came to you tomorrow and said our society is concerned about fertility rates. We want to encourage children. We would like to encourage those children within a traditional family structure. What works? And can you point to me anywhere in the world where someone has found a formula in their society that has worked?

Am I wrong that, at least in the current literature, it just is not out there?

Dr. Stevenson.

Dr. Stevenson. So I think the one thing that is hard in looking around the world, the world is a great place to look for lots of examples. Sometimes we find things that work, and sometimes not. But we have to think is this matching our society.

So what has happened in the United States is we are investing more as parents in our children than we ever have before.

Representative Schweikert. You referred to it—I had a professor who used to refer to it as "the high quality child."

Dr. Stevenson. Yes. So people are—college-educated mothers are working more in the market for pay, but they are also spending way more time with their children than they ever did when they were stay-at-home moms. It is amazing. I do not know where they are getting the hours, but moms are spending more time. Dads are spending more time.

Representative Schweikert. How does that—how does that—those are interesting data points, but how does that help build——

Dr. Stevenson. Let us put this together with what our public policy is. We are not investing in children. The public policy—the government is not matching what the parents want.

Representative Schweikert. But show me a society that actually—because we have some that are putting stunning amounts of money, and yet we have not seen a change in the fertility rate. And that is my honest question. And maybe it is that as a society we should do those things. I am actually—this is one of those occasions where, someone is known to lean conservative, and maybe somewhat libertarian, I think if I can just find some data that shows it would be good for society.

And can I hit Doctor——

Dr. Stevenson. I was just going to say, what I am asking you to do is look for countries where the parents desire to invest is high, and see what works there.

Representative Schweikert. And I will read—you know, I am just a voracious reader. You send me anything, I will read it.

Dr. Ray, and then I am way over time.

Dr. Ray. Yeah, I think one of the main things is higher quality jobs with higher wages. We were just talking about millennials. One of the biggest issues with millennials, and again similar to what Dr. Stevenson was saying, I sometimes do not put tons of weight in some of the attitudinal data when people are in their 20s. For example, because once they finish school and get a house and do all these sort of things, the success sequence tells people to do

before they get married, they will get married. And I think that those marriages will be more successful.

And if we want people to have more children, people need more money to take care of children. Taking care of children today is extremely, extremely expensive. When I talk to—again, I have two young kids. When I talk to other families, they talk about having an additional child, a third child, or a second child——

Representative Schweikert. I——

Dr. Ray. Hold on, let me make this point. Because they ultimately do not do that, because it is too much money, because of the investment they are making. But if they were able to make higher wages, it might be a cost/benefit analysis——

Representative Schweikert. Dr. Ray, I was actually going to compliment you, because you actually did come close to the thing, because we were actually trying to build a model that said what would happen if they are going to have one child, but if they hit certain levels of success five years earlier, would that mean a second child.

Dr. Ray. Yes.

Representative Schweikert. And you actually sort of touched on that in some of your writings.

Can I hear from Dr. Wilcox, and then I apologize for going way over time. He humors me because I torment him.

[Laughter.]

Dr. Wilcox. I just wanted to say two things quickly. One is that we actually are seeing this decline in fertility even in Scandinavian countries that have incredibly progressive benefits, you know, that many of our colleagues would call for. So I think it would be attentive to the fact that there is something out there that is happening that is sort of above and beyond just the policy thing. And maybe, you know—well, certainly the policy recommendations that some of our progressive peers have called for.

There is some evidence of a program that has been somewhat successful, and it is a program of paying five hundred and whatever their currency is to families for each child, you know, a very targeted kind of child allowance. That could be kind of a model for us to think about here in the U.S., to sort of think about a child allowance that would give families choices about how best to spend their money on their kids to, you know, deal with the rising costs.

Representative Schweikert. We have actually even looked at everything from a negative income tax to some stability income for the additional child. We are just trying to figure out what would help us produce a level of population stability and family formation.

And, Mr. Chairman, thank you for tolerating me.

Chairman Lee. Thank you.

Representative Herrera Beutler.

Representative Herrera Beutler. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This has been just fascinating for me. It is funny, as I was looking through this, I think everybody is kind of right. And everybody is kind of a little wrong, which is pretty much how it always works, right?

Some of the recommendations I am just excited to even get started on, I think recommendations from each of you. I found it par-

ticularly interesting, Dr. Stevenson, that you were talking about our maternal mortality rates. It was my piece of legislation that got signed into law at the end of 2018, our first Congressional Federal legislation in the Nation to start addressing the rising maternal mortality crisis. Because you either are a mom, or you have got a mom, so it impacts all of us. And for some reason in 21st century America we were not—people do not even know when you say 47th in the developed world, people get shocked. And I am like this is our backyard. It is rural, it is urban, it is poor, it is rich. It is everybody.

So we are starting to address that. I think the next piece there is to make sure that we have health care coverage, especially for moms on Medicaid, through that first year of life, if we are going to start measuring maternal mortality for that first year of life. Women with private insurance will hopefully keep it, right?

But certainly Medicaid needs to continue. I think that is 2.0 for that. I had a good conversation with Vice President Pence during the whole ObamaCare repeal time. And that was my comment to him. As someone who is very much pro-life, if we are going to encourage people to have children in dire circumstances, then we can make sure that we are stepping up both as the community and our policies federally.

The other piece, I think Dr. Ray you were talking about and I did have some questions for you. I do think that equatability for—you were talking about, really, Black men in big cities, where are the good jobs? Like in opportunities. I did have to smile a little bit, because if you step out of those big cities, we are seeing a lot more opportunity across gender and race, and traditional—in fact, non—Hispanic men without high school degrees are some of those who are actually seeing their wages boosted right now in this economy. So it does make me think in some of those big cities, maybe it is time for a little balance in some of those political levers. Maybe we could help spread out the thriving economy we are seeing in other areas.

And as someone who—I am so moved by your personal story. You know, I think I could have pulled myself from each of your examples. You know, I am 41. I just have a 9-month-old. I started having children late, because, I don't know, I got wound up in this place. My husband, who is going to hate me for this, is technically a millennial. He has all three of my children right now. So he's got the 6-year-old, the 3-year-old, and the 9-month-old. And I was like, "bye, honey, I've got to go to a hearing." And he is going to handle them so much better than I would.

So I had to smile about all the different ways you were quantifying people, because I am also Hispanic. And the first in my family to get a four-year college degree. And so so much of your story really inspired me. Actually, your mother did, I'm not going to lie. She probably put all of us to shame.

But as I was listening to this, because one of the things I will say has helped tie me together in all this, has been both my faith and my parents. My parents are still married. And one of the things I just kept asking, if the goal here is improving the stability and well-being of American children, children are the products of their parent's marriage.

Now for their parents, right—and I am looking at Dr. Ray because obviously his mother is amazing and overcame a lot more. So for me the question is not how do we get more people to get married because who wants to get married if they see a terrible marriage, or a terrible situation?

That is the one thing, when I look at millennials, and I think finances is the first thing they will say, when you say why are you not having kids, or when are you going to have kids, and generally it is the guy who will say "money, we don't have enough to pay for them yet."

And I think that is true. But I think the next step is, what is your view of marriage? And what causes someone to get married? Is it a healthy marriage? I was surprised—the one thing I was surprised by is the lack of conversation around, I do not know if you would say "emotional health," in each of these situations. Because I do not want to push millennials to get married if they are going to get into crumby marriages and have bad outcomes, right?

So what we really want is stable families. So for me the question is: Why do not young people value marriage? And what are we modeling? What are they seeing? Because I think this generation is actually pretty courageous to demand certain things, work/life balance. They are doing that, though, because they want to see something better. I think about this in terms of faith, too. If our faith does not show anything, why would anybody want to join the faith? I would not.

The question to me, then, goes back to the health of the people who are getting married. Who am I? And why am I here? And that is the thing I think we have to answer before we put them on this success—I cannot remember how you were saying it, Dr. Wilcox—but the steps obviously make sense. But I just think, even when it comes to the economics, those are all symptoms. But in treating all the symptoms, how do we bring about the health and well-being really of the people that create the most intimate building block of our society, which is a marriage.

I think that is where we have to start. And I would love to hear your thoughts. Dr. Ray, I think I would love to hear, because I think your mom obviously found that.

Dr. Ray. Yeah, I mean my mom—so I will say a couple of quick things, and then I will say something about my mom. When this hearing happened and Sol Espinoza asked me to be a part of it, the first thing that came to my mind is what does "stable" mean? What you did conceptually from a sociological standpoint, you expanded past the economic structural parts, even the cultural parts, to think about what does a healthy marriage mean?

I have a very healthy marriage with my wife. One of the things my mom did raising me, she said two main things. She said, first, I am a woman. I cannot necessarily show you what it means to be a man, and in particular a Black man in society, but I can put you around other people who can. I cannot necessarily show you what it is like to be in a marriage right now, but I can put you around people who can show you what that looks like.

So she helped me to model family. So I had a very healthy, positive view of what marriage looked like. When I ask a lot of my friends, if you talk to a lot of millennials, they do not have that,

partly because their parents were getting divorced when they were kids and they do not want to go through that.

I think the other thing is that from a cultural standpoint—and Dr. Wilcox talked about this—sometimes I kind of think about shows and how much they matter on MTV and that kind of thing, but I do think that showing people that marriage is good, and what a successful marriage looks like, is something that we should really, really do. Instead, oftentimes when you look at parents with young children who are working, they look miserable, like their life does not look great, even if it is. And oftentimes it is hindsight.

And so I think part of what has to happen is, if we are going to talk about marriage and what a healthy marriage looks like, we have to reconceptualize what "stability" and "healthy" means. And I think we have to make sure that young adults, and in particular young kids, elementary school kids, high school kids, that they are able to model and actually see what healthy, positive, happy couples in marriages look like.

Because I think in American society we do not necessarily have that image. I think certain people like myself were able to be around families that my mother made me get around to see that, but I think for a lot of my friends they do not have that. So when it comes to getting married, and particularly having kids, why would they do that? Because life does not look better with that.

So part of it is that we have to show people what that looks like.

Dr. Stevenson. So I would just like to add that what we see is that couples, where they have similar expectations for how they are going to behave in marriage, how they are going to share the tasks of raising children, the tasks of working, who is going to do the vacuuming, who is going do the washing up, those are the marriages that succeed. And one of the reasons that I thought it was really important to talk about the increasing role that fathers are playing as really active care givers, like your husband, is because those are the marriages that are succeeding. And when we model that for kids and say: You know what, this modern masculinity does involve having a baby pouch on some of the time.

Those are the marriages that are really thriving, and so trying to figure out how we can make men, particularly men who are not able to find the kinds of work that they thought they were going to be able to do, the kinds of like goods-producing manufacturing jobs, has increasingly become a service sector, how do we convince them that, you know, it is okay to work in the service sector and take care of your babies, and your masculinity is fully intact.

Ms. Hymowitz. I am a little bit concerned that we keep talking about marriages, but I want to remind us once again that 40 percent of children, American children, are born to unmarried mothers. And some of those mothers will marry at some point, maybe to the child's father, maybe not, and that seems to me when we are talking about all that fathers do, and how much more fathers are involved, and how much more they can be involved, that is not going to happen without marriage in any reliable way.

So, you know, I think the effect is, I think Dr. Ray had a very interesting chart about how much time fathers who are living with their children are spending with their children versus how much time those who are not living with their children, and it is a huge

difference. And I do not see how that changes without marriage, or some kind of firm commitment.

We do know that, you know, cohabitation seems to be something that is working for—in some countries. That is, more permanent relationship without marriage. But that does not seem to be the case in the United States.

Representative Herrera Beutler. I think you are correct in that marriage has I think those benefits. I think my point is beyond just whether or not two people get married, or two people shack up, or two people live together. It is what stability are they going to create for the kid. And that stability, you cannot give out what you do not have. And I will say, in my marriage I think the reason that we do not worry about who is doing what, when—and he is obviously a strong conservative, confident man—is because of the mutual, not just partnership, but love and respect. And I think that is ultimately how we get to the more stable relationships in marriage, which I agree.

Ms. Hymowitz. Yeah. There is something of a feedback loop that is going on here, because there are so many children growing up without fathers, without seeing marriage. I think Dr. Ray's experience is somewhat unusual. As you say, a lot of kids do not ever see, especially in certain communities where they do not know anybody who is married.

So it is a completely lost norm in those communities. So I think that the question is, you are right, you have to figure out what it is that will allow people to get along better. I agree with you about that. But I think that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy because when kids are growing up without those norms——

Representative Herrera Beutler. It is true. It is true, but I would argue in some rural White areas where people are married and it is dysfunctional——

Ms. Hymowitz. Absolutely. Absolutely.

Representative Herrera Beutler [continuing]. Just as much. I get it. I will get you in, and then I will get my lack of time back.

Chairman Lee. Thank you. We are going to start into a second round now. They have just called a vote in the Senate, so I am going to have to leave in a moment, in which case I will hand the gavel off to Mr. Beyer and he will then filibuster for the next six hours while I am voting.

[Laughter.]

Or, alternatively, wrap up, depending on which comes first.

Ms. Hymowitz, I wanted to get back to you for a moment. At the end of paragraph three of page one of your written testimony, you made some observations that I wanted to learn more about.

You say: We hear a great deal about the injustice of our gender gap, but research that takes into account occupation, number of hours worked, seniority, and time away from job, finds an unexplained gender-income gap of only a few percentage points.

I wanted to ask you where that comes from, particularly in light of the stats that you shared earlier in that same paragraph where you talk about the fact that 60 percent of all physicians 35 and younger are women, and that women now make up a majority of law school students and associates, young lawyers. Presumably

that is indicative of the fact that they are doing well in those professions.

So what explains the remaining gender gap?

Ms. Hymowitz. First of all, a lot of the comparisons we do are based on data that we have from the government on, let us say we are comparing people in similar occupations. So you will see a category that will say "physicians," and it will compare men and women. But of course physicians come in many types. So that you could have a cardiologist, who makes a great deal of money, and a pediatrician who does not. And women are more inclined to go into specialty areas where they do not make as much money.

So, yes, they are physicians, but there is a gender gap in the—a wage gap that is partly dependent upon the kinds of doctors they are. And this goes through all of the occupations, practically, that you can think of.

Chairman Lee. Okay, so you might just say the same thing with regard to lawyers, or accountants?

Ms. Hymowitz. Absolutely. So, you know, you are going to have more—look, some of this will even out at a certain point I think as women—there is a pipeline issue.

Chairman Lee. Right.

Ms. Hymowitz. But as that changes, and it will change, it might get better. But, you know, as Dr. Stevenson pointed out, women's income gets hit when they have children. And my own observation of—and this is just my observation—is that, yes, they want a little bit more time with their kids. And I do not see how that—why we would want to change that. We want to cushion them from the effects of it, but we do not want to change that.

Chairman Lee. Dr. Ray, I see you wanted to respond.

