



The Marriage and Fatherhood Provisions of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005

by Paula Roberts
January 9, 2005

During the week of December 18, 2005, both the House and the Senate took up the fiscal year 2006 federal budget reconciliation (called the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005). On very close votes, each chamber passed the bill. The Senate version (S. 1932) differs slightly different from the House version, so the House must vote again before the bill can go to the President for signature. This vote is expected on February 1, 2006.

Subtitle A of Title VII of the bill contains a reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Among the provisions of this subtitle is a program of grants for the promotion of healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood (Section 7103). Below is a description of this program.

Please Note: There is some possibility that the House will make additional changes in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 or that the Act will fail to pass the House. Therefore, this description should not be taken as final. It is meant as a guide for those attempting to understand the provisions of this 744-page conference agreement.

Federal Funding

The bill appropriates \$150 million per year for fiscal years 2006 through 2010—a total of \$750 million. Of this money, up to \$2 million per year may be used to fund demonstration projects for coordinating the provision of child welfare and TANF services to tribal families at risk of child abuse or neglect. Up to \$50 million may be made available for responsible fatherhood programs.

State Funding

States are not required to put their own money into these programs. However, if they choose to do so, that expenditure counts toward the state's maintenance of effort requirement. Using state funds to operate programs that further TANF purposes 3 or 4 also counts toward this requirement. TANF purposes 3 and 4 are:

- Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies
- Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

Use of the Funds in General

The Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) can use the money to conduct and support both research and demonstration projects. The research or demonstration project may be conducted by public or private entities. The money may also be used to provide technical assistance to states, Indian tribes, and tribal organizations operating TANF programs.

The funds must be awarded on a competitive basis. As part of their application, those seeking funding for healthy marriage promotion or responsible fatherhood programs must describe how they will address issues of domestic violence. They must also describe what they will do, to the extent relevant, to ensure that participation in the programs is voluntary (including how they will inform participants that the program is voluntary). Applicants must also commit to consulting with experts in domestic violence or relevant community-based domestic violence coalitions in developing their programs and activities. Finally, applicants must commit themselves to using the funds only for the purpose of the program.

Healthy Marriage Promotion Activities

As noted above, the funds may be used for healthy marriage promotion activities. This term is defined to include the following:

- Public advertising campaigns on the value of marriage and the skills needed to increase marital stability and health
- Education in high schools on the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting
- Programs targeting non-married pregnant women and non-married expectant fathers including marriage education, and marriage/relationship skills—these programs may include parenting skills, financial management, conflict resolution, and job/career advancement
- Programs targeting engaged couples and couples or individuals interested in marriage; these programs can include pre-marital education and marriage skills training
- Programs for married couples, including marriage enhancement and marriage skills training
- Divorce reduction programs that teach relationship skills
- Marriage mentoring programs that use married couples as role models and mentors in at-risk communities
- Programs to reduce the disincentives to marriage in means-tested aid programs, if offered in conjunction with another healthy marriage activity.

Tribal Families

Tribal governments and tribal consortia may seek funding for demonstration projects to test the effectiveness of coordinating TANF and child welfare services to tribal families at risk of child abuse or neglect. The funds can be used to improve case management, to provide supportive services and assistance to children in out-of-home placement, and offer prevention services and assistance. Special reporting requirements may apply to these funds.

Promoting Responsible Fatherhood

States, territories, Indian tribes and tribal organizations as well as public and nonprofit community entities (including religious organizations) can apply for the responsible fatherhood funds. The money can be used to provide the following.

- **Activities that promote or sustain marriage.** These include counseling, mentoring, disseminating information about the benefits of marriage and two-parent involvement for children, enhancing relationship skills, education about controlling aggressive behavior, disseminating information on the causes of domestic violence and child abuse, marriage preparation programs, pre-marital counseling, marital inventories, and skills-based marriage education. These funds may also be used for a variety of financial planning services including education, counseling and mentoring on household management; budgeting; banking; handling financial transactions; and home maintenance. Finally, the funds may be used to provide divorce education and reduction programs, including mediation and counseling.
- **Promoting responsible parenting.** These include, but are not limited to, counseling, mentoring and mediation, disseminating information about good parenting practices, skills-based parenting education, and encouraging child support payments.
- **Improving the economic status of fathers.** These include, but are not limited to, work first services, job search, job training, subsidized employment, job retention, job enhancement, encouraging education (including career-enhancing education), dissemination of employment materials, coordination with existing employment services such as welfare-to-work programs, and referrals to local employment training initiatives.
- **Promoting responsible fatherhood.** This includes the development of a national media campaign to promote responsible fatherhood and the establishment of a clearinghouse to assist states and communities in their efforts to promote and support marriage and responsible fatherhood. These tasks are to be undertaken by a nationally recognized nonprofit fatherhood promotion organization