



FUTURE OF THE FAMILY COMMISSION

Notes from Meeting #1 – January 27, 2016

The first meeting of the Commission was held on January 27, 2016 in Madison, Wisconsin, attended by the following members of the Commission:

1. Secretary Eloise Anderson, Chair
2. Mr. Jeff Pralle
3. Dr. Sarah Campbell
4. Mr. Mikel Holt
5. Archbishop Jerome Listeck
6. Mr. Jim Kacmarcik
7. Ms. Alicia Manning
8. Mr. Delvyn Crawford

Two members, Ms. Rachel Campos-Duffy, and Ms. Emetia Riddle-Williams, were unable to attend.

Facilitation of the meeting was conducted by staff from Credens LLC, and supported by staff from Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF).

Meeting agenda, expert and other presentation slides and other material handed out separately are incorporated here as reference, but have not been appended to these notes. They are organized in the following manner:

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Summary of Expert Presentation

Prof. Timothy Smeeding, the invited expert for the meeting, discussed the following key trends:

The Changing American Family

1. The composition of the American family has changed significantly since the 19th century, evidenced by people getting married at an older age, rising percentage of women who never marry, rising divorce rates, and increasing births to unmarried women.
2. These changes are due to changing family economics, largely driven by a decline in median wages since the 1970s. More families have dual earners and female breadwinners. Wage labor opportunities, especially for the unskilled, have declined since 1970s.
3. Wage gains have increased minimally only for those with postgraduate degrees. Wages have remained essentially flat for those with bachelor's degrees or no college.
4. Assortative mating ("marrying your own kind / class") remains consistent which increases income disparities.
5. More women are giving birth outside of marriage and in unstable situations; birth rates are not declining but marriage rates are.
6. There is a "right way" and a "wrong way" of having a child, in terms of impact on children's well being and development. The "right way" supports best outcomes for children and families, and includes the following sequence: Finish school; Get a decent job; Find a partner you can rely on; Make a life plan including marriage; Have a baby. The "wrong way" does not support best outcomes for children and families, and includes the following sequence: Have a baby first; Don't finish school right away; Don't have a decent job; Don't have a partner to rely on; Never, ever have a life plan. Increasingly, more and more births are the "wrong way."

Socio-Economics in Wisconsin

1. Unemployment levels among young people are high, particularly for those with little education.
2. College graduates delay childbearing until their late 20s.
3. Family stability is difficult; WI has a 75% rate of multi-partner fertility.
4. If a child starts in the bottom 20%, the likelihood that the child will move up is quite low.
5. Parenting skills, abilities and resources matter; we need to make "weaker" parents "stronger".
6. 41% of births are out of wedlock, 60% of those are unplanned.
7. 20% of African-American babies born in Milwaukee are "unwanted".
8. Wisconsin child poverty rates have been declining since 2011 due to public policies and government safety nets such as Earned Income Tax Credit, FoodShare, public housing, SHARES, BadgerCare.
9. Wisconsin has a small African-American middle class and it is declining; African-Americans in Wisconsin face high poverty rates.
10. Milwaukee has extreme racial and income disparities, and very high rates of child poverty. The rate of black child poverty is 40% in Milwaukee County.
11. Poverty varies across counties and dramatically within Milwaukee County, leading to a wide achievement gap across the state.

Policy Issues

- There are only 5 options for addressing unplanned births out of wedlock – abstinence, contraception, marriage, abortion, and adoption.

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- We need to reduce unplanned, out-of-wedlock births.
 - Abstinence and marriage promotion have not worked; abortion and adoption are controversial and less desirable choices.
 - Evidence suggests that effective birth control is starting to work. Therefore, Smeeding recommends:
 - a. Promote long-acting reversible contraceptives
 - b. Promote marriage. Still, two minimum wage earners cannot adequately support a family, so,
 - c. Higher wages are needed as well to promote family stability
 - Incentivize marriage over cohabitation and reduce disincentives to marriage.
 - Reduce incarceration rates.

