

It Takes a Family

As candidates prepare to run for office next year, there are many pressing issues to be addressed in Michigan, including our ailing economy. High on the list of priorities should be the state of marriage and the family. It is the condition of these fundamental institutions that will determine the well-being of children, the health of our communities, and the economic potential of our state.



As we debate budget priorities each year, one glaring reality continues to surface – we are all paying a high price for broken or never formed families. Hardly a dollar is spent on welfare, corrections or state health care programs, that is not linked to divorce, out-of-wedlock births and father absence.

Communities with higher rates of out-of-wedlock births also

have higher rates of violent crime. Children from unmarried households struggle with low academic performance and are more likely to drop-out of school. Medicaid pays for a staggering 68 percent (over 30,000) of all births to unwed mothers.

Any strategy aimed at controlling the rising cost of government or rebuilding our state's economy must also include a vision of fostering healthy families. Polls suggest that voters understand this link and are ready to support public officials and candidates who present a positive, pro-family vision.

Recent surveys show 90 percent believe couples should be encouraged to get pre-marital education, 87 percent believe divorce is a problem, 85 percent believe it is better for children to be raised in home with a mom and dad and 76 percent say couples

who have children together ought to be married.

The public already knows that it takes a family to build a healthy culture, but our public officials need to be informed and persuaded to take action. That's why we exist – to encourage policies to preserve marriage, encourage abstinence, promote adoption and call parents to take responsibility for raising their children. We also fight to protect our children from the extreme violence and pornography that pervades our culture.

I hope you agree with our vision for Michigan. If you do, will you join our efforts? Your partnership will help us continue to provide sound public policy for stronger Michigan families. I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Brad Snavelly

Brad Snavelly
Executive Director
Michigan Family Forum

MFF needs your support

Michigan Family Forum is a 501c3 organization funded entirely by donations from involved, caring people like you. If you can help support MFF's efforts to strengthen families in Michigan financially, please return the enclosed donation card with your contribution or call us at (800) 644-9111.

Thank you for your partnership!



Packed with research and helpful information, MFF's Family Resource Guides give you a valuable tool in addressing marriage and family issues. Check out these and other resources on our Web site, or order a copy on the enclosed card.

Infant Adoption in Michigan: Reviving a Vanishing Phenomenon
What Every Child Needs: The Unique Contributions of Fathers and Mothers
Marriage and the Limits of Contracts: Public Costs for Private Choices
Family Guide to Internet Safety

Welcome, Stefan



Michigan Family Forum is pleased to welcome Stefan Hull to our staff. Stefan is coordinating our new "Choose Freedom" abstinence initiative and assisting staff with other projects. Stefan earned her BA in psychology from the University of Michigan and previously worked for Lutheran Social Services. She and her husband reside in Lansing and are active at University Reformed Church in East Lansing. Welcome, Stefan!

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Fall Legislative Luncheon Focuses on Adoption

Tom Atwood, National Council for Adoption President, Featured Speaker

Michigan Family Forum was pleased to welcome National Council for Adoption President, Tom Atwood, as its featured speaker at our Fall Legislative Luncheon in October. Mr. Atwood addressed a group of nearly 30 legislators and other public policy staff.



Atwood used his time at the podium to offer a set of recommendations for State lawmakers on how they can promote foster-care based and infant adoptions in Michigan. He also updated the group on initiatives underway at the national level.

MFF distributed copies of its newest report, "Infant Adoption in Michigan: Reviving a Vanishing Phenomenon," which also includes recommendations for lawmakers and public policy staff. "Most of our recommendations are in line with what Tom was suggesting," said MFF Executive Director Brad Snavelly. "It was great to see and hear from a national expert on what can be done to make Michigan a more adoption-friendly state."