Dr. Ray. Yeah, I just want to quickly push back on that. So research actually shows that even within the same occupations that women still get paid less. I think one of the best examples is our profession, actually, as academics. Even within the same department, we see that women are paid less at the same rank for doing the same amount of work.

And so, you know, definitely we can see some type of gap in specialty. But even within those specialties, even among pediatrics, we still see that men who are pediatricians compared to women get paid more.

We have to be very realistic about why that gender wage gap exists. And I think it is something that we should really, really pay attention to; that it is not simply that women are leaving the workforce to take care of their kids, but it actually is a real penalty that women face.

And the other thing, and this is Dr. Shelly Correll's research who is at Stanford, who has done a lot of work in this area at the Clayman Institute, one of the big things she finds is that after women have children, they actually become more productive. And for those of us in here who have kids, that is something to really think about. You might be more tired. You might be more stressed out. But you actually use your time better.

And so I think that we have to look at some of the more recent research that is done. I think Shelly Correll's work, Steven Evan Bernard's work who is in Indiana, I think they are some of the

scholars to really look to to show us that this gender gap exists across the board.

Ms. Hymowitz. Can I just——

Chairman Lee. Yes, go ahead.

Ms. Hymowitz. If I can push back a little bit myself. If you look at Claudia Goldin's work, she—she is at Harvard and has done a lot of work on the gender gap over the years, and there is still a gap. But what she finds is that the economy is changed particularly at the high levels in ways that privileges, or leads to higher earnings for people who are available all the time, basically. And that tends to be more men than women.

So, you know, you can look at ways to try to change those industries where that is the case. But for instance if you are in big law, you have to be available for clients. In many firms, you have to be available for clients——

Chairman Lee. Yes, I have experienced that one up close and personal.

Dr. Stevenson. Can I—I actually just pushed back a little bit. Claudia Goldin was my advisor in graduate school, and I know her work really well. In big law, there is a huge penalty if women do not want to be on call all the time.

The same penalty was true in obstetrics. There was a belief that, you know, your obstetrician had to deliver your baby and needed to be on call 24/7. Women went into obstetrics and they changed that, and the way we deliver babies has changed, and there is no longer a penalty for not being around all the time.

Claudia has often said, why is it that babies are easier to pass off than court cases? That is something she has never understood. So we do not understand why some occupations continue to have an enormous penalty like finance for having a short, brief time out of the labor force. And I do not think that it is easy to say that, you know, women are taking time out. Of course if women want flexibility we should give it to them, and we should help all occupations realize that it is a mistake to lose the talent by having unreasonable penalties for people who want a little bit of flexibility.

Chairman Lee. I will say, having accidentally turned into a witness a moment ago, saying that I have experienced that one, I will say that at least with every law firm I have ever had any association with, which I will concede are big law firms, law firms do tend to go out of their way to offset that. Generally speaking, a premium is placed in the profession on availability, particularly a big firm, but they also go out of their way to try to offset that by having special committees and procedures that are designed specifically to attract, recruit, retain, and promote women. And as far as I can tell, they have done a pretty good job of that.

I am unfortunately going to have to go, so I am going to hand the gavel over to Vice Chair Beyer. But I want to thank all of you for being here. Your testimony has been outstanding, and I have really enjoyed this hearing a lot. Thank you.

Vice Chairman Beyer. I am going to come a little out of left field, Dr. Ray. I am one of six, the father of four. You have two children. Why are kids so darned expensive? I seem to recall my mother turning us out into the backyard, and every one of us talked about how expensive children are right now.

Dr. Ray. Yeah, I think one of the biggest things with the expenses of children—and I am sure others up here have thoughts, as well—but I will kind of combine the research with my own personal experience, having an 8- and a 9-year-old right now, is that a lot of the resources—and this gets back to my own personal story—a lot of the resources that were available to my mother when she was raising me are not available today.

So what families are doing, they are outsourcing those resources. And then it is a scaling up of supposedly sort of soft skills and certain types of experiences that kids need today. So what that means is that parents are spending a lot of money for other sorts of things that, honestly, school and local neighborhoods used to do. I mean when we look at the differences in school funding compared to what the Federal Government used to provide in the past is now funded at the local level.

So like this neighborhood that I talked about growing up in Atlanta, the local property tax structure simply could not even afford to keep the lights on, could not even afford to have air conditioning at the schools in August in Atlanta. Anybody who has been in Atlanta in August knows it is really, really hot.

So then all of a sudden you do not get any of the additional perks that go along with supposedly what it means to raise kids in a community. So parents are now outsourcing all of these things. I know a lot of parents who send their children to math and reading programs because they feel that the schools that they go to are inadequate, it is not even that they want their kids to get ahead, they simply want their kid to be able to keep up, to simply stay on par.

And so I think as we look at what is happening with parents today, and families raising young children, it is that the costs associated with activities, with even educational activities—I mean we have not even got to thinking about going on a nice trip, which for a lot of families simply does not happen. I think we have to be very realistic about these sort of things. School uniforms. Even in a lot of public schools, parents have to get school uniforms. If you know anything about kids that are my kids' ages, as you do, I mean we have to get a uniform basically every week for one of our boys. This costs a significant amount of money. And if you are a family that is strapped, going to pay for a $20 or $30 shirt every couple of weeks, they simply cannot afford it.

And these are often times at public schools where supposedly they are not supposed to be able to have to pay for these sort of things, the taxing that they are providing to the local neighborhoods are supposed to do it.

Vice Chairman Beyer. Thank you. Dr. Stevenson, Ms. Hymowitz talked about the significant percentage of children in single-family homes, or born to unmarried mothers. What happened to the stigma about that? Again, growing up the Florence Crittenton Home for Unwed Mothers was across the street from my elementary school. There are no more Florence Crittenton Homes for Unwed Mothers.

Dr. Stevenson. Oh, that is I think a long social change. But, you know, I am—sorry, I am trying to think about where to start. I was actually just talking with somebody about this the other day.

It used to be the case that we would stamp "bastard" on the birth certificate of a child born out of wedlock. And in many states, in fact in Louisiana, the State did not recognize the legal relationship between the mother and the children that were born out of wedlock. And that was overturned by the Supreme Court in 1968 that said the sort of Draconian attitude toward single mothers is too much. It is too hard on children. So I think that there has been—you know, there has been a big cultural evolution since then which has allowed single mothers to thrive.

But I think more importantly, coming back to this point about is it a good marriage or a bad marriage, has allowed people to make a choice about raising a child on their own, or being in an unsuccessful marriage.

And there is a large literature on what happens when we try to force people together who are in an unhappy marriage, and it is not good for children. I think we can all agree that what is good for children is for children to be raised by as many loving people as possible. And if that is two parents, that is terrific. Two loving parents who get along and are not fighting with each other is really great for kids. That is just not always possible. And it has been really important for us to recognize.

I think if we go back to that Supreme Court case in 1968, one of the things that really struck me was saying, you know, you might not like the decisions that the parent is making, but do not have the child bear the consequence.

And that is really important. We need to support all children.

Vice Chairman Beyer. That is a great segue, because one of the things is that sort of in all of your testimonies, both spoken and written ones, that so much of the challenge has to do with low economic performance. Either men that are unemployable, or families that have to postpone marriage because they do not have the income.

Dr. Wilcox, you expressed skepticism about some of the progressive plans of your colleagues. Where does your skepticism come from?

Dr. Wilcox. I want to be careful here. I am not saying that some of these programs and policies are not necessarily helpful to families, but we have to sort of recognize that they are not a panacea, and that just addressing the economic dimensions of these challenges today will not necessarily get us to the place where we would like to be is sort of the point that I would make about this.

And I think it is important in terms of the question that you just asked Dr. Stevenson, that we sort of understand that we are not going back to the 1950s into the home that just across from your home growing up. But I would like to go forward in the 21st century to a world where kids who are born to lower income families, and kids who are born to African-American families, and kids who are born to less educated families, have just the same shot as being raised by two loving married parents as kids born to more educated, more affluent, you know, White and Asian families.

And so I think to get to that place, from my perspective, requires us to address both the economic kinds of questions we have been talking about today, but also it requires us to think and speak more frankly about culture and to sort of get people to understand

and to realize that, you know, it certainly helps our kids if we can figure out ways to forge strong and civil marriages. And I say this as someone who was raised by a single mom, as well, and my mom did I think a great job with me and my sister. But there was a profound longing in my heart growing up, you know, not having a father in the household. And what I am just hoping we can figure out is sort of ways, you know, economically, civically, and culturally to increase the share of kids who are raised by two loving married parents, and where we do not have these huge class divides when it comes to family structure in America.

Vice Chairman Beyer. Thank you very much.

Congresswoman Herrera Beutler, the floor is yours.

Representative Herrera Beutler. Sweet. This is so fascinating. Actually, it is funny to me. These are some of the things that I think really drive, or should drive most if not all of the policy that we do here. And yet, you know, the chances that we will have the ability to impact all the different committees—I think about our Budget Committee, Ways and Means, everything that we are working on, certainly health care, all of this plays into it.

And I think, Dr. Wilcox, your point, it is funny that you just said, you were talking about some of the solutions are not a panacea, and I had written down that marriage is not a panacea, and I am a big promoter of marriage. I do not know if I should say, I do believe it is the reason that, you know, my kids are able to be happy and healthy is because of the effort my husband and I put into it, right? And we have that chance. I did not end up in a domestic violence situation, or so on, right. Thank you, Daniel.

But I still keep coming back to, I think we have to help people answer who am I? And why am I here? Because they are not going to be able to bring that into a marriage situation and not be a healthy marriage. Or they will be able to answer it in whatever circumstance they are in, and then provide for their kids. Which I think are both examples of that.

That does not mean that the ideal, which I think is what you are talking about, is the ideal would be getting people into stable, committed, married relationships so that the kids have that stability. Because it is true, man. They get their security from what is going on in the home, and who is affecting the home. I am sorry that I have kind of pigeon holed everybody now in how I think about it.

One of the things I wanted to ask about, you know, I think some of the policy recommendations I think are super strong. The earned income tax, let's see, you know, doubling the threshold, and certainly not penalize marriage, strengthening CT&E, because I think that goes across the board. I think that is one of the areas where we have sold this whole generation down the river and into debt because we have not talked about what do you want to do? Who are you? What do you like? How do we help you get there? And some of that is CT&E.

I have certainly seen it in my brother's life. An expansion of the child tax credit. It seems like those things you all agreed on. Am I reading that right? All of you agreed on that?

[Nods in the affirmative.]

And then—sorry, I took a lot of notes. In terms—oh, this is for Dr. Ray. Equitable opportunity for jobs. You know, that is some-

thing that I have been focusing on in my region, my district. That is, how we get more people access to jobs, right, because that is the first step to being able to provide for yourself, your family, what that looks like.

How do we help get equal opportunity for jobs? And I think in particular you were talking about African-American men, but what does that look like?

Dr. Ray. Yeah, I think—I think one of the biggest—I think there are a couple of main things. First, I think that there has to be more vocational and technical training. So if you look at what is happening going from high school to college is that in a lot of states—Maryland is one of these—where if you are going to say come to the University of Maryland, typically your junior year of high school you start going to community college so that you can try to offset some of the costs——

Representative Herrera Beutler. It is a Running Start program.

Dr. Ray. Exactly. The problem, though, is that those programs are typically for very high achievers in high schools. When we go back in previous decades, community colleges were for people who were going to end up getting a trade, who were going to end up with a vocational/technical associates degree. Those individuals are being placed out of that queue. So I think that is the first thing. So there is a training gap.

Then the second thing, obviously, is that with the training gap there is a job gap. And I mentioned cities in particular because when we talk about, Black American families, a lot of them are located in urban cities. And we have to be very clear that historically, Black families actually move to those cities looking for jobs that for the most part have disappeared.

I mean, I think Gary, Indiana, which is a city we do not talk about often, but it is a city that was thriving in the 1960s and 1970s, and it is simply obsolete with an economic hub. Detroit? Baltimore? The same way. So we want to get to a point—and kind of what we have kind of been talking around, is that, as much as some people want this to change, men still intrinsically tie their masculinity to work. And what that means is, is when they do not see value in work, or when they are not getting valued at work, it then impacts other aspects of their lives.

And so we have to do something about the economic hubs in our existing—in cities. I mean, they are simply depleted. And now what is happening is that now people are flocking to the suburbs, because over the past 20, 30 years that is where the jobs were, and we have not even got to rural America yet. Like when I was talking about Kosciusko County. No matter whether we are talking about urban, suburban, or rural areas, for searching workers they are simply priced out of the market. And that has a lot to do with education, but it also has a lot to do with the jobs that are available.

The jobs that are available, they are often times working two and three of them to try to put food on the table. They do not have good benefits. And like there was a man in Kosciusko County who we interviewed. He said something very profound.

He used the word "role." He said, "My wife and I switched roles." I find it so interesting when people use that terminology, and we

make the assumption that people do not necessarily think about it that way, and they do. He said: "My wife and I switched roles, and I am primarily at home with the kids. It does not make sense for me to work right now, because if I do, we still will not make enough for childcare. So instead it is better for me to stay at home, us have one income, and then we get some sort of government assistance."

What I find interesting about that, he wants to work. He wants to be out.

Representative Herrera Beutler. This I see over and over again with regard to the child care piece. One of the reasons, I would say, I have a few bipartisan, bicameral pieces of legislation with regard to child care and helping to pay for child care, or helping offset some of the things more middle class families, some with lower income, right.

One of the things the child care providers, especially in areas like mine where we have a child care desert in Washington State, they do not have the facilities and the provider, right? And what those providers that are there have told me, the why, different ones, that the minimum wage, the blanket minimum wage requirement, the $15 an hour Washington State, have actually cost them because they cannot keep providers, good child care providers, in those places because they move on, or they cannot afford it, the centers themselves.

So talk about a conundrum we are running into, but I think artificially setting things, I think we have got to figure out how to do this in a way—it gets deep quickly, but I saw that on your recommendations and I thought some of those, what I am being told by child care providers and those who use the subsidies to make sure they are getting low-income people options for their kids that are quality, are telling me the opposite about the set standard minimum wage.

I just thought that was interesting. I mean, I am just running with it.

[Laughter.]

Dr. Stevenson. So I think that is a really important point, and I will just put out the mathematical fact. If we want child care providers to be trained in early childhood education, they are going to have to be paid a wage that is above the minimum wage. And how can a minimum wage worker afford to put their kid in a child care center where the child care workers are making more than they are, without government support and government subsidy?

That is the fundamental problem. And the solution is not to have a whole bunch of low-paid child care workers, but it is to figure out how we invest in our children more.

Representative Herrera Beutler. I think that is it, right there. I think you are right. We say we invest in the kids, but we really do not.

Dr. Stevenson. And there is not—I mean, there are a slew of studies that show the return to taxpayers of spending money on that. You know, every year with my graduate students we put on big events at the Ford School talking about the growing Federal deficit and debt. So I am well aware and versed on those issues.

But there is no dollar that we could better spend than to invest more in early childhood education.

Representative Herrera Beutler. Let me make sure, because I am going to yield it for good now.