Summary

Prof. Smeeding presented data on how there have been significant changes over time in what a “typical” American family looks like in regards to marriage, age when having children, wage prospects, family stability, etc. His suggestions are LARCs, promoting marriage, and higher wages.

Definition of Consensus

The topics within the scope of the Commission’s work are very complex, and have different beliefs, values and opinions associated with them. The Commission has been asked to try to reach consensus on its recommendations. After some discussion, the Commission agreed to employ the following definition of Consensus:

“The group will have reached consensus on a decision when, after a prescribed period of discussion, each participant can say about both, the process and the outcome:

- I believe that others understand my point of view
- I believe I understand others’ points of view

And

- Whether or not I prefer this decision, I expect my opinion will be duly recorded/ noted by the Commission and the recommendations have been arrived at openly and fairly.”

Definition of Family

The Commissioners discussed various aspects, definitions and types of Family. For the purpose of this Commission, the Commissioners agreed to define Family by focusing on “What is best for the child?”, and to include the following in that definition:

- “Natural” or biological parents – both, mother and father, and single parents
- Grandparents and other relatives providing care for the child
- Legal guardians
- Foster family and/or residential care
- A person perceived by the child as his or her parent, including key influencers in a child’s life, individuals and supporting agencies.

Observations / Reflections of the Commissioners

After listening to the Expert presentation, the Commissioners were asked to identify a few items that stood out to them as new / relevant / interesting information. Their comments are summarized below:

1. There are multiple ways to be “married”, even though it might not be called a marriage; for example – cohabitation
2. The definition of family is very broad.
3. Given the diversity of the Commissioners, it will be challenging to reach consensus on all items, even though the Commissioners are all participating for the right reasons.
4. These are extremely complex and broad problems facing the Commission, and proposed solutions are likely to be reductive.
5. The onus of preventing unwanted or unplanned pregnancies should fall equally on both young men and women, and not just on women.
6. There are not enough educational and informational programs about morals and values to offset changing cultural influences and societal desensitization about sex.
7. Many young men seem to jump from boyhood to fatherhood, and miss the transformational stages of adulthood and “husbandhood.”
8. There are not enough conversations between adults and children about healthy sexuality; many children learn about sexuality from TV and movies. This keeps young members of the society from having the tools to make appropriate sex-related decisions.
9. Many young men do not understand the financial and other consequences of unprotected sex, unplanned and unwanted pregnancies.
10. Job opportunities are evaporating for the middle class.
11. Many of the facts presented by the guest speaker are startling to the Commissioners. Collectively, information on the current state is lacking or not well known.
12. It is sad to realize that many children are trapped in an adverse situation that feels normal to them.
13. The erosion of marriage among today’s middle class is surprising. We cannot take the institution of marriage for granted even among communities where the marriage rates have been historically high (Latinos, for example).
14. Assortative relationships (“marrying your own kind / class”) and marriages accentuate socio-economic inequality – for example, a high-earning professional typically marries another high-earning professional, and a low-earner typically marries another person from the same socio-economic segment of the society. Although there are more marriages between different ethnicities, neighborhoods and religions, people still tend to largely marry within the same class. Assortative marriage is not a new phenomenon.
15. There is concern about the dissolution of traditional institutions of civil society. Communities today are unable to transmit virtues. How can we build social capital?
16. The child poverty rates, especially in Milwaukee, are sobering, as are the disadvantages young men face when they become fathers.
17. Many young fathers feel that more money will solve their problems and so they engage in illegal activities to get money. This leads them to exist in a constant “survival mode.”
18. The incarceration rates in Wisconsin are staggering.
19. Despite data showing recent economic decline, the trades are alive and well in Wisconsin. Manufacturing in and around Milwaukee is still healthy. The challenge today is to find skilled machinists and labor.

