

How our tax dollars subsidize family breakup

Exclusive: Stephen Baskerville cites recent data pegging cost of divorce at \$1 trillion

Divorce and unwed childbearing cost taxpayers at least \$112 billion each year or more than \$1 *trillion* over the last decade. This estimate from the [Institute for American Values](#) is, as the authors suggest, likely to be an *underestimate*.

This staggering but plausible tally of the economic costs of family dissolution follows what we have long known about the social costs. All our major social ills – poverty, violent crime, substance abuse, truancy and more – are more closely linked to family breakdown and single-parent homes than to any other factor. A poor black child from an intact home is more likely to succeed than a rich white one from a single-mother home.

It is hardly surprising that massive financial costs follow from this: Welfare, law enforcement, education, health care – all these budgets are justified by the pathologies generated by single-parent homes. Indeed, family dissolution not only creates costs; by destroying society's basic economic unit, it also prevents generating the wealth to meet those costs.

Yet, even this is only the beginning. More alarming still are the political costs. For contrary to the beliefs even of most conservatives, divorce and unwed childbearing are not the products merely of a decadent culture. They are driven by government – the same government that is extracting \$112 billion annually from our pockets.

This is not to deny that we bear responsibility for all this through our sexually dissolute lifestyle, but the consequences of that lifestyle have already become institutionalized in coercive government policies. Diabolically, the very government programs advertised as addressing these social ills are the ones actually generating them. The result is a government perpetual-growth machine that will continue to expand until we have the courage stand up and unequivocally demand that it stop.

It began with welfare. Programs advertised as relieving families that had lost the father's wages due to war and economic hardship became a bureaucratic mechanism for driving more fathers from the home. The result was the vast welfare underclass we usually associate with low-income minority communities – the vast breeding grounds of crime, drug abuse, truancy, teen pregnancy, child abuse and other horrors that soak up taxpayer dollars.

But now it is becoming even more serious. Divorce has transformed welfare programs into mechanisms for creating fatherless homes in the middle class. And here the welfare bureaucracies go further: After driving out the fathers, they are seizing family wealth and even incarcerating the fathers.

This criminalization of parents is not isolated. Perhaps the earliest welfare state provision was the public school system, which jealously guards its prerogatives of using children as political pawns. The recent California appeals court decision

allowing the criminalization of homeschoolers is only one indication of government's increasingly aggressive stance toward parents. The federal decision in *Fields v. Palmdale*, ruling that parents have no right to a voice in their children's public school education, is another.

But schooling is only one arena. The divorce machinery is even more authoritarian. The divorce apparatus has so many methods of seizing children and family assets and for incarcerating parents that it is a wonder any families remain.

For example, child support enforcement is advertised as a way to recover welfare costs by forcing "deadbeat dads" to support children they "abandon." In reality, it has become a massive subsidy on middle-class divorce, effectively bribing mothers to divorce with the promise of a tax-free windfall subsidized by taxpayers. It is also a means for incarcerating fathers without trial who cannot pay the extortionate sums. Far from saving money, child support enforcement *loses* money and – far more serious – subsidizes the divorces and unwed births that generate these additional costs.

Programs ostensibly for "child abuse" and "domestic violence" – problems also originating in single-parent welfare homes – have likewise become tools to create single-parent homes in the middle-class through divorce proceedings. Patently trumped-up accusations of child abuse or domestic violence, presented without any evidence, are used to separate fathers from their children and, likewise, to jail them not through criminal trials but through "civil" divorce proceedings and in new, openly feminist "domestic violence courts." Thus does family dissolution also undermine our most cherished due process protections.

Further, mothers are not only enticed into divorce with promises of lucrative support payments; they are also coerced into it through threats of losing their children themselves. Mothers are now ordered to divorce their husbands on pain of losing their children through spurious child abuse accusations. Intact middle-class families now live in fear of a visit from the dreaded "child protective services" with the possibility of losing their children.

This machinery cannot be brought under control by marriage therapy programs, as the Institute for American Values advocates. While private church-based and community efforts like Marriage Savers should be encouraged, government psychotherapy merely puts more vested interests on the public payroll. We must demand that our tax dollars stop subsidizing family breakup and ills that in turn require ever more tax dollars. By subsidizing the destruction of families, we are subsidizing the progressive impoverishing of our society. Indeed, by subsidizing the criminalization of both fatherless children and fathers, we are paying for the destruction of our freedom.

It is simply not possible to allow the family to unravel without having our civilization do the same. Yet that is precisely what we are doing.

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