I think I would love to hear thoughts about the mental health piece. I know, as someone who does believe in marriage and its benefits, how do we help people see good marriages, and feel confident enough, or ready enough to get into one? Some of it are the symptoms we have talked about, but at the heart of it have you seen any data on those things?

Dr. Wilcox. Well I think, as I said before, one of the encouraging pieces of news that we cannot lose sight of here is that we are seeing an increase in the share of kids who are being raised in stable marriages. When we look at the General Social Survey, we also see, too, that a clear majority of both women and men who are married today say that they are very happy in their marriages.

So at least for the families that are being formed today, I think we are going to see kids being exposed in tiers about peers being exposed to some better things. And some of those things are related to points that Dr. Stevenson made about kind of we are seeing more men like your husband, for instance, who are——

Representative Herrera Beutler. He is gonna kill me.

[Laughter.]

Dr. Wilcox [continuing]. Engaging on the home front. But it is important to recognize, even on that score, there are different models for how marriages are kind of doing that thing. We actually see, surprisingly, that the most progressive Americans, and the most conservative Americans—and maybe that would explain your husband's status in some part—are the ones most, like I say, they are very happy in their marriages.

I think oftentimes some of the different models to how they kind of do it, but I think what is one common thread across those two different sort of ends of the spectrum is that they have in different ways pretty high expectations about what men are doing. And so among the conservative spouses it is mostly religious conservatives in people who are happily married on sort of one end of the spectrum, and on the other end it is more progressive folks who have more egalitarian commitments. But I think the shared thread there on both of those kinds of marriages is they have pretty high expectations for what the guy will be doing. Not necessarily when it comes to housework, or when it comes to their investment in the kids and in the marriage and the family. So that is sort of I think one thing to kind of be aware of and to sort of lift up.

But I also think it is important to sort of, not that you all can do much about this, but to sort of recognize that the pop culture is pretty important here, probably more important than what happens actually in Washington. And so we really need more shows, you know, like "The Middle" and fewer movies like "The Marriage Story." Because, you know, a show like "The Middle" is I think very honest in its depictions of the challenges of family life and marriage. It is not sugar-coating anything. But ultimately it is pretty funny, and it is pretty—you know, it is pretty uplifting. Whereas a movie like "The Marriage Story" I think presents a pretty kind

of dim view of marriage, one that is actually not even very realistic anymore.

So I think it is about trying to figure out ways to encourage our colleagues working in southern California to be not doing a rose-colored job when it comes to the pop culture, but an honest job and one that really does sort of show how good marriages, good families, are great for adults and kids.

Representative Herrera Beutler. That is such a great point, considering what just happened with the Oscars, and the types of shows that got voted in, and the types of producers who were pulled in. I thought, how is that a cross section of American society?

Ms. Hymowitz. I would just add one more thing in terms of trying to think about the mental health piece. I am not going to speak specifically about serious mental illness because that is not my—but I think that we need to be thinking more about the schools kids are going to.

I think a school with a strong culture, a strong sense of purpose, and a strong sense of proper—you know, of appropriate behavior, and of kindness, of generosity, but also of discipline, can make a huge difference for kids who are maybe not going to find that so much at home.

And we do have in New York City, and I know this is true elsewhere, we do have some charter schools, not all, that are doing that. And it is quite a remarkable thing to see. And the parents of course are deeply, deeply grateful.

Representative Herrera Beutler. Thank you.

Thank you.

Vice Chairman Beyer. Dr. Stevenson.

Dr. Stevenson. Thank you. I was just going to actually add something that will tie in Dr. Wilcox's sort of life plan. I think that people enjoy their lives, or have better mental health when they understand the progress narrative of their life, when they know what they are aiming for, they are working toward something and there is a path they are going down.

So Dr. Wilcox noted that highly educated people follow this path of education, then work, then marriage, then kids. And that is because for many highly educated people there is a narrative that they are working toward something. They know what the job promotion is they are looking for. They know the career path, and they know where they want to get to.

I think that that whole path is missing for a lot of people with lower incomes and less education. And that idea of not knowing their path, not knowing their progress narrative is leaving them unmoored emotionally and also sort of unable to follow the path that Dr. Wilcox is suggesting.

And I think that is one of the reasons I have skepticism of just telling them this is the right path to go down, but perhaps helping them form their own plan for how they are going to execute their life. What are their ambitions going to be? What are they going to achieve? From school, as Ms. Hymowitz suggested, starting them understanding the path they need to walk down. And then I think that they will naturally fall into the path that Dr. Wilcox suggests is the best.

Vice Chairman Beyer. I want to thank all of you for being here today, and for letting us go beyond our five minutes. So we want you to come back sometime when there are no votes, and you will have a whole panel up here.

I was particularly struck by both Dr. Wilcox and Dr. Ray's comments about being raised by single mothers without the dad. And, Dr. Wilcox, your yearning for that missing father. I realized that I had a dad that was home at four o'clock every afternoon, was around every weekend working on the neighbors' cars, and very present. And I realized my three closest friends all had basically absent fathers. And it was not until I was 18 that I realized they did not really like me, they just wanted to hang around my father.

[Laughter.]

That was the really important part. So I want to thank all of you for being here today. Thanks to the witnesses. If any of the members want to submit additional questions for the record, the hearing record remains open for three days. And, without objection, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:08 p.m., Tuesday, February 25, 2020, the hearing of the U.S. Joint Economic Committee in the above-entitled matter was adjourned.]

SUBMISSIONS FOR THE RECORD

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. MIKE LEE, CHAIRMAN, JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

Good afternoon, and thank you for joining us for this hearing of the Joint Economic Committee. Today's hearing will focus on the most important institution in our society—the family.

As most members of this committee are aware, the American family is in a precarious state: although the vast majority of Americans still desire to marry, the marriage rate has declined for decades and stable family life has disappeared for millions of American children.

The trends in family life are concerning: whereas just 5 percent of children were born to unmarried mothers in 1960, 40 percent of children are born to unmarried mothers today. Meanwhile, 30 percent of children today live without one or both parents, twice the proportion of children that lived without one or both parents 50 years ago.

Over the past few years, the Social Capital Project has worked to document these trends in American "associational life," the web of social relationships through which we pursue joint endeavors—our families, communities, workplaces, and religious congregations. The Project recognizes the family as a crucial source of these relationships, which is why our policy agenda aims to make it more affordable to raise a family and to increase the number of children raised by happily married parents.

But although the Project has sometimes emphasized the social value stable family life provides, the declines in family stability have economic, physical, and emotional consequences as well. For a variety of reasons, children raised in single-parent families are far more likely to experience child poverty, less likely to graduate from high school or attend college, and less likely to be connected to the labor force as adults.

In addition, children raised in single-parent families are less likely to have positive relationships with their parents, and are far more likely to experience physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.

Conversely, children raised by two married parents in a healthy relationship are likely to be happier, healthier, and better prepared for life.

The positive outcomes associated with stable home life are outcomes Americans want for all children, no matter their background. But tragically, the decline of the family is concentrated among some vulnerable groups, including minorities and low income families.

For example, over two-thirds of births to Black mothers and over half of births to Hispanic mothers occur outside marriage, and minority women are much more likely to see their marriages end in divorce. Meanwhile, two-thirds of births among non-college educated women occur outside marriage, and non-college educated adults are also less likely to stay married.

Although these trends are most stark for disadvantaged groups, they affect us all.

What factors have driven these declines in family stability? The breakdown of the family is at least partly caused by cultural changes that have reverberated throughout our society—including changing romantic norms that led to greater relationship ambiguity, a culture of individualism that too often emphasizes the desires of individuals over the well-being of the family, and the retreat from religion, which is one of the strongest supports of marriage and family life.

But while cultural factors may have contributed to declining marriage rates over time, the Federal Government has also played an active role. For example, our government penalizes marriage through the welfare system and tax code.

Our Federal Government should not be in the business of punishing marriage. Instead, it should support policies that strengthen marriage and thus improve the likelihood of family stability for children. State and local leaders should also seek ways to strengthen marriage and increase family stability.

Some of us have been working toward that goal: today we will hear from expert panelists, who will speak to the state of the American family and address various policy solutions we might pursue. I look forward to hearing their testimonies on this critical topic.

I now recognize Vice Chair Beyer for opening remarks.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. DONALD BEYER JR., VICE CHAIR, JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

Thank you Chairman Lee.

This is my first hearing as Vice Chair of the Joint Economic Committee. I feel privileged to be a member of the committee and to have the opportunity to work on issues that are of real importance to most Americans.

I would like to thank former Vice Chair Carolyn Maloney for her leadership. And I'd like to thank Chairman Lee for his hard work, commitment and collegiality.

Today, we are focused on family stability and the connection to the well-being of American children.

We all share a commitment to the same goal—delivering the best outcomes for children, families and the economy.

The question is—how do we get there?

TEEN PREGNANCY IS AT RECORD LOW

I want to start with good news. Teen pregnancy, which leads to poor health and economic outcomes for mothers and their children, is at an all-time low.

Between 1991 and 2015, the teen birth rate dropped by almost two-thirds, thanks in part to the Affordable Care Act.

This is an issue I have worked on for many years, and I think we can all feel good about the substantial progress that's been made.

DECLINING MARRIAGE RATES LARGELY ARE A RESULT OF ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

Part of the impetus for today's hearing may be that marriage rates have declined in the past several decades. A good portion of that decline is the result of economic challenges.

If you're struggling financially, your wages haven't gone up or you've lost your job—getting married is neither feasible nor practical.

Perhaps less known is that divorce rates have also been falling. Since its peak in 1980, the divorce rate has fallen to a 40-year low.

AMERICANS WANT TO GET THEIR ECONOMIC FOOTING BEFORE MARRIAGE

Young Americans today want to get their economic footing before they get married. They correctly understand that they must get an education or training to achieve financial success. They want to get a firm foothold on a career and earn a degree of financial stability.

If they wait longer to get married, it's not because they are anti-marriage. It's because they are pragmatic. They are pro-success.

They are adapting to current conditions—not wishing for a return to the past.

And the reality is that the traditional male-breadwinner model of the past failed to work for so many—as wages stagnated and the costs of housing and college soared higher and higher.

TRADITIONAL FAMILY STRUCTURES ARE NOT THE ONLY PATH TO SUCCESS

My friends on the other side sometimes talk about the so-called break down of family and the increase in households headed by single mothers.

It's true, that as people delay marriage, there are more babies born to unmarried parents. That holds across demographic groups and race. And it's true in the United States and elsewhere.

But what the research also shows is that children raised by loving adults do well. There are lots of loving and supporting arrangements.

It's also true that fathers today spend significantly more time caring for their children than in previous generations—in fact, three times as much as in 1965.

On average, the households with the highest incomes are married with both spouses working. But not every household is going to look like that and the government should be working to support children in all types of families—especially those with access to only limited financial resources.

REAL CHALLENGES FACING FAMILIES ARE ECONOMIC

The real challenges facing families—whether living in small rural communities or large metro areas—are economic.

Forty-four percent of workers earn just $18,000. And many are working two and three jobs.

Millions of American families are one accident, one car breakdown, one trip to the emergency room from financial crisis or ruin.

When people are living paycheck to paycheck, when wages are basically where they were 40 years ago, is it any wonder adults postpone marriage?

WE SHOULD INVEST IN PROVEN PROGRAMS

Step number one, then, is to do more to help people build their financial base.

Increase the minimum wage. Expand the EITC. Provide affordable, quality child care. Protect nutritional supports. Ensure workers have real bargaining power—to negotiate wage increases, predictable hours and better working conditions.

Children whose families benefit from expanded EITC are more likely to graduate high school and enroll in college.

Similarly, access to SNAP leads to better educational and health outcomes.

If we care about child outcomes, we should invest in programs that drive those outcomes higher.

WE NEED "FAMILY FRIENDLY" POLICIES LIKE PAID LEAVE

Making paid family leave a reality—for women and men—would be another important step.

I'm pleased and encouraged that Federal workers will be able to take 12 weeks paid leave to care for a newborn or adopted child.

We should expand that same policy to workers in the private sector.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES NEED TO CATCH UP TO THE WAY AMERICANS LIVE

Finally, part of the challenge for families is that our government hasn't kept pace with the way people are living their lives.

For example, the share of multigenerational households is growing, but our policies haven't changed.

Grandparents and aunts and uncles are taking care of kids—they're doing a great job. But, often they can't access family leave or food assistance or other important supports that would help.

We need to catch up.

I thank all of the witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to your testimony.

Statement before the Joint Economic Committee

On "Improving Family Stability for the Well-Being of American Children"

Family Stability and the American Dream

W. Bradford Wilcox
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University of Virginia
Visiting Scholar, American Enterprise Institute
Senior Fellow, Institute for Family Studies

February 25, 2020

The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) educational organization and does not take institutional positions on any issues. The views expressed in this testimony are those of the author.

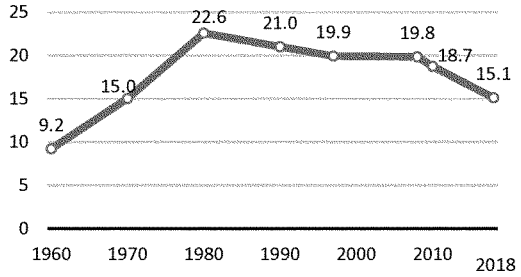
Chairman Lee, Vice Chair Beyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Economic Committee, thank you for convening this hearing on improving family stability. I am a sociologist at the University of Virginia, a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, and a senior fellow of the Institute for Family Studies. This testimony reflects my own views and not those of any organization with which I am affiliated. Thank you for having me here today.

If your only sense of the state of our unions was drawn from pop culture and the prestige press, you could be forgiven for thinking that the state of marriage and family life in America is dire. From the Oscar-winning movie *Marriage Story*, which leaves the impression that divorce remains an endemic feature of married life, to the title of the new *Atlantic* cover story, "The Nuclear Family Was a Mistake," much of today's culture paints a dark portrait of the state of our unions.[1]

The Good and Bad News About Family in America

But, in truth, the data tell a sunnier story than you might get from just following pop culture and the prestige press. There is good news about marriage and family life in America; news that is underreported and not well-known by the general public. First, as Figure 1 indicates, divorce is down more than 30 percent since the height of the divorce revolution in 1980, and it seems to be headed lower. This means the fabled statistic — that one-in-two marriages end in divorce — is no longer true. A clear majority of marriages today will go the distance. Second, in the wake of the Great Recession, the decades-long increase in nonmarital childbearing has come to a halt and is now falling, albeit modestly.