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20. It was shocking to know that 20% of babies are unwanted.
 21. We need more jobs in Wisconsin.
 22. There are no quick fixes – these are cultural problems that require long-term solutions.
 23. The Expert spoke about the “right” and “wrong” way to have a baby; we need to effect change when the “wrong” way happens—the unplanned and unwanted babies.
 24. Milwaukee leads the nation in seven negative indicators, and Wisconsin has the highest black incarceration rate in the country.
 25. Poverty, education, and incarceration needs to be fixed before marriage can be addressed.
 26. Wisconsin does not have a long history with blacks. Many came to Wisconsin after the war for manufacturing jobs, and the second wave came in the 1980s for welfare. Within Wisconsin, Beloit has the longest history with blacks.
 27. Today, many families typically do not save money for a rainy day.
 28. The values of love, family, and stability are not being heard on mainstream radio, but have been replaced by negative messages and negative aspects of the “hip-hop culture.”
 29. We tend to look at Milwaukee as unique in Wisconsin with its socio-economic issues, but similar things are happening in rural parts of the state, as well. Therefore, these issues pertain to the whole state.
 30. The 20% rate of unwanted babies is close to the rate of domestic child abuse.
 31. Should we assume that the facts we heard are, indeed, facts?
Comment: Some of the facts heard may be coated with opinion; the Commissioners will hear a lot of facts and may need to challenge and question them.
 32. Issues that cannot be addressed with policy solutions may be suited for the “pulpit” of the Governor’s office.

Key Challenges Identified by the Commissioners

The following key challenges were frequently discussed and deemed important for the scope of work.

1. The changing/ declining importance of morals and values, and reduced exposure to those from past generations.
2. Changing cultural influences, especially those that are highly sexualized and violent.
3. High rate of unwanted babies.
4. High rate of adult functional illiteracy.
5. Increase in the number of undocumented people.
6. Impact of foster care and lack of help to children transitioning out of foster care in learning about family stability.
7. Impact of violent crime and gun violence on communities and families; these affect all families, not just vulnerable ones.

Questions / Additional Data Requests

The Commissioners posed many questions during the meeting, some for reflection and discussion, and others as request for any available data or research. These questions are listed below.

The number of “data / research requests” is very large, and the DCF staff does not have the capacity to research and/or address them all. Therefore, the Commissioners will be asked to prioritize in order to reduce the number of such requests.

	<i>Question</i>	<i>For reflection & discussion</i>	<i>Data/ Research Request</i>	<i>Staff Comments</i>
<i>Marriage & Family</i>				
1.	Why are marriage rates falling/what is behind the decline in marriage rates?		X	<i>In Smeeding presentation & suggested readings</i>
2.	How were marriages strengthened in the past? What has changed?		X	<i>In Smeeding presentation & suggested readings</i>
3.	Do we need continued education for married couples?	X	X	
4.	Are the reasons behind marriage today very different than the reasons were in the 1950s? Are they influenced by socio-economic, cultural, other factors?		X	<i>In Smeeding presentation & suggested readings</i>
5.	Is there any data to show whether a woman is considered “ineligible” for marriage based upon on the number of children she has?		X	
6.	What data related to the Adolescent Risk Assessment in Wisconsin are available? Are the data broken down by ethnic / racial groups, e.g., African-American, Native American, Latino population, etc.?		X	
7.	What is the average age that kids in Wisconsin are starting to have sex?		X	
8.	What are the effects of incarceration rates on kids?		X	
9.	What percentage of Wisconsin kids have a parent in jail?		X	
<i>Safety-net Programs & Affordable Housing</i>				
10.	What is the impact of welfare, and what has changed under W-2?		X	
11.	Which safety net / government programs have yielded positive results in terms of impact on families and poverty?		X	<i>Data on economic impact available – part of Smeeding presentation</i>

