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Update on the Marriage and Fatherhood Provisions of the 2006 Federal Budget and the 2007 Budget Proposal

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In February 2006, Congress passed the fiscal year (FY) 2006 budget, called the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. Section 7103 of this legislation establishes a program of grants for the promotion of healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood. This paper describes this program, and provides an update on the funding and possible expansion included in the Bush Administration's FY 2007 budget documents released on February 6, 2006.

Federal Funding

The new law authorizes an appropriation of up to \$150 million per year for fiscal years 2006 through 2010. Of this money, up to \$2 million per year is to 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 is to be made available for responsible fatherhood programs. The remainder is for healthy marriage programs.

President Bush is seeking full funding for this effort in FY 2007. In addition, documents that accompany the President's budget indicate that the Administration will seek an additional \$100 million per year to fund a new Family Formation and Healthy Marriage State Grants program. This money would be available to states on a competitive basis and would require a dollar-for-dollar state match. (Under the proposal, federal TANF funds could be used to meet the match requirement.) The money would fund innovative approaches to promoting healthy marriage and reducing non-marital births.

State Funding

States are not required to put their own money into the Deficit Reduction Act programs. However, if they choose to do so—or to use state funds to operate programs that further TANF purposes 3 or 4—that expenditure counts toward the state's maintenance of effort requirement. TANF purposes 3 and 4 are as follows:

- 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 Deficit Reduction Act 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 themselves 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 targeted on 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 targeted on engaged couples and couples or individuals interested in marriage; these programs can include pre-marital education and marriage skills training.
- Programs for married couples; these programs can include marriage enhancement and marriage skills training.
- Divorce reduction programs that teach relationship skills.
- Marriage mentoring programs, which 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:

- Activities that promote or sustain marriage—including counseling, mentoring, disseminating information about the benefits of marriage and two-parent involvement for children, enhancing relationship skills, education regarding how to control 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. The 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; they may also be used to provide divorce education and reduction programs, including mediation and counseling.
- Activities to promote responsible parenting—including, but not limited to, counseling, mentoring and mediation, disseminating information about good parenting practices, skills-based parenting education, and encouraging child support payments.
- Activities to improve the economic status of fathers, which 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.
- Development of a national media campaign to promote responsible fatherhood and 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.

It is anticipated that a Request for Proposals (RFP) will be issued shortly. This RFP should provide guidance to public and private entities wishing to obtain some of these funds. CLASP will provide an analysis of this RFP once it is issued.