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## **New State-by-State Report Describes Efforts to Strengthen Marriage and Two-Parent Families**

(Washington, DC)—Over the last ten years, every state has undertaken at least one activity or made at least one policy change designed to strengthen marriage and/or two-parent families—although most of these efforts have been modest, according to a new report from the Center for Law and Social Policy, *Beyond Marriage Licenses: Efforts to Strengthen Marriage and Two-Parent Families. A State-by-State Snapshot* by Theodora Ooms, Stacey Bouchet, and Mary Parke. The report is the first to provide a state-by-state description of government-related activities in the new field of couples and marriage policy.

The new report comes as Congress is considering an Administration proposal for \$1.5 billion in dedicated funding for activities to promote healthy marriages as part of the reauthorization of the federal welfare program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). In addition, the Senate HELP Committee's Subcommittee on Children and Families is holding a hearing, "Healthy Marriages," on Wednesday, April 28, at 2 pm, 430 Dirksen Senate Office Building. Among the witnesses will be Wade Horn, Ph.D., Assistant Secretary for the Administration for Children and Families, and former Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating.

Among the report's main findings:

- The authors identify four main categories of couples and marriage activities: (1) state policy initiatives, commissions, and campaigns, (2) changes in state marriage and divorce law (specifically covenant marriage laws and license fee reductions for couples who have premarital counseling), (3) programs, activities, and services, and (4) policy changes related to marriage and two-parent families in TANF and child support.
- Seven states—Arizona, Florida, Louisiana, Michigan, Oklahoma, Utah, and Virginia—and several communities have used flexible TANF funds (under the 1996 welfare reform law) to support marriage-related activities. Nearly three dozen states have launched voluntary educational programs, usually on a pilot basis, to help couples better choose marriage partners and create healthier, longer-lasting marriages.
- Traditionally, relationships and marriage education classes have been available mostly to middle-class, committed couples in non-governmental settings. With the availability of government funding in recent years, some states and communities are adapting classes for low-income individuals and couples (both married and unmarried) in a variety of settings.
- The federal government is already dedicating funds to marriage-related activities—even as the President's TANF marriage initiative remains unresolved. Over the past three years, the federal Administration for Children and Families has committed at least \$90 million in grants for demonstration projects, technical assistance, and research and evaluation.

“This report shows that a lot more is going on with marriage policy and programming in states than most people realize,” said Theodora Ooms, CLASP Senior Policy Analyst and lead author of the report. “However, the efforts thus far are modest and reach only a small number of people. Given the lack of research on marriage-related interventions, policymakers should proceed cautiously, try out a variety of strategies, and carefully evaluate the positive and negative consequences of these programs, particularly for low-income families and children.”

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To download the 75-page report, including individual state profiles, visit [http://www.clasp.org/Pubs/Pubs\\_New](http://www.clasp.org/Pubs/Pubs_New). To set up an interview with Theodora Ooms, contact John Hutchins at (202) 906-8013.

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*A national, nonprofit organization founded in 1968, CLASP conducts research, policy analysis, technical assistance, and advocacy on issues related to economic security of low-income families with children.*