Figure 1: The Divorce Rate, 1960–2018

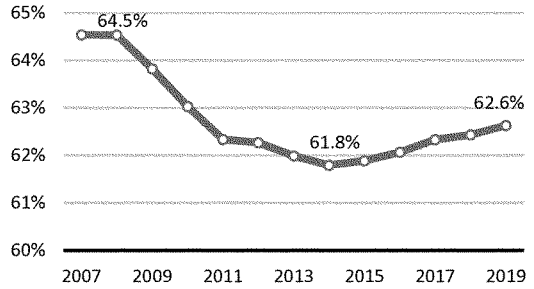


Source: 1960–97 estimates based on National Center for Health Statistics data; 2008–18 estimates based on the American Community Survey.[2]

Less divorce and nonmarital childbearing equal more children being raised in intact, married families. In fact, as Figure 2 shows, since 2014, the share of children being raised in an intact, married family has climbed from 61.8 to 62.6 percent. An uptick in children living in intact families has been strongest for black children and children born to disadvantaged mothers,

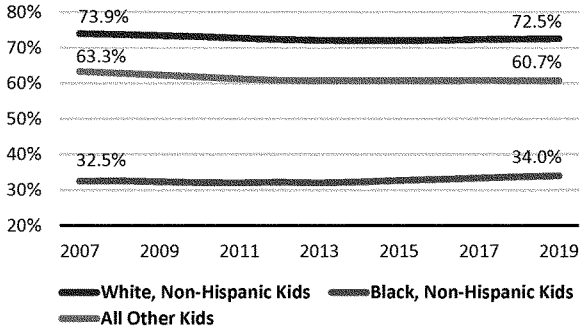
as Figure 3 suggests. The good news about family in America, then, is that a growing share of children are being raised in intact, married families.

Figure 2: Children in Intact Married Families, 2007–19



Source: 2007–17 estimates based on the American Community Survey, and 2018–19 estimates are projections based on 2018 and 2019 Current Population Survey. Courtesy of Lyman Stone.[3]

Figure 3: Share of Children Living in a Married, Two-Parent Household, by Major Racial or Ethnic Group, 2007–19



Source: American Community Survey data queried through the Integrated Public Use Microdata System.[4]

The bad news, by contrast, is that the nation still faces a deep divide when it comes to family structure and stability, with children from black and less-educated homes still facing markedly higher rates of family instability and single parenthood. Single parenthood is about twice as high for children from families with less education and for black children, compared to children, respectively, from college-educated families and children from white and Asian families.[5] This form of family inequality is particularly troubling because it leaves many

working-class and poor children "doubly disadvantaged"—navigating life with fewer socioeconomic resources *and* an absent parent.[6]

The Roots of Family Inequality

This family inequality has been driven by shifts in the economy, culture, and public policy.[7] Economic gains since the 1970s have disproportionately gone to the most-educated Americans. By contrast, Americans without a college degree — especially men — have not seen marked wage gains, even as employment instability and nonparticipation have increased precipitously for less-educated men.[8] This matters because stable employment is a powerful predictor of men's odds of getting and staying married.[9]

But growing inequality in family life is not simply an economic story; shifts in culture, civil society, and policy have also had a hand in the family changes of the last half-century. Since the 1960s, American culture has de-emphasized many of the values and virtues that sustain strong and stable marriages in the name of "expressive individualism."[10] But what is interesting about this well-known cultural trend is that a cultural countercurrent has quietly emerged in recent years among elite Americans: While America's educated elite overwhelmingly reject a renewed marriage-centered ethos in public, they embrace a marriage-centered ethos for themselves and their children in private, thereby affording their families a significant cultural advantage when it comes to forging a strong and stable family life.[11] Unfortunately, it seems this marriage-minded ethos has not yet caught on as much in less-advantaged communities.[12]

Likewise, declines in religious and secular civic engagement have been concentrated among working-class and poor Americans, thereby robbing these families of the social support they need to thrive and endure.[13] Finally, means-tested programs and policies from the federal government often penalize marriage among lower-income families.[14] Taken together, these shifts have weakened the strength and stability of family life in poor and working-class communities across the United States.

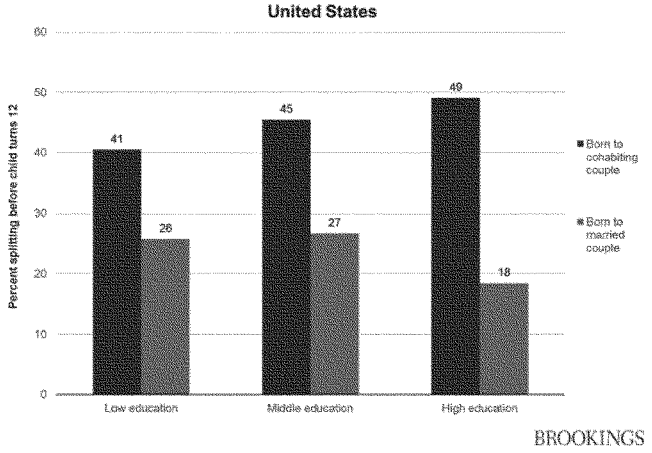
The shift away from stable marriage over the last half-century has also hit African American families especially hard for two sets of reasons. First, the legacy of slavery and the ongoing reality of American racism have exacted a toll on black families since the postbellum era.[15] Slavery's "ethnocidal assault" on black marriage and black men left its mark on black family life, and the economic and social stresses and injustices of racism — from racist policing to redlining — have made black relationships and family life much more difficult.[16]

Second, the economic and policy changes of the post-1960s world have had a disparate impact on the black family. For instance, from an economic perspective, the shift to the postindustrial economy has proved particularly difficult for the economic fortunes of black men; similarly, on the policy front, the rise of mass incarceration has taken a toll on black family life.[17] All these factors and more have left African American families more deeply affected by the post-1960s changes in American family life than any other group.

Why Family Structure and Stability Matter

The family divide in America matters because the American Dream is in much better shape when stable marriage anchors the lives of children — and the communities they grow up in. My use of the term "marriage" here is deliberate. No family arrangement besides marriage affords children as much stability as does this institution. For instance, children born to cohabiting couples are almost twice as likely to see their parents break up, compared to children born to married couples, even after controlling for confounding sociodemographic factors such as parental education.[18] Figure 4, which displays the likelihood that children will see their parents break up by age 12 for different levels of education and different relationship statuses, is emblematic of the superior stability of married families in America.[19]

Figure 4: Percentage of Families Breaking Up Before Child Turns Age 12, by Parents' Marital Status and Education



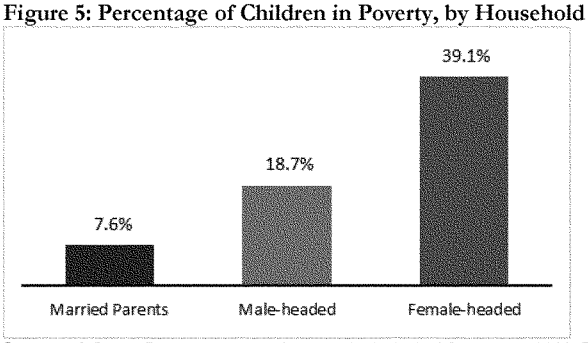
Source: Estimates from the National Survey of Family Growth.[20]

I cannot here summarize the voluminous literature on family structure and child well-being. But outcomes related to education and economics are suggestive of the ways in which marriage advantages children. When it comes to education, for instance, children raised in stable, married families are more likely to excel in school, generally earning higher grade point averages.[21] The effects of family structure are typically stronger for social and behavioral outcomes related to schooling, such as school suspensions, schools contacting parents about child behavior, and dropping out of high school.[22] Research also indicates that children from married homes are more likely to attend and graduate from college.[23] In other words, children are more likely to acquire the human capital they need to flourish in today's competitive marketplace when they are raised in stable, married families.

The relationship between family structure and children's economic well-being is also well established. Because families that have two parents are more likely to have not only a full-time earner but also two earners, children in stable, married families enjoy markedly higher income and lower risks of poverty and material deprivation.[24] Figure 5 indicates that children living in single-parent homes are at least two times more likely to be in poverty compared to children in married-parent families.

Obviously, much of the association between family structure and child economic well-being is about selection effects: Married parents tend to be better educated and employed in better-paying jobs, even before they marry.[25] However, part of the marriage effect seems to be causal, as well; that is, marriage increases the odds that families have access to two earners, reduces the odds that households go through costly family transitions such as a break up, engenders more support from kin, and fosters habits of financial prudence including more savings.[26] Indeed, research suggests that child poverty would be markedly reduced if the nation enjoyed 1970s marriage levels.[27] Likewise, when it comes to the racial divide in poverty, Penn State University sociologist John Iceland's work indicates that the effect of family structure is "the most significant factor among blacks — not only for poverty, but also for affluence, explaining about a third of the [racial] disparity in poverty and affluence in 2015."[28]

Figure 5: Percentage of Children in Poverty, by Household Type



Source: US Census Bureau, Income and Poverty in the United States: 2018, Table B-2.[29]

Family structure also matters for communities. Scholarship by Harvard University economist Raj Chetty and his colleagues indicates that neighborhoods with more two-parent families are significantly more likely to foster economic mobility for poor children.[30] In their words, "the strongest and most robust predictor is the fraction of children with single parents."[31] They have also found that found that black boys are more likely to achieve upward economic mobility if there are more black fathers in a neighborhood — and more married couples.[32] At the community level, we can see that strong and stable families — including father-present homes — are strongly linked to the health of the American Dream.

Perhaps not coincidentally, neighborhoods, towns, and cities are also safer and less likely to function as pipelines into prison for our young men when they are anchored by strong and stable families. The work of Harvard sociologist Robert Sampson tells us that neighborhoods with many two-parent families are much safer; in his own words, "Family structure is one of the strongest, if not the strongest, predictor[s] of variations in urban violence across cities in the United States."[33] My own research indicates incarceration rates for boys are markedly lower in neighborhoods with lots of two-parent families. Using Chetty's publicly available data set, my colleagues and I find that the share of single parents in a neighborhood is one of the most powerful predictors of later incarceration for young men.[34]

In all these ways, and more, the research on family structure and stability tells us that the American Dream is more alive when intact, married families anchor the lives of children.

Public and Civic Efforts to Bridge America's Family Divide

An increasing share of children today are being raised by married parents in a stable family environment. That is the good news. But the bad news is that a large divide in family structure and stability now marks American family life. The following public policy and civic measures would begin to bridge this divide, strengthening and stabilizing marriage and family life in the United States.

- **End the Marriage Penalty in Means-Tested Programs.** Currently, means-tested programs such as Medicaid, the earned income tax credit (EITC), and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) often penalize low-income couples who choose to marry.[35] These penalties fall particularly hard on working-class Americans, with one study showing that more than 70 percent of American families with young children with incomes in the second and third quintile face marriage penalties related to Medicaid, cash welfare, or SNAP receipt.[36]

  Studies suggest that these penalties can reduce the odds that lower-income families marry, and one survey found that almost one-third of Americans age 18 to 60 report they personally know someone who has not married for fear of losing means-tested benefits.[37] Congress should eliminate, or minimize, marriage penalties facing lower-income families with children age 4 and under by doubling income thresholds for means-tested programs and the policies serving married families — or pursuing other legislative remedies.

- **Strengthen Career and Technical Education and Apprenticeships.** One reason marriage is fragile in many poor and working-class communities is that job stability and income can be inadequate, especially for young adults without college degrees. This labor force reality can be remedied, in part, by scaling up career and technical education and apprenticeship programs.[38] Raising the skills, earnings, maturity, and self-confidence of young men and women who are not on the college track would

make forging strong and stable marriages more accessible to these Americans.[39]

I endorse recent administration, congressional, and state initiatives to increase apprenticeships and shorter, simpler apprenticeship-like training programs in the US. Increased federal appropriations for apprenticeship (from about $30 million to $200 million) have funded state expansion efforts, grants to community colleges, modernization and expansion of apprenticeships' occupational range, and industry intermediary and equity projects. Congress should do more to expand apprenticeships and career and technical education and to make sure that young men and women who are pursuing these options have access to Pell Grants and other forms of federal aid in much the same way as their peers in four-year colleges and universities. One promising provision already under consideration in Congress is Workforce Pell — which would make Pell Grants available to shorter, job-focused community college programs that lead to industry-recognized credentials.[40]

- **Subsidize Lower-Income Work**. To strengthen the economic foundations of poor and working-class family life and to increase the returns of work for less-educated men and women, the federal government should subsidize lower-income work.[41] A wage subsidy would reinforce the value of work and also send a powerful signal to working-class families that the nation stands with them. One approach would set the value of the subsidy relative to a "target wage" of $15 per hour and "would close half the gap between the market wage and the target" wage.[42] Unlike the EITC, this wage subsidy would be added to worker's paychecks, providing them with an ongoing, paycheck-to-paycheck boost to their family budget.

- **Expand the Child Tax Credit.** To help families cover the expenses of raising young children and reduce the financial stresses that can cause marital instability, Congress should also expand the child tax credit to $3000 per child and extend it to payroll tax liabilities or provide families with a fully refundable credit. The credit should be paid out on a monthly basis so as to give families additional month-to-month support in addressing the financial challenges of raising a family today.[43] To limit the expense, this expansion should be restricted to children under 6. Families would continue to receive a $2000 credit for children aged 6–17, though this benefit would be paid out on a monthly basis as well. A monthly tax credit would send a powerful signal to parents that the nation stands with them in their efforts to raise the next generation.

- **Launch Civic Efforts to Strengthen Marriage.** In the realm of civil society, national, state, and local initiatives that educate Americans on the benefits of stable marriage could prove helpful. Campaigns against smoking and teenage pregnancy have taught us that sustained efforts to change behavior can work. I would like to see a civic campaign organized around what Brookings Institution scholars Ron Haskins and Isabel Sawhill have called the "success sequence," in which young adults are encouraged to pursue education, work, marriage, and parenthood in that order.[44]

Ninety-seven percent of young adults today who have followed this sequence are not poor.[45] A campaign organized around this sequence — receiving widespread support from educational, civic, media, pop cultural, and religious institutions — might meet with the same level of success as the recent national campaign to prevent teen pregnancy, a campaign which appears to have helped drive down the teen pregnancy rate by more than 65 percent since the 1990s.[46]

Initiatives like these are especially needed because elites tend to value marriage for themselves and their kids but are reluctant to communicate the value of a stable marriage to the wider public.[47] This means many young men and women from poor and working-class communities grow up never knowing the value of a stable family life for their own economic prospects and those of their children. Initiatives relying on schools, community organizations, churches, and social media campaigns could help bridge this class gap in support of a marriage-centered orientation.

Measures like the ones articulated above are necessary to bridge the divide in family structure and stability across the US. The alternative to acting decisively is accepting a world where the educated and affluent — and their children — hoard strong and stable families for themselves, and everyone else has a diminished shot at forging such families for themselves. Given the importance of strong and stable families for realizing the American Dream, it is imperative that federal, state, and local governments — as well as civil society — do all they can to ensure that every American man, woman, and child has an equal shot at forging a strong and stable family.

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Testimony before the Joint Economic Committee

February 25, 2020

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Chairman Lee, Vice Chair Beyer, Distinguished Members of the Committee: thank you for this opportunity to testify today. I am the William E. Simon Fellow at the Manhattan Institute. Much of my research over the past 23 years has been on the decline of marriage, its causes, its impact on children, and its relationship to poverty and inequality. Today, I'd like to focus on what is perhaps an underappreciated part of this story, what some family scholars call the marriageable men problem.

