

The Last Decade: 1996-2006

1996 Defense of Marriage Act

In 1996 the Defense of Marriage Act passed by a vote of 85-14 in the Senate and a vote of 342 -67 in the House of Representatives. It was signed by President Bill Clinton on September 21, 1996.ⁱ This Federal law stated the following:

Marriage is the foundation of a successful society.

Marriage is an essential institution of a successful society which promotes the interests of childrenⁱⁱ

1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)

This welfare reform law (PRWORA) set a national goal to promote marriage, to increase and strengthen two parent families, and to prevent out-of-wedlock child-bearing.ⁱⁱⁱ

2002 The Healthy Marriage Initiative "To encourage marriage and promote the well-being of children, I have proposed a healthy marriage initiative to help couples develop the skills and knowledge to form and sustain healthy marriages,"
~President George W. Bush

ACF's Healthy Marriage Initiative involves:

Developing demonstrations. A number of communities conduct healthy marriage demonstration projects. These are broad-based efforts to work with key community sectors (e.g. local governments, business, civic organizations, non-profits) to strengthen marriages.

Emphasizing marriage in Federal programs, ACF's program offices are promoting healthy marriages in every appropriate program. For example, marriage education and enrichment services are being provided, alongside existing services, to low-income couples who utilize Refugee Resettlement, Children's Bureau, Community Services, Child Support Enforcement, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) services.

Conducting research. Over \$24 million is being used to explore and assess marriage strengthening services so that future resources can be targeted more wisely.

Training The initiative is providing training about healthy marriage issues to interested Federal ACF staff.

This initiative is *not* about:

Trapping anyone in an abusive violent relationship.

Forcing anyone to marry or stay married.

Running a Federal dating service.

Withdrawing support from diminishing in any way, either directly or indirectly, the important work of single parents.

2005 The Deficit Reduction Act

One of the largest programs under ACF administrative authority, the TANF program, was reauthorized through the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. Three of the four legislated purposes of the TANF program specifically address family formation objectives, while two specifically address marriage.

The purposes of TANF are as follows:

Provides assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;

End the dependence of the needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;

Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and

Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

Eight Allowable Activities

The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 was signed into law February 8, 2006 and reauthorizes the TANF program through September 30, 2010. The reauthorization includes \$150 million to support programs designed to help couples form and sustain healthy marriages. Up to \$550 million of this amount may be used for programs designed to encourage responsible fatherhood.

Allowable marriage activities are:

Public advertising campaigns on the values of marriage and the skills needed to increase material stability and health;

High School Education on the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting;

Marriage education, marriage skills and relationship skills programs, that may include parenting skills, financial management, conflict resolution, and job and career advancement, for non-married pregnant women and non-married expectant fathers;

Premarital education and marriage skills training for engaged couples and for couples or individuals interested in marriage;

Marriage enhancement and marriage skills training programs for married couples;

Divorce reduction programs that teach relationship skills;

Marriage mentoring programs that used married couples as role models and mentors in at-risk communities; and

Programs to reduce the disincentives to marriage in means-tested aid programs, if offered in conjunction with any activity above.

Some responsible fatherhood grantees also include marriage-education related programming.^{iv}

Through the Healthy Marriage Initiative, ACF is providing leadership, funding support, technical assistance and guidance to promote action in support of the family formation goals of TANF. In addition, ACF is funding and facilitating the provision of marriage strengthening services to families receiving help from other ACF programs, as well as supporting the development of community-wide initiatives that involve many different types of organizations interested in taking steps to increase healthy marriage.

ⁱ Defense of Marriage Act. Pub. L.No.104-199,110 Stat. 2419 (Sept 21, 1996).

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DOMA>.

ⁱⁱ General Information: Background. Healthy Marriage Initiative.

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/about/mission.html#background>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Patrick F. Fagan, Robert W. Patterson, & Robert E. Rector (October 25, 2002). *Marriage and Welfare Reform: The Overwhelming Evidence that Marriage Education Works*. Backgrounder #1606. The Heritage Foundation. <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Welfare/bg1606.cfm>

^{iv} *Healthy Marriage Initiative Activities and Accomplishments 2002-2005*. Administration for Children and Families Healthy Marriage Initiative, Department of Health and Human Services. 2006.

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthy_marriage/pdf/community2006.pdf