	Question	For reflection & discussion	Data/ Research Request	Staff Comments
12.	When do safety nets become hammocks: at what point do government programs/subsidies promote dependency and work against motivations to become financially independent?	X		<i>See AEI/Brookings report in suggested readings</i>
13.	What are the economic benchmarks to qualify for childcare subsidies?		X	<i>Can provide federal and state eligibility criteria</i>
14.	What do we know about Finland's childcare support program?		X	
15.	What are the trends since the Great Recession regarding reliance on entitlement programs?		X	<i>In Smeeding presentation & suggested readings</i>
16.	Are more people accessing and/or abusing disability benefits since the Great Recession?		X	
17.	Would affordable housing encourage single parents to find stable relationships, by eliminating unsafe cohabitation and partner instability?	X	X	<i>May be answered by future speakers</i>
18.	How does lack of affordable housing affect family stability?		X	<i>May be answered by future speakers</i>
19.	What is the impact of frequent move of households on academic performance and future economic mobility of children?		X	<i>May be answered by future speakers</i>
20.	Do we have expectations from society today - regarding support for disadvantaged members - that used to be considered responsibilities of families or individuals in the past?		X	<i>In Smeeding presentation & suggested readings</i>
Family & Life Skills				
21.	What education / programs exist for young men about sexual health, abstinence, delaying onset of sexual activity, mitigating hyper-sexualized societal influences, contraception, etc.?		X	
22.	If some parents have not helped their children learn how to make good decisions regarding sex, what programs exist to help teach these children?		X	
23.	What is (or should be) the role of schools in teaching children how to make good decisions about sexual activity?	X	X	<i>We can research current role for WI schools, "should be" is up for discussion</i>

	Question	For reflection & discussion	Data/ Research Request	Staff Comments
24.	What programs exist to help parents learn to teach their children how to make good decisions re: sex?		X	
25.	Can we identify the factors that lead to pregnancy within unstable situations? Does it have to do with young women not knowing their own value and purpose?		X	
26.	What are the health effects on babies of women getting pregnant later in life? Is this trend also associated with higher levels of health complications (e.g., autism)?		X	
27.	What are the consequences for children of being an unwanted baby?		X	
28.	How should Wisconsin deal with the unwanted babies?	X		
29.	What options do young moms have if they do not want their baby, and how do they learn about those options?		X	<i>First half covered in Smeeding presentation. Second half of question requires research.</i>
30.	How do we provide opportunities for young families to be successful, in terms of teaching how to be a successful family and how to teach young boys to be responsible men?	X	X	
31.	How can we help to create strong parents from the very beginning / day one?	X	X	<i>In Smeeding presentation & suggested readings</i>
32.	What is the skillset to be a successful family?	X	X	
33.	How do children learn values and principles if no parents are present to teach them?	X		
34.	Do we have generations of kids who are used to a household living paycheck to paycheck and do not know how to achieve financial stability?		X	
35.	Could the Commission use radio and television to promote healthy choices?	X		
General Education / Vocational Training				
36.	How can we close the gaps in high school dropout and graduation rates between pregnant and non-pregnant teenagers?		X	
37.	What programs are available for post-secondary (college and vocation) education for parents?		X	

	Question	For reflection & discussion	Data/ Research Request	Staff Comments
38.	What evidence-based curricula are other cities or states using for life skill lessons?		X	
39.	How can we help re-train people who have lost their jobs?		X	
40.	What is the first step for people to start a business or learn a trade? Are there avenues for people to learn about entrepreneurship opportunities and grants?		X	
Economic Stability / Mobility				
41.	What are the variations in poverty rates across Wisconsin? Are poverty maps available for the whole state?		X	<i>In readings – WI Poverty Report</i>
42.	How important are economic stability and marriage to child well-being?		X	<i>02 23 16 presentation focus</i>
43.	What % of black middle-class families had parents who were themselves already middle class? How much social mobility exists in the black community?		X	
44.	What socio-economic issues found in impoverished neighborhoods of Milwaukee today were in existence generations ago when ethnic populations occupied those same areas? Was the economic mobility of ethnic populations in those areas assisted by a stronger family, religious communities and emphasis on education?	X	X	
45.	How can the Commissioners hear directly from disadvantaged fathers and young mothers?			
46.	How are more jobs going to be available in Wisconsin?	X		
47.	With 48% of kids coming from parents with low educational backgrounds, how do we change their mobility and create a good educational pathway for them?	X		
48.	What is the impact of undocumented immigrants on the socio-economic framework of communities?	X		

Other Requests

1. The Commission requests a glossary of terms, definitions and relevant acronyms
2. The Commission requests a definition of “weak, average and strong” parents in expert presentation
3. Read the Daniel Patrick Moynihan Report