The mass movement of American women into the workforce that began in the mid 20th century launched an extraordinary social revolution whose ripple effects we are still trying to fully understand. In 1950, about one in three women were in the labor force.[1] The numbers for prime age women rose dramatically over the following decades peaked at 2000 at 76.7%. Today after a moderate reversal during the Great Recession, it's returned to that historical high[2]. Even more striking was the shift in the work patterns of women with children. In the past, women who worked almost always left the labor force when they gave birth. Today working motherhood is the new normal. As of 2017, 71.3% of mothers of children under 18 were in the labor force, including 63% of mothers with children under 3.[3] In January the Labor Department announced that for the last quarter of 2019 women were a majority of those in the nonfarm payroll positions,[4] something that could be said of no other OECD country.[5]

This revolution has brought countless benefits to women. In order to prepare themselves for the workforce, they've spent more years pursuing an education. This has given them the chance to use the full range of their talents and pursue their individual interests. It's been widely (and accurately) reported that women are now more likely to graduate from college than men are;[6] as a result over 40% of women in the labor force have a college degree compared to only 36.4% of men.[7] Women have also poured into graduate schools and now earn more Master's and Ph.D. degrees, than men do.[8] Sixty percent of doctors under 35 are women[9], more than half of law school graduates and associates are also women.[10] They make up a quarter of the Senate and nearly a quarter of the House.[11] We hear a great deal about the injustice of our gender gap, but research that takes into account occupation, number of hours worked, seniority, and time away from the job, finds an unexplained gender income gap of only a few percentage points.[12]

I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge that there are still obstacles for women. There is still that income gap, even if it is far smaller than generally understood. As the #metoo movement reminds us on a regular basis, harassment and discrimination are an ongoing problem. Women still do more of the childcare in married couple homes; in single mother homes, which constitute the vast majority of single parent households, they often do all of it. Despite all of these impediments, the opportunities for American women to exercise their talents, to be financially

independent, to leave an abusive marriage, to buy their own homes, and to build wealth are extraordinary and unprecedented.

The opportunities for them to find a desirable husband or partner, that is, a man with whom they might want to raise children, turn out to be another matter. The problem is especially acute for our lower-skilled population. In 1960, more than 90% of adult women over 35 had married. There was little difference between rich and poor women, high school drop outs and college grads; all married at similar rates.[13] The numbers for all groups began to fall over the next decades, but the decline was especially dramatic for women with less than a college degree. As of 2015, 71 percent of college educated women were married; that was true for only 56% percent of less educated women, a difference of 14 percentage points.[14] Surprisingly, the women who did not marry continued having children at a similar rate. As a result, nonmarital births in that population soared. Today, 54% of moderately educated women and 66 % of those with a high school diploma or less are unmarried mothers.[15] The large majority of their children will live apart from their fathers for much of their childhood.

The most common explanation for the decline of marriage and mother-father families at the lower end of the income ladder is the moribund economic fortunes of low skilled men. There is some disagreement about just how much the earnings of these men have declined over the past decades[16] or whether they have declined at all, [17]and I won't elaborate on that debate here.

But there is little question that the economic fortunes of those men *relative to women* have worsened. According to a recent Pew Research study, between 1980 and 2018 the overall hourly wage rate rose by 45% for women. For men, the increase was only 14%. [18] At the higher end of the skills ladder, wage growth was stronger than it was for lower skilled jobs. That was the case for both men and women, but the future may well be female at that level. Demand for workers with strong analytic, managerial, and social skills is growing, as are the wages for those jobs. Women excel in these jobs. By contrast, demand and wages for workers with mechanical skills where men dominate, are either stagnant or falling. With increasing education and labor market experience, "women made significant strides in moving out of lower-paying occupations and into higher-paying occupations from 1980 to 2018, says the Pew report; the same cannot be said for their male peers.[19]

Equally important for understanding the decline of married two parent family is what the demographer Nicholas Eberstadt calls "men without work."[20] As of October 2019, over 10% of the prime aged male population was entirely MIA from the labor market. Thanks to a relatively strong labor market, that represents a slight improvement over four years ago, but as Eberstadt notes, it's still close to Depression-era levels. The large majority of these workless men have only a high school degree or less; notably, almost none of them are immigrants though the latter are likely to have less well-established social networks and more limited English language skills than native born men. Prime aged men without work are not going to school, nor are they developing their skills in other kinds of training programs. Very few of them report they are interested in finding a job. And, despite an overall increase in male involvement in domestic responsibilities, they are not spending "work hours" caring for children. One well publicized 2017 paper theorized that improvements in "leisure technology," namely, video games, played a big role in keeping workless young men occupied.[21] True or not, workless haven't found another

way to make much money; more than a third of them lived below the poverty line, compared to 9 percent of prime-age men overall.[22]

What does all of this have to do with marriage? After all, the traditional family model with a male breadwinner and homemaker wife has been in decline for more than five decades now. The proportion of dual earner married couples with children more than doubled from 25% in 1960 to over 60% in 2012. (Women are the sole earners in about 6% of married couples.)[23] Historically, because women did not have their own means of earning a living, they expected to marry men who were able to do so. It was reasonable to believe that once they had their own pay stubs and bank accounts, as they do today, men's earning power would be far less critical to their decisions about who to marry. In fact, with women's wages and education levels on the rise, it would make sense for more men to simply take on the roles of secondary earners or perhaps even become stay-at-home dads.

That's not what's happened. Instead, marriage, though not child bearing rates, plummeted. Why is that? To answer that question, consider Pew Research interviews with Americans about the qualities they think matter for husbands and wives. About seven-in-ten adults, both men and women, said that a good husband or partner should be able to support a family financially. Only thirty-nine percent of women and 25% of men held woman to the same standard. Traditional preferences for male breadwinners are even higher among those with less education. Eighty-one percent of those with high school or less and 71% of moderately education believe husbands should be able to provide financially for their families, while only 40% and 29% respectively said the same about wives. The demographer Yue Qian compared couples in the 1980 Census and in the 2012 American Community Survey and confirmed that men and women were following their stated preferences. Between the intervening decades, though wives grew more likely to marry down in terms of educational achievement, "the tendency for women to marry men with higher incomes than themselves persisted."[24] I've written recently about a study with very similar findings for couples in Sweden, one of the most egalitarian countries in the world.[25]

The notion that men and women still prefer marriages where husbands earn at least as much as wives finds support in "Mismatches in the Marriage Market," a widely cited paper published in 2019 in The Journal of Marriage and Family. The authors analyzed the socio-demographic characteristics of couples who married between 2008 and 2017. That data allowed them to create a profile of marriageable men for women with varying racial, economic and educational levels and compare them to the actual population of unmarried men at national, state, and local area levels. The already married men had 58% higher income than the men currently available and were 30% more likely to be employed. [26] To put it simply, the economically desirable men were already taken.

The "mismatch" between what women might want and the men available was larger for minority, and especially African-American, women than for their white peers. A Pew survey confirmed that "[N]ever-married women place a high premium on finding a spouse with a steady job," the authors write. Yet the number of never-married employed men between 25 and 34 per 100 women plunged from 139 in 1960 to 91 in 2012, even though there are more men than women in that age group. The ratio for black men and women is considerably worse: there are only 51 employed young black men for every 100 young black women. The share of blacks

who have never been married has quadrupled over the past half century—from 9% in 1960 to 36% in 2012. [27] With these ratios, it's not surprising.

In short, despite women's extraordinary gains over the past decades in educational achievement, income, and occupations, both sexes still expect husbands to earn at least as much as their wives do. Women who can't find such men will choose not to marry. Judging from their behavior thus far, either they will become single mothers or not have children at all.

This leads me to the following conclusion: to ensure more children grow up in stable, two parent families, we have to focus our attention on young men, particularly less educated and minority men. I would suggest three areas of attention.

First, the nation's schools have to pay more attention to their boy problem. Boys are already behind girls when they enter school.[28] They read and write later than girls and the gaps widen over time. Educators often find boys lose interest in their classes by middle school as reading material becomes more challenging.[29] Relatedly, boys are two times as likely to be suspended as girls,[30] and 40 percent more likely to drop out of high school.[31] Educators have been invested in improving the outcomes in science and math for girls over the past decades; they need to show the same commitment to addressing boys' lagging reading skills,[32] testing out new approaches that might improve boys performance. To cite just one potential avenue, there's some evidence that boys benefit from more structured reading instruction than many schools offer. [33]

The second change needed to improve boys' outcomes is increasing both the number and prestige of trade schools, apprenticeships, and career and technical training. The training offered in these schools should be holistic. They should be attending to students' "soft skills," their work ethic, perseverance, dependability, civility, and the like. I've included in the record an article about one such trade school that has successfully taught mechanical skills and social competence for generations of disadvantaged men.[34]

The third area of attention is admittedly less amenable to government policy, but is no less crucial to addressing the marriageable men problem: a re-affirmation of the importance of fathers and male contributions to the household. These days, according to surveys, girls and young women have stronger career aspirations than men.35 It sounds surprising at first but think about it. Society has come to accept single motherhood; in fact, it is the norm in many disadvantaged communities. I would propose that this seeming social progress has had unintended effect of telling boys and men that their contributions to family life and the household economy are of no great consequence. Why study, plan, show up for work on time, or go to work when you're sick of your boss if no one is depending on you, and no one cares?

Thank you for your attention.

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Testimony before the Joint Economic Committee

February 25, 2020

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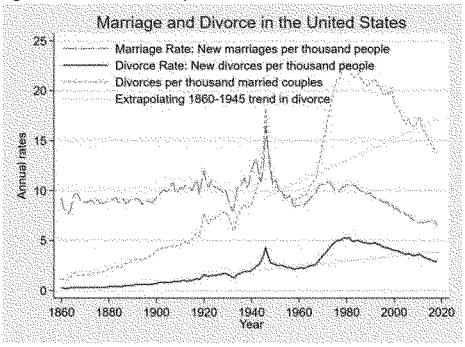
Chairman Lee, Vice Chair Beyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Economic Committee, thank you for the invitation to speak to you today about America's families. I am an economist who has spent much of the past three decades trying to better understand families, employment, and how the two interact. Importantly, my focus has also included considering the ways in which policy choices help shape the decisions people make in their families and careers. For example, in my research I have shown that divorce law reform improved marriage by substantially reducing violence in marriage[1]. This counter-intuitive finding—making it easier to get divorced improved the quality of many marriages—points to how important it is that policy makers understand the nuanced way in which policy choices impact family choices.

I was asked to speak today about changes in family life. The family is not a static institution. In recent decades, marriage rates have fallen, but so too have divorce rates.



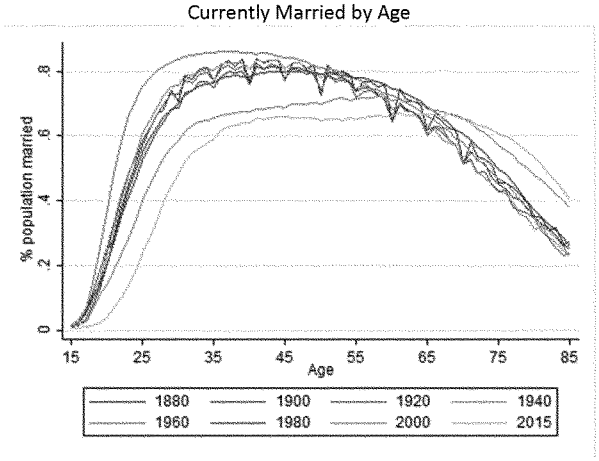
Sources: data for 1860-1919 are from Jacobson (1959); 1920-1998 from Carter et al. (2006), Historical Statistics of the United States, Millennium Education; 1999-2005 from Statistical Abstract of the United States; 2005-2018 from National Center for Health Statistics)

[1] Bargaining in the Shadow of the Law: Divorce Laws and Family Distress, Betsey Stevenson, Justin Wolfers The Quarterly Journal of Economics, Volume 121, Issue 1, February 2006, Pages 267–288, https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/121.1.267

The divorce rate per thousand married couples (seen in the figure as the dashed green line) peaked in 1981 and has been declining since. The spike in divorce in the 1970s reflected both the young age at which that cohort married and social changes in the expectations for marriage and adult life.[2] While the spike stands out, the divorce rate had been slowly increasing for many decades prior to World War II. Extending the pre-World War II trend (prior to both the post-war spike and the 1970s spike) forward to today, you can see that today's divorce rate is well below what the pre-World War II trend would have predicted. The decline in the divorce rate over the past four decades has undone much of the 1970s rise.

One explanation for the decline is that both men and women are waiting longer to marry and marrying at older ages is associated with a greater likelihood of a marriage surviving.[3] Since 2000, marriage patterns have diverged from the past, with lower rates of marriage at young ages and higher rates at older ages. The 1960s was also an outlier period in that an unusually large share of those in their 20s and 30s were married.

Currently Married by Age



(Data: US Census)

Many point to the decline in marriage among the young—indeed among those 22 to 29 years old in 2018, only 26 percent had ever married. In comparison, 79 percent of 22 to 29 years in 1960 had married. But much of this gap reflects a delay in marriage rather than marriage foregone. In fact, those ages 60 and over are more likely to have married and more likely to be

[2] Stevenson, Betsey, and Justin Wolfers. 2007. "Marriage and Divorce: Changes and their Driving Forces." Journal of Economic Perspectives, 21 (2): 27-52; Adam Isen & Betsey Stevenson, 2008.

[3] Isen, Adam and Betsey Stevenson "Women's Education and Family Behaviour: Trends in Marriage, Divorce and Fertility," in John Shoven (ed.), Demography and the Economy, University of Chicago Press, 2011.

currently married compared to those in almost any other time period. Marriage is thriving; it is simply thriving at older ages.

While learning about our current wonderful era of older marriage may be welcome news, it does not address your primary concern: are children being raised in households that have sufficient resources to care for them? But understanding what makes older marriages thrive provides broader insight into families—the success of older marriages highlights the role of income and leisure time in helping today's marriages thrive. More generally, to understand marriage it is necessary to realize that the increase in longevity means that children are no longer central to marriage as a larger share of adult life is spent without young children in the home.

Some of the changing patterns in the age of marriage reflects our longer life expectancy. Those marrying in the 1950s had a life expectancy of roughly 60, while those marrying today have a life expectancy of roughly 80. Increasing longevity means that couples have the option of having more years together, delaying marriage, and/or divorcing. Despite the myth that marriages will survive if they withstand the crucial early years, divorce occurs at fairly steady rates at each year of marriage—there's no magical number of years of marriage after which it becomes immune to dissolving.[4] That's why it is simultaneously true that Americans are both more likely to experience a marriage of 25 years or more and to experience divorce compared with people marrying a century ago.