MFF will be promoting three adoption-related bills that have been introduced in the Michigan House. Rep. John Gleason is sponsoring a bill that will expand the ability of adoptive parents to provide health care coverage for the birth mother and child. Rep. Matt Gillard has introduced HB 4780, which would require that employers who pro-

vide leave with pay to an employee following the birth of a child offer the same benefit to the parents of a child adopted at birth. Rep. Jack Hoogendyk has introduced legislation that would increase Michigan's refundable credit for adoption expenses for children who are wards of the state from a maximum of \$1,200 to a maximum of \$2,400.

"MFF looks forward to working in a bi-partisan fashion with lawmakers to help move our adoption recommendations forward," said MFF Research and Public Policy Director Dan Jarvis.



New Resources from Michigan Family Forum!

Michigan Family Forum's latest resources continue to support our goal of strengthening families in Michigan through sound public policies.

You can view our newest Policy Briefs as well as the "Infant Adoption in Michigan: Reviving a Vanishing Phenomenon" publication at our website:

www.michiganfamily.org



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2006 Top Priorities

- Launch "Choose Freedom" Abstinence Initiative
- Divorce Effects Legislation
- Premarital Education Incentives
- Promote Adoption
- Regulate Family Planning Funding
- 2006 Voter Education Project

"Please accept my deepest appreciation for the invaluable assistance MFF provided me and the Senate Judiciary Committee during the work on Senate Bill 416, our new law to prohibit the dissemination of ultra-violent video games to minors...My fervent desire and prayer, as I know is yours also, is that this new law will survive the court challenge and make a difference in the lives of our children and culture. But win or lose, the efforts of the MFF have made a difference, and it is appreciated."

~Senator Alan Cropsy in a letter thanking MFF for its contribution.

Lawmakers Act to Protect Kids From Violent Video Games

New Law Challenged in Federal Court

Michigan lawmakers acted this fall to protect children from the harmful effects of ultra-violent and sexually-explicit video games. Using research gathered by MFF's Dan Jarvis, State Senator Alan Cropsy crafted a bill that makes it a crime to sell such video games to minors. The House also passed similar bills, and Governor Granholm signed the final four-bill package in September.

As expected, however, a group of trade associations filed suit to overturn the legislation on First



Senator Alan Cropsy

Amendment grounds. In November, a federal judge in Detroit issued an injunction preventing the state from enforcing the law, with one caveat. The judge has not issued a final ruling on games that are "sexually-explicit," most likely because of how

the bill was crafted using long-established anti-obscenity laws.

Proposal 2 Challenged in Court

Michigan's Marriage Amendment (Proposal 2) has been under attack since voters approved it in November of 2004. The primary challenge has been whether the amendment prohibits state and public employers from offering same-sex domestic partnership benefits.

In March, the ACLU filed a suit to protect same-sex benefits for city workers in Kalamazoo. Attorney General Mike Cox had issued an opinion saying that Proposal 2 clearly banned the city from offering the benefits. The ACLU sued on behalf of several pub-



Michigan Hall of Justice

lic employees impacted by the law, and in September, a circuit court judge overturned Cox's opinion. The judge's ruling was appealed, and an injunction against offering the benefits was ordered by the Michigan Court of Appeals until a final ruling is made.

"MFF supports the Attorney General's original opinion," said Executive Director Brad Snavely. "We also agree with the Appeals Court ruling

because it would be unwise for a public employer – including the state of Michigan itself – to offer the benefits when the final ruling is still pending."

Marriage Bills to be Reintroduced

Two Michigan lawmakers are expected to reintroduce legislation to strengthen marriage and protect children of divorce. The Michigan House and Senate passed similar legislation last year, only to have Governor Granholm veto the measures. Before the new year begins, Representatives John Moolenaar and Barb Vander Veen are expected to kick off the process by introducing parenting plan and divorce education legislation.

Rep. Vander Veen's divorce effects program will require parents of minor children to learn about the impact of divorce on children, how to minimize those harmful effects and where to turn for help. The program will also encourage parents to develop a cooperative parenting arrangement. Rep. Moolenaar's parenting plan legislation will provide divorcing parents a non-adversarial means of working out parenting issues.



