



FUTURE OF THE FAMILY COMMISSION

Notes from Meeting #2 – February 23, 2016

The second meeting of the Commission on February 23, 2016 in Madison, Wisconsin, was attended by:

1. Secretary Eloise Anderson, Chair
2. Dr. Sarah Campbell
3. Ms. Rachel Campos-Duffy
4. Mr. Delvyn Crawford
5