Rising life expectancy has also changed the role of children in marriage as a shrinking share of adulthood is spent with young children in the home. A century ago, women having children could scarcely expect to live beyond age 50 and the typical woman had roughly four children. Not surprisingly, many women's entire adult lives were spent caring for children. In contrast, women today have a life expectancy of roughly 80 and have half as many children. As a result, women's adult lives are no longer spent primarily raising children. This is not to say that children are not an important part of most people's lives. In fact, there has been a reduction in the likelihood of never having children among women reaching childbearing age since 1960. More women have children, but they have fewer children, and parenting young children requires a smaller share of their adult lives.[5] This also reduces the cost of a potential maternity leave policy: If women work between the ages of 22 and 72, they have 50 years in the labor force. If they take 6 months off for the birth of each of their two children, then only 2 percent of their working lives (1 year out of 50) will be spent taking leave to bond with a child.

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[4] Stevenson, Betsey and Justin Wolfers, "Trends in Marital Stability," in Lloyd Cohen and Joshua D. Wright (eds), Research Handbook in the Law and Economics of the Family, (Edward Elgar Press), 2011; Isen, Adam and Betsey Stevenson "Women's Education and Family Behaviour: Trends in Marriage, Divorce and Fertility," in John Shoven (ed.), *Demography and the Economy*, University of Chicago Press, 2011.

[5] Is There a Case for a "Second Demographic Transition"? Three Distinctive Features of the Post-1960 U.S. Fertility Decline, Martha J. Bailey, Melanie Guldi, Brad J. Hershbein. Chapter in NBER book Human Capital in History: The American Record (2014), Leah Platt Boustan, Carola Frydman, and Robert A. Margo, editors (p. 273 - 312)

Just as marriage has been postponed, so too has childbirth. Children are born to mothers at increasingly older ages with a shift of the distribution from a large mass of people having first births in their 20s to many having their children in their 30s and 40s. For college educated Americans and for women in many developed countries, the median age of first birth is now in the 30s. The first birth among women with advanced degrees beyond college is even later. The New York Times article "The Age That Women Have Babies: How a Gap Divides America" shows the gap in age of first birth for women by education and marital status. Those without a college degree have their children out of wedlock and in their 20s, while those with a college degree have their children in their 30s and within a marriage.

Many scholars have pointed to a bifurcation in families because women with less education and fewer options in the labor force are following a somewhat different pattern. Less educated women have postponed marriage but not childrearing and as a result have their children often prior to marrying, raising single children in much lower income households. While many bemoan the lack of a second parent, research shows that the fundamental problem stems from insufficient income and socioeconomic stress.[6]

College-educated parents are often regarded as the model for successful parenting—their children are more likely to be raised in two-parent homes that have much higher incomes. This is driven as much or even more by the higher earnings potential of people in their 30s as it is by the dual income status of these married homes. College-educated parents spend more time with their children and more time intensive parenting.

But this narrative hides two important facts. The first is that women with both high and low education levels are spending more time parenting than in the past. All parents are investing more in their children. The second fact is that many college graduates in middle-class families struggle to pay student loans, to save for the down payment on a home, and to get a stronger foothold in the labor market. The shift to having children at older ages reflects the desire by many people to establish their careers and achieve financial stability prior to having children. Research shows that women's careers and wages stagnate after having children, a fact that leads many women to postpone having children as long as possible. Women and couples are making decisions about having children while considering the challenges of balancing work and children, the support they will get from their employer, the difficulty in arranging trustworthy children care, and the financial cost of having children.

The birth rate in United States hit a record low in 2018 raising questions about why people in their 30s are having fewer children.[7] In particular, Millennials are on track to have fewer children compared with previous generations. Millennials came of age during a deep recession and births typically decline during a recession because fewer people feel prepared to handle

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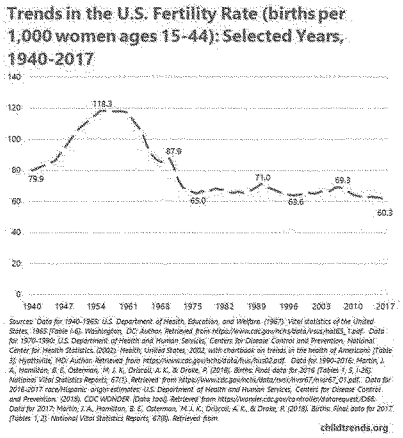
[6] Cross, Christina. (2019). Racial/Ethnic Differences in the Association Between Family Structure and Children's Education.

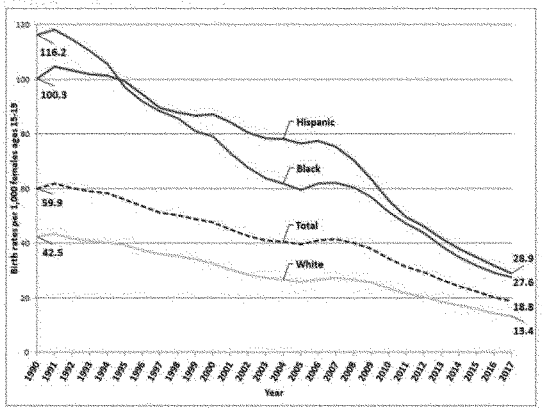
[7] National Vital Statistics Reports Volume 68, Number 13 https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr68/nvsr68_13-508.pdf

the financial burden of having a child. Yet, we're now ten years into an economic expansion and the unemployment rate has been below 5 percent since 2016. Such a strong economy is typically associated with higher birth rates.



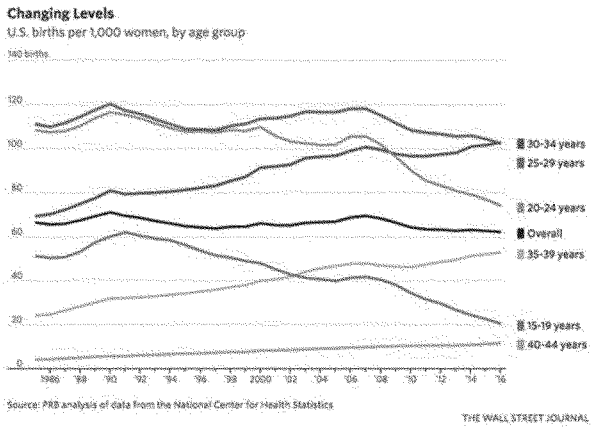
To be sure, one has to be careful interpreting the decline in births. Some of the decline is part of a long-run trend in the teenage birthrate, which has fallen by half since 2007. Birth rates of near-teens has also substantially declined over the past decade. Births to young mothers has fallen due to efforts to make it easier for younger women to avoid an accidental pregnancy and by a growing desire for young women to pursue higher education.

Figure 1: Birth rates per 1,000 females ages 15-19, by race and Hispanic origin of mother, 1990-2017



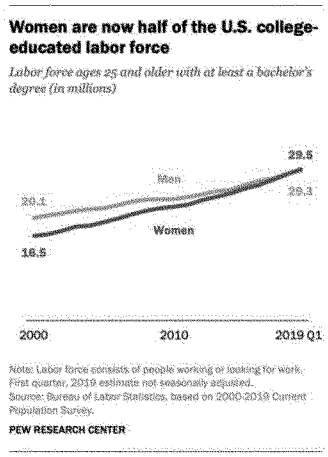
Source for 1990-2014: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). Births: Final data for 2014. National Vital Statistics Reports, 64(12). Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr64/nvsr64_12.pdf - PDF

The puzzle is that births for women in their early 30s has declined in recent years, as did births to women in their late 20s. Births to women in their late 30s and 40s rose, highlighting the continuation of women's delays in fertility.



To understand why women are continuing to further delay or even forego children, it is necessary to consider women's role in today's labor force. The majority of nonfarm payroll jobs

are held by women.[8] Women are getting higher education at much higher rates than men at a time when the college wage premium has never been higher.[9] The majority of college-educated workers in the United States are women. This trend will continue since nearly 60 percent of those graduating from college today are women—meaning that in a decade an even greater share of college-educated workers will be female. It is important that policy makers concerned about families and children understand the crucial role that women are playing in the workforce. These women struggle to balance their careers with their families and have dealt with this struggle by delaying fertility to older and older ages. Women are crucial to the functioning of our economy, but workplace policies and government policies have not kept up with the emergence of women as primary or co-equal household earners.



In my own research, I have found that the fundamental drivers of a successful marriage have changed as a result of technological change, increasing life expectancy, increasing globalization and international trade, greater living standards, and changing gender norms and expectations.[10] For much of history families worked together in what some researchers have called the corporate family economy—families worked together on farms and in the home.[11] As

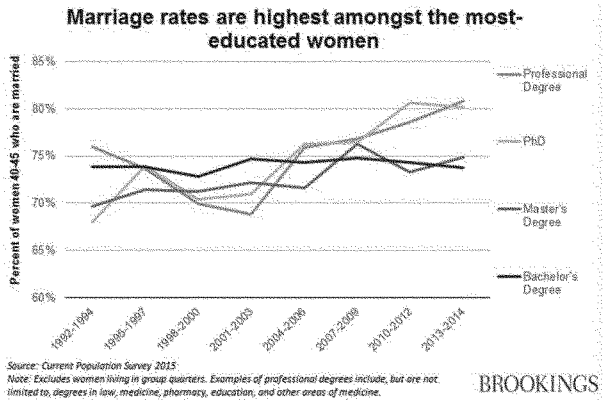
[8] https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-01-10/women-stand-out-in-otherwise-middling-u-s-december-jobs-report

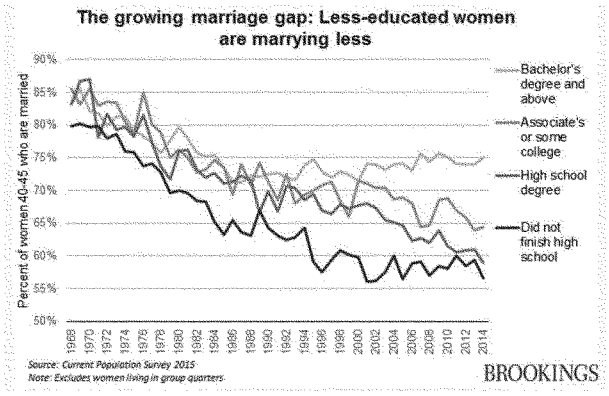
[9] NCES "The Condition of Education 2018" https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018144.pdf

[10] Stevenson, Betsey, and Justin Wolfers. 2007. "Marriage and Divorce: Changes and their Driving Forces." Journal of Economic Perspectives, 21 (2): 27-52; Adam Isen & Betsey Stevenson, 2008. "Women's Education and Family Behavior: Trends in Marriage, Divorce and Fertility," NBER Chapters, in: Topics in Demography and the Economy National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc.

[11] Ruggles S. (2016) Marriage, Family Systems, and Economic Opportunity in the USA Since 1850. In: McHale S., King V., Van Hook J., Booth A. (eds) Gender and Couple Relationships. National Symposium on Family Issues, vol 6. Springer, Cham

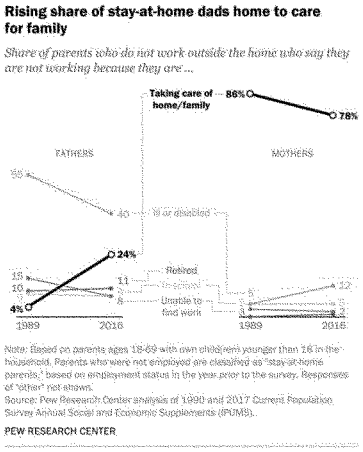
the need for agricultural workers declined, the male breadwinner family emerged—a period in which men and women had separate spheres. Today's families also work together in a shared mission, but now they operate much as they did in the days of the corporate family economy—together in a shared pursuit of earning a living and raising children. Notably, the difference is that modern families have more equal roles for men and women in the home and in the workplace. Families of equality—in which men and women share the joys and daily tasks of childrearing—are today's most successful families. College educated women were once the least likely to marry.[12] Today they are the most likely to be married and they divorce at lower rates.

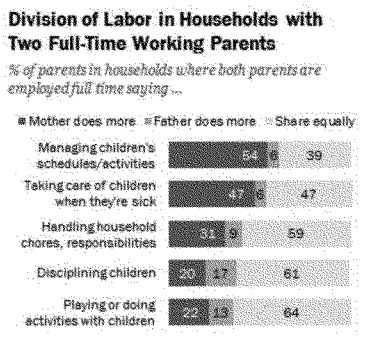




[12] Isen, Adam and Betsey Stevenson "Women's Education and Family Behaviour: Trends in Marriage, Divorce and Fertility," in John Shoven (ed.), Demography and the Economy, University of Chicago Press, 2011.

The rise of marriages of equality have created a bigger role for fathers. Fathers today spend more time with their children, and are more actively engaged parents. Dads are increasingly playing the role of the primary caregiver in the household: 1 in 5 fathers are the primary caregiver of preschool-age children when the mother is employed.[13] In the last 30 years, the number of families with stay-at-home dads and a working mom doubled,[14] the number of father-only families more than doubled, and in 2019 nearly a quarter of single parents with children under age 18 were father-only households.[15]





[13] Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2011
[14] Census Table MC1 from 2019 Current Population Survey
[15] Census Table FM-1 from Current Population Surve

In keeping with the shift in marriages to equal partnerships grounded in shared interests and background, in which both partners contribute to income and caregiving, fathers change diapers, give bottles, and bring children to and from school. Although fathers continue to spend less time on childcare than mothers, this gap has narrowed over the past 10 years, and dads are increasingly performing caregiving activities traditionally done by mothers. Overall, fathers are spending more time on childcare and housework, and have not reduced their paid work hours by a commensurate amount. In 1965, fathers spent 49 hours per week doing paid work and taking care of their families; in 2012 that jumped to 54 hours per week.[16] Fathers are doing 4.6 more hours of childcare per week and 4.4 more hours of housework per week.

It is worth noting that fathers are now often the ones leading the charge to find a solution to work-family conflict.[17] In 2008, 60 percent of dads in two-income couples reported work-family conflict compared with 35 percent in 1977.[18] Men are also now more likely to seek jobs that allow more flexibility, require less travel, or include paid paternity leave.

The changing role of fathers is impacting schools, employers, and healthcare. Neither schools nor employers can presume that fathers can ignore the call to come to a sick child's help and take them home to rest or to the doctor for help. Pediatricians have noted that father's involvement in children's health and development has changed substantially over the past decade. [19] But many pediatricians have yet to recognize the shift and can do more to help fathers—married or not—play a more active and beneficial role in their children's health and development.

Policy Solutions

Make Solving Maternal Mortality a National Priority

A starting place to support families must be from the very beginning with the mothers who have children. Children cannot be raised in a two-parent family when one parent is lost in childbirth. The United States has the highest rate of women dying from pregnancy-related complications in the developed world and the rate at which women die from pregnancy and childbirth has been rising. More alarming are the racial disparities—African-American, Native-American, and Alaska-Native women die are about three times as likely to die from pregnancy related complications compared to white women in the United States.[20]

The number of children growing up in families in which a mother has died during pregnancy or childbirth may be small, but each case is devastating. More importantly, there are policies that Congress can enact right now to reduce maternal mortality. NPR reported that states devoted

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[16] Bianchi et al. (2006); American Time Use Survey

[17] All statistics from CEA analysis of 2012 American Time Use Survey

[18] Galinsky et al (2011) and Family and Work Institute (2002).