Rep. John Moolenaar

In her 2004 veto message, Governor Granholm indicated a willingness to sign the two proposed bills if they were independent of other bills that sought to encourage pre-marital education. View the Legislative Update section of MFF's website to remain up to date as these bills move through the House.

"MFF is playing an important role in promoting good policies such as the Parenting Plan legislation that I am working on. I am confident this legislation will help children by helping divorcing couples settle their differences in a less adversarial manner."

-Rep. John Moolenaar

MFF Launches "Choose Freedom"

Pilot Program Will Encourage Students to Share Abstinence Message With Peers

Michigan Family Forum is launching a new peer education initiative to help teens share the abstinence message with their friends and schoolmates. "Choose Freedom" is a program that will train teens to effectively communicate the message of sexual purity and abstinence until marriage using video, drama and other multimedia techniques.



Lansing-area youth pastors were introduced to the program on December 6. MFF's Stefan Hull outlined the vision and plan for creating a statewide

network of teen peer-educators promoting the abstinence message in their churches and schools. For more information, contact Stefan at (517) 374-1171.

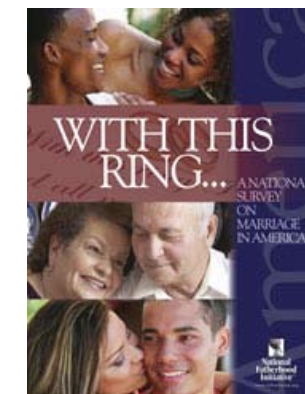
"Thanks to Michigan Family Forum for launching Choose Freedom and for the opportunity you are giving our students by equipping them with the tools they need to make positive choices about purity. As a youth pastor, this is a message I give them constantly, and for most of my students it is the message they receive at home on a regular basis. But your "peer-to-peer" approach is a relevant and powerful new tool that will benefit every student and student ministry that participates."

-Lansing Area Youth Pastor

New Report Indicates Strong Support for Marriage

In November, MFF released a new report in conjunction with the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI). The report profiled Michigan residents' attitudes about marriage, aspirations for marriage, and past experience with marriage. Among the report's findings were the following:

- 89% of respondents said that marriage should be a lifelong commitment
- 97% said that fathers are important as mothers for the proper development of children
- 87% disagreed with the statement "Marriage is an old-fashioned, outmoded institution"
- 73% disagreed with the statement "Either spouse should be allowed to terminate a marriage at any time."



"This report once again indicates that most Michiganders understand the importance of marriage and favor reforms to Michigan's marriage and divorce laws," said Executive Director Brad Snavely. "Hopefully our elected officials, including the Governor, are getting the message – we must act to strengthen the institution of marriage and protect children of divorce."

Michigan Births, Prenatal Care and Outcomes by Marital Status, 2003

Mothers' Marital Status	Births	Inadequate Prenatal Care	Low Birth Weights	Infant Deaths
Married	85,529	5.3%	6.9%	0.6%
Unmarried	45,321	11.3%	10.6%	1.3%

Source: 2003 Live Birth File, Vital Records and Health Development Section, Michigan Department of Community Health

Let your voice be heard

MFF has added a new component to our Web site to allow Michigan citizens to contact their leaders on important issues in a fast, user-friendly format.

Our Citizen Action Center alerts you to current issues that matter to families.

You can view the action alerts and, with a few clicks of the mouse, email or print a message to the appropriate leaders.* For your convenience, talking points are included for each action item. Use them as a guide or write your own message, click "send," and let your voice be heard!

*To participate, you must register in the Action Center. Registration gives you access to the email features and includes you in our weekly FORUM ONLINE email and special FORUM FLASH alerts. Your information is confidential and will not be sold or distributed to outside parties.

To sign up, visit www.michiganfamily.org

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THE FORUM

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If you would like more information about Michigan Family Forum, or if you know of other people who would like a free subscription to THE FORUM, please call our office or visit our Web site.

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