[19] Fathers' Roles in the Care and Development of Their Children: The Role of Pediatricians
Michael Yogman, Craig F. Garfield, COMMITTEE ON PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH
Pediatrics Jul 2016, 138 (1) e20161128; DOI: 10.1542/peds.2016-1128

[20] "Huge Racial Disparities Found in Deaths Linked to Pregnancy" New York Times May 7, 2019; "American is Failing Its Black Mothers" Harvard Public Health Winter 2019.

only 6 percent of block grants under the Title V federal-state program supporting maternal and child health went to mothers health issues.[21] Medicaid often fails to cover the cost of doulas, yet doulas and midwives provide affordable, effective care for women.[22] Implicit discrimination leads to doctors to ignore black women's reports of pain and complications. Funding for simple training in implicit discrimination can help doctors deliver better care.

The first step in supporting children in families is ensuring that the women who birth these children survive and are healthy, and Congress should immediately support the research and provide the funding necessary to make pregnancy and childbirth as safe for all American women as it is for women in other developed countries.

Provide federal paid family leave

The next step to support families is recognizing the need for paid leave so that both fathers and mothers can bond with their new child. Paternity leave helps men build and develop as active caregivers. Maternity leave allows women to recover from pregnancy and bond with children. Research shows that parental time at home with a newborn has important long-run benefits for children.[23] Research also shows that paid maternity and paternity leave leads to women's greater likelihood of working and higher earnings following the birth of a child.[24] To be clear, higher income helps families thrive and women's labor force contributions help families succeed. So keeping women in the workforce has important positive effects on children.

Many businesses have increased access to paid family leave because it is the profitable thing for them to do. But these policies are mainly about retaining highly-skilled, high-income women who are costly to replace.[25] Government action is necessary to ensure that all families have access to paid leave. A federal paid leave policy is essential in helping to close the gap in inequality among children. There are many papers that you can turn to on the benefits of paid leave, but let me focus on the recommendations from a bipartisan working group.

For the past several years, I have been part of a bipartisan working group on paid family leave run jointly by the American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution. While there remain disagreements on some details, our group reached a clear and strong consensus that

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[21] The Last Person You'd Expect To Die In Childbirth May 12, 20175:00 AM ET Heard on Morning Edition https://www.npr.org/2017/05/12/527806002/focus-on-infants-during-childbirth-leaves-u-s-moms-in-danger

[22] https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2019/02/27/black-women-are-facing-childbirth-mortality-crisis-these-doulas-are-trying-help/?fbclid=IwAR1E0zLdn9HNIACU_Gz2kGtLdSAuwsod5Ug11cWyJIwBI_1WX5tfWLceFS4

[23] Berger, Lawrence & Hill, Jennifer & Waldfogel, Jane. (2005). Maternity Leave, Early Maternal Employment, and Child Outcomes in the US. Economic Journal. 115. 29-29. 10.1111/j.0013-0133.2005.00971.x.

[24] Maya Rossinâ□□Slater & Christopher J. Ruhm & Jane Waldfogel, 2013. "The Effects of California's Paid Family Leave Program on Mothersâ□□ Leaveâ□□Taking and Subsequent Labor Market Outcomes," Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., vol. 32(2), pages 224-245, 03. Jane Waldfogel, "The Family Gap for Young Women in the United States and Britain: Can Maternity Leave Make a Difference?," Journal of Labor Economics 16, no. 3 (July 1998): 505-545.

[25] https://qz.com/604723/when-google-increased-paid-maternity-leave-the-rate-at-which-new-mothers-quit-dropped-50/

the United States needs a federally funded paid family leave policy.[26] Our consensus policy had four points of agreement:

1. Both men and women need access to paid leave.
2. A plan could and should be budget neutral by "splitting the costs of financing between a payroll tax and cutting government spending or tax expenditures elsewhere in a way that does not adversely affect low-income families."
3. Benefits would be limited and targeted, specifically offering a 70 percent replacement rate with a benefit cap of $600 per week for a limited number of weeks.
4. There must be some job protection.

In an era of soaring budget deficits, it is difficult for some members of Congress to get behind a new safety net program. However, it is clear that American children and parents need access to paid family leave in order to thrive. It is time for Congress to make this important issue a national priority.

Affordable, high-quality early childhood education and childcare

When parents go back to work after bonding with their new child, they need to be able to find affordable, high-quality childcare and early childhood education. The last several decades have brought tremendous strides in our understanding of children's learning. Infants and toddlers take in the world around them at birth, laying the foundation upon which the rest of their knowledge will be built. Researchers have established that profound advances take place in individuals' reasoning, language acquisition, and problem solving in early childhood. Children need age- and developmentally-appropriate play and learning from very early ages. We now know that it is not sufficient to begin a child's education at kindergarten. However, there is great inequality in access to early childhood education. Yes, parents are investing heavily in their children—both mothers and fathers are spending more time with their children than earlier cohorts did, despite fewer children living in homes with a stay-at-home parent. But early childhood education requires knowledge about child development that not all parents have and most children will spend time with other caregivers.

More than two-thirds of young children live in households in which all parents are working—either a single working parent or a two-income household. Yet high-quality childcare is hard to find and is expensive. Families of children under the age of 5 spend $250 per week on average on childcare.[27] A report by the Center for American Progress recently highlighted the large number of Americans who face job disruptions because of childcare problems. Both men and women leave jobs or refuse to accept better jobs because of the limitations imposed by their childcare constraints. Early childhood education helps children develop foundational skills and allows more parents to actively pursue careers. Government spending on early childhood

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[26] "Paid Family and Medical Leave An Issue Whose Time Has Come" Aparna Mathur and Isabel V. Sawhill et al, May 2017 AEI Brookings. https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/paid-family-and-medical-leave-an-issue-whose-time-has-come/

[27] https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/news/2020/02/18/480554/child-care-crisis-causes-job-disruptions-2-million-parents-year/

education is an investment. These early investments lead to higher earnings, better health, and more civic cooperation throughout children's adult lives.[28]

Recognize and support broader kinship relationships

Grandparents are playing an increasingly important role in childrearing both for married and single parents. Grandparents may end up as the primary parent of a grandchild or may simply be an integral part of providing care. Many parents rely on extended family to help them balance the demands of raising children. Research shows that couples who live away from their parents are more likely to move toward their parents—the grandparents—once children are born. Public policy needs to consider the ways in which the role and responsibilities taken on by grandparents can be better supported and recognized.

Higher wages for our lowest earners

Many people point to the lower incidence of poverty among married couples and argue that we should help people marry in order to lower poverty. In reality, we should lower poverty in order to help people marry. More importantly, marriage promotion programs do not work. The programs that have been evaluated have found no beneficial effects for parents or for children. The reason is simple: Americans truly embrace marriage. In many other developed countries people have eschewed marriage for cohabitation. But Americans still hold marriage up as the ideal. The difficulty is affording it. Raising the minimum wage, making the Child Tax Credit fully refundable, and increasing the EITC—including for noncustodial parents—are all policies that help raise family incomes and therefore support children and their parents. There are current proposals to do this right now in Congress and urge you to take action on these commonsense ways to help families and family stability.

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[28] "The Economics of Early Childhood Investments" Report of the Council of Economic Advisers January 2015 https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/early_childhood_report_update_final_non-embargo.pdf

POLICIES TO IMPROVE FAMILY STABILITY

Dr. Rashawn Ray
David M. Rubenstein Fellow, The Brookings Institution

Chair Lee, Vice Chair Beyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Economic Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify on "Improving Family Stability for the Wellbeing of American Children." I am a David M. Rubenstein Fellow at The Brookings Institution. I am also an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland and the Executive Director of the Lab for Applied Social Science Research (LASSR). LASSR is a research center that regularly partners with government agencies, organizations, and corporations to conduct objective research evaluations and develop innovative research products such as our virtual reality work with law enforcement and incarcerated people.

My written testimony centers on addressing three important questions:

1) What does recent research tell us about trends in family formation and stability?
2) How should these trends be interpreted?
3) What are polices that can improve family stability?

TRENDS IN FAMILY FORMATION

Figure 1 shows the distribution of household types from 1900 through 2017. In 1900, marriage represented slightly over 50% of households, peaking over 60% in the 1960s, and then decreasing to roughly 45% in 2017. When compared to 1900, single-parent households have only increased slightly. However, if 1960 is the comparison year, single-parent households have increased more dramatically. The percentage of households with an individual increased from about 5% in 1900 to roughly 30% in 2017. As young adults delay marriage for education and work, and older adults encounter divorce and the death of relationship partners, the households of one continue to be prominent in 21st century America. Yet, despite the high divorce rate, recent research by Cohen (2019) suggests that the divorce rate seems to finally be falling. Marriage is occurring later in life and the likelihood of staying married seems to be increasing among recently married couples.[1]

A household type that is often not discussed is extend family arrangements. In 1900, extended family arrangements were about 30% of households and represented the second most prominent household type in the United States. This household type decreased into the 1980s but has grown since then. Similar to the issues facing Americans at the turn of the 20th century, families are pooling funds together to deal with stagnant wages, rising housing costs, and rising healthcare costs, illness, and elderly care. As of 2017, roughly 15% of households were composed of extended family members (many of whom are together out of necessity and not by choice).

[1] Cohen, Philip. 2019. "The Coming Divorce Decline." *Socius* < https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2378023119873497>

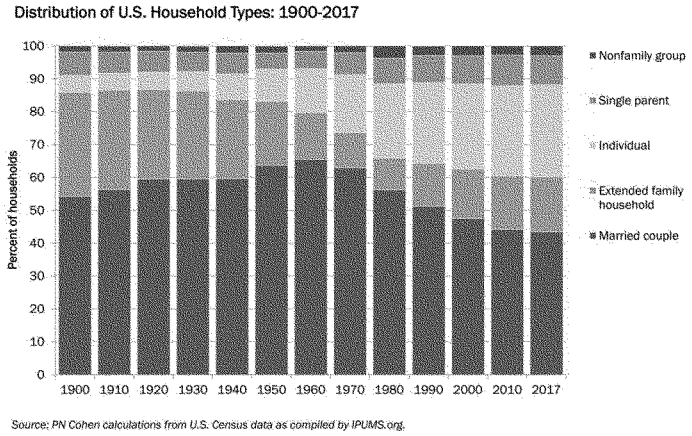


Figure 1: Distribution of Household Composition by Year
Source: Cohen, Philip. 2018. *The Family: Diversity, Inequality, and Social Change*. Norton: New York.

Figure 2 uses 1960 as a benchmark to show changes in family and work arrangements over the past 60 years. In 1960, 65% of households were composed of married parents where the father worked for pay outside of the home and the mother worked inside the home as the caregiver and house worker. In 2017, this arrangement only represented 21% of households. Though research shows that people's attitudes have changed about women working outside of the home, this shift is much more than cultural. It is structural. Most American families cannot survive on one income. This has been the case for a majority of Black and poor households for decades as unemployment and underemployment faced by Black men have propelled Black women into the labor force in ways that was not the case for White women. Consequently, the percentage of families where the mother and father work outside of the home has increased over 100% since 1960 to represent 37% of all household types in 2017. The percentage of single-parent households has nearly tripled during this time. Not only has single-mother households increased from representing 8% of households in 1960 to representing 21% in 2017, but single-father households (about 1% in 1960) represented 5% of households in 2017.

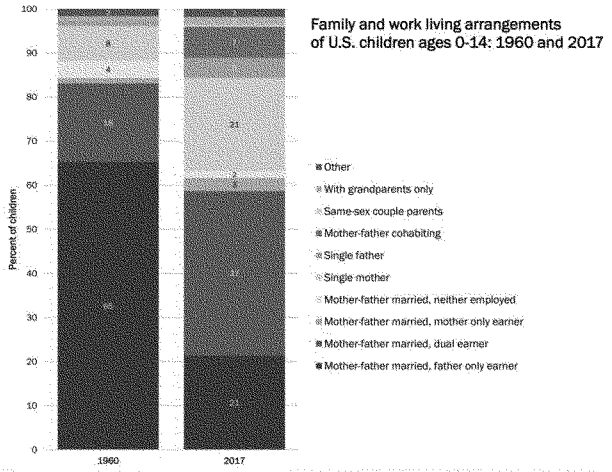


Figure 2: Family and Work Arrangements for Households with Children 14 and Under
Source: Cohen, Philip. 2018. *The Family: Diversity, Inequality, and Social Change*. Norton: New York.

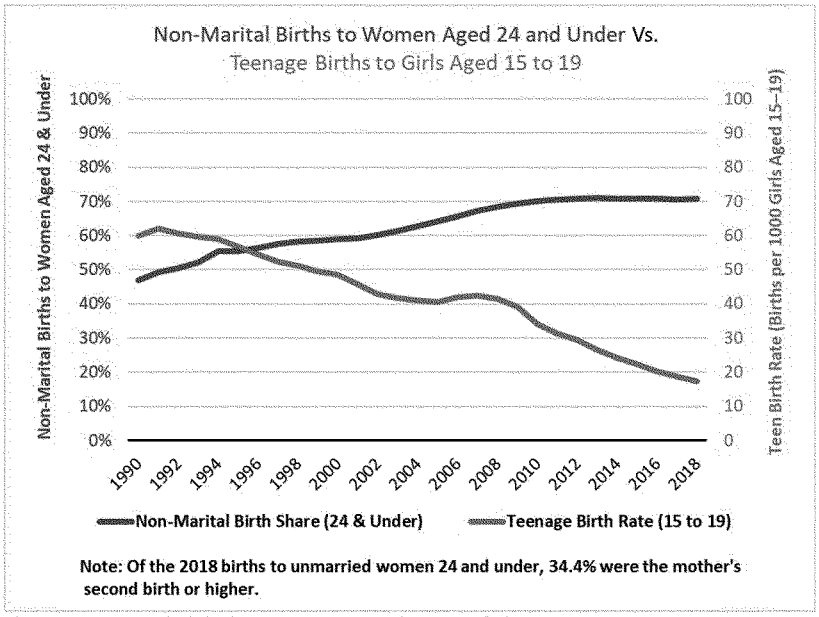


Figure 3: Non-Marital Births for Women Age 24 and Under v. Girls Age 15-19
Source: Ian Rowe. American Enterprise Institute

Figure 3 shows the non-marital birth rate for teenage girls and young women. Concerning non-marital births, the birth rate among teenage girls decreased from about 60 in the early 1990s to less than 20 in 2018. However, the percentage of non-marital births attributed to young adult women has substantially increased.

Figure 4 shows the percentage of unwed parents living in different family arrangements. In 1968, nearly 90% of unwed parents were in single-mother households. Over the past 50 years or so, this percentage has decreased to about half of the households for unwed parents. In 2017, 35% of unmarried parents were in cohabiting households.

Figure 5 shows father participation with their children by race. Defying stereotypes about deadbeat dads, Black men, compared to men in other racial groups, are more likely to bathe children, play and read to their children, take children to activities, help with homework, and talk with children about their day. And, Black men are much more likely to be involved in their children's lives when not living with their children than White or Latino fathers. Still, this is not enough and fathers need to continue to increase their participation as caregivers and house workers within the home.

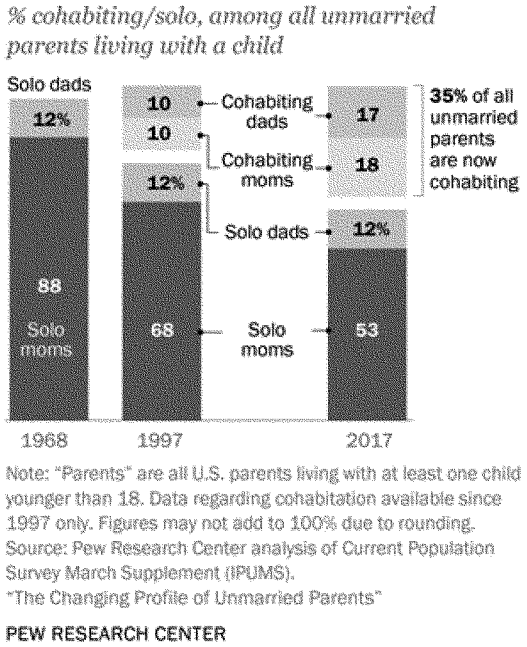


Figure 4: Family Composition of Unmarried Parents
Source: Livingston, Gretchen. 2018. "The Changing Profiles of Unmarried Parents." Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/04/25/the-changing-profile-of-unmarried-parents/>

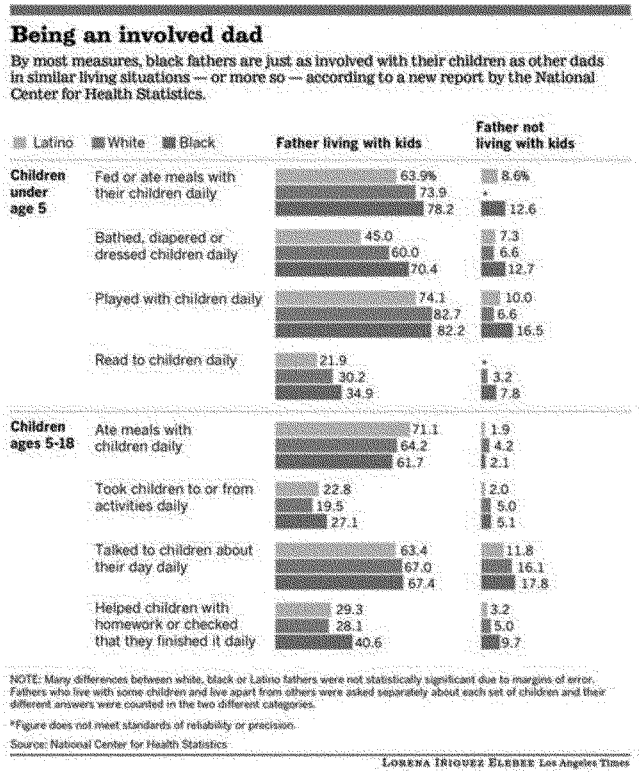


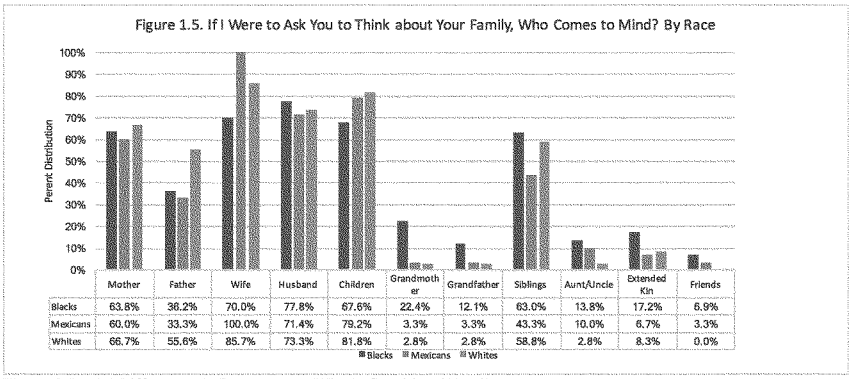
Figure 5: Father Participation with Children by Race
Source: National Center for Health Statistics

INTERPRETING TRENDS IN FAMILY FORMATION

In order to understand trends in family formation, they must be interpreted through a lens that properly takes into account the disparities of the lives of families across race and social class. This is what Dr. Pamela Braboy Jackson and I did in our recent book *How Families Matter: The Simply Complicated Intersections of Race, Gender, and Work*. Jackson and I collected data from 46 Black, White, and Mexican-American families living in middle America. We wanted to know how family formation and life experiences shape how people define and understand family.

Rather than the bleak assessment of family that is commonly purported, we found something different among the families in our study. First, we found that the way people interpret family

was different across race. As Figure 6 below shows, Black Americans were more likely than White and Mexican-Americans to include grandparents and extended kin as part of their family. Blacks and Whites were more likely than Mexican-Americans to include siblings. These findings are not simply about who is considered family. They speak to the ways that people are involved in our daily lives and how our structural locations in society vary. For example, we found that Black children and young adults, compared to Whites, were more likely to live with their grandparents. Blacks are more likely to assist financially across generations and Latinos are more likely to live in extended family households. These are not cultural family arrangements as much as they are structural survival strategies in an economic market that has rarely provided them with opportunities to live in autonomous, self-sufficient households.



	Mother	Father	Wife	Husband	Children	Grandmother	Grandfather	Siblings	Aunt/Uncle	Extended Kin	Friends
Blacks	63.8%	36.2%	70.0%	77.8%	67.6%	22.4%	12.1%	63.0%	13.8%	17.2%	6.9%
Mexicans	60.0%	33.3%	100.0%	71.4%	79.2%	3.3%	3.3%	43.3%	10.0%	6.7%	3.3%
Whites	66.7%	55.6%	85.7%	73.3%	81.8%	2.8%	2.8%	58.8%	2.8%	8.3%	0.0%

Figure 6: Racial Differences in Responses to Who is Considered Family
Source: Jackson, Pamela Braboy and Rashawn Ray. 2018. *How Families Matter: Simply Complicated Intersections of Race, Gender, and Work*. Lexington Books: Lanham, MD

Second, we found that the traditional family arrangement of a father working outside of the home and a mother staying home with the kids seems to be reserved for very high earners. Middle-income and low-income families simply cannot afford this lifestyle choice. Third, we found that parents do not really "balance" work and family. Rather, they "juggle" their various responsibilities and frequently pray they do not drop or break anything.[2] Fourth, parents' ability to manage family and work life is contingent upon structural forms of economic (e.g., income, autonomy, flexible work hours) and social capital (e.g., social support and networks). Flexible work hours and job autonomy allow many working professionals to play a "chess game" to make daily and weekly decisions about childcare, housework, and family activities. Working class parents, on the other hand, are more likely to play "checkers" and have little choice in the pursuit

[2] Ray, Rashawn and Pamela Braboy Jackson. 2013. "Complexity Begets Complexity: An Intersectional Approach to Work-Family Balance among Black, White, and Mexican- American Adults." Pp. 243-264 In Marla Kholman, Dana Krieg, and Bette Dickerson (Eds), *Notions of Family: Intersectional Perspectives, Advances in Gender Research, Vol. 17*. Bingley, UK: Emerald.

to juggle work and family life. Interestingly, single parents were some of the savviest people in our study. The way they worked to make ends meet and show up for childhood activities is admirable. Unfortunately, many single-parents simply do not have the resources to keep up long-term, especially if they are trying to pursue more education, work toward a credential for higher pay, or obtain a part-time job to get out of debt or save for their children's college.

Overall, families are surviving, but they are floundering. Resources and safety nets that were available in the 1940s, 1960s, and 1980s simply do not exist in 21st century America for a majority of families.

POLICIES TO STABILIZE FAMILIES

How can policies be used to improve family stability? My research suggests focusing on a living wage, high-quality jobs with family-friendly benefits, and affordable childcare.

- **Living Wage**
  There needs be a living wage so people can live. According to a Joint Economic Committee report, minimum wage is nearly $3 less in today's dollars than its peak of 1968.[3] The minimum wage is simply too low. People cannot live on this. Across race, these disparities are even worse as Black households earned about 60 cents on the dollar relative to White households in 2018. It is often easy to say that these disparities are due to racism, which is not necessarily false. Yet, I think there is a better interpretation more suitable for how we think about public and social policy. It mostly centers on where jobs are located. I say more below.

- **High-Quality Jobs with Family-friendly Benefits**
  Families need earners with high-quality jobs. Though low-employment across racial groups is a positive step, many of the jobs being created are not high-quality jobs that allow people to adequately provide for their families. People need jobs with family-friendly benefits that include child leave policies and paid, flexible sick leave policies. Working Americans should not have to get a payday loan to pay for the doctor when their kid gets the flu or accidently breaks their arm on the playground. Equitable policies must help to stop penalizing parents who want to be with their children when they are sick.

  People living in areas with low-job growth face wage stagnation and unstable benefits packages. Blacks are more likely to live in or around areas with low job growth rates. Some of these cities including Detroit, Cleveland, and Baltimore are impacted by the historical and current legacy of redlining and restrictive covenants. Blacks are most likely to be in occupations set for to technical displacement (production, food service, retail, and clerical work). Based on job growth potential, Black men are underrepresented in the best 15 occupations and overrepresented in the bottom 15 occupations for men. Education and health professions, two occupations most resistant to technical

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[3] Joint Economic Committee. 2020. The U.S. Economy by the Numbers—December 6, 2019. < https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/ff46c280-58a4-4246-a821-6bc1faf2f446/usebtn-december-for-online-printing.pdf>

displacement, should be a focus of vocational and technical training in predominately Black communities.

All of this is important because men find their identity in family via work. When work disappears, so does their identity within the family.[4] Though I think we need to expand how men view their familial identities, this is where we are. There is a mismatch between how boys are socialized and what they are capable of achieving in 21st century America, especially if you are Black, poor, and/or rural.

- **Affordable Childcare**
  Families need affordable childcare. I recently seen this firsthand. Over the past few years, I worked on a project with Black Onyx Management. We conducted a welcomeness study for Kosciusko County, Indiana, which is essentially the orthopedic capital of the country.[5] Kosciusko County is predominately White and rural. Some of the findings about their struggles with childcare were saddening. Nearly 25% of parents reported that either them or their spouse left a job because of childcare issues. People making about $45,000 a year, compared to people making over $100,000, were about 75% more likely to report that paying for childcare was difficult. Below are some of the common responses we received from the over 2,000 people who participated in the study.

  "I am retired raising my 2-year-old grandson. Affordable childcare is non-existent in this county."

  "I am a stay at home dad because I got in a wreck and ended up switching roles with my wife. We do not make enough money to keep up with normal bills. I also don't see it being worth it to have my kids get childcare and me get a job. The type of job I can get would not bring in enough money to make our younger children being watched by a stranger worth it after paying for the childcare."

  "Lack of affordable and quality childcare in this area make it extremely difficult for both parents to work, resulting in more families having to depend on food stamps, Medicaid, and other government programs. If you are wealthy or known, you have more opportunities, as opposed to those who are in lower or working classes."

  "I think childcare is too expensive. I make good money but can't afford to live on my own with a child."

  "When moving here from Fort Wayne a few years ago, I was appalled at the gap between the money from industry in this community against the lack of high quality AFFORDABLE childcare options and pre-k options. We must have more options for working parents. This community has a glaring gap in childcare. It's a real struggle."

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[4] Ray, Rashawn. 2008. "The Professional Allowance: How Socioeconomic Characteristics Allow Some Men to Fulfill Family Role Expectations Better than Other Men." *The International Journal of Sociology of the Family: Special Issue on Intersectionality*. 34(2): 327-351.
[5] Black Onyx Management. 2019. "Kosciusko County Welcomeness Study." Orthoworx.

I want to reiterate that these are people living in middle America were the cost of living is relatively low. Imagine what it is like living in cities today. I honestly do not know how families are making it.

MY FAMILY STORY

I would be remiss if I did not end my testimony with my own family story. As a researcher, rarely do I make myself salient in the process. However, given the topic, I think my own biography is relevant. I grew-up in a single parent household and have never seen my biological father before. I am now happily married to my high school sweetheart with two smart and talented boys. How did I get here?

While in the Army, my mom, Joslyn Talley, got pregnant by a Sergeant on her base. She had a decision to make. Should she have an abortion, get out of the military to raise her child, or allow her parents to adopt her child? My mom decided to be honorably discharged and raise me. Considering my mom was admitted to West Point, her decision was even more consequential. Indeed, her admission to West Point as a Black woman in the late 1970s was remarkable. As the daughter of a 21-year veteran who served in two wars and received the Purple Heart and Bronze Star, it was even more noteworthy.

When I was a child, my mother put herself through nursing school to become a Registered Nurse. As an infant, we were on welfare and lived in subsidized housing. With childcare and financial support from my grandparents and aunt, my mom made sure that I was always with family when she was working nights and studying. When I was in elementary school, my mother worked a full-time job and two part-time jobs to make ends meet. When I graduated from college, my mom told me that she cried when I made all-stars in baseball because she did not know how she would pay for it or attend the games. Interestingly, I never remember my mom missing a game or important school event. She may have come late or left early, but she was always there. I do not know how she did it.

We also experienced a lot of housing instability. My mom and I moved 14 times by my 18th birthday. She was constantly searching for proficient schools for me to attend. With the Majority to Minority bussing program in Atlanta, I was able to attend a school that many of my neighborhood friends could only dream about. It had a gifted program and I was fortunate to be admitted. The neighborhood school that I was zoned for did not have enough books or adequate heating, air, or lighting. The student-teacher ratio was astronomical and it was predominately Black.

Since my mom was a nurse, I was able to socialize with physicians regularly. I shadowed them and went to lunch with them. And though my life was different than the physicians' children, I gained access to a form of social and cultural capital that my neighborhood friends did not have. I graduated high school toward the top of my class, attended the University of Memphis on a full academic scholarship, and then attended graduate school at Indiana University to obtain my PhD in sociology. During graduate school, I was awarded fellowships from the National Science Foundation, National Institute of Mental Health, and the American Sociological Association.

Altogether, I am the epitome of the success sequence. My mother was not. Yet, she is a remarkable woman. And, she had resources that helped her raise her son. The policies that I discussed in this testimony will allow working parents the ability to help their children achieve the American Dream and save federal and state government funding by decreasing the likelihood of future generations being in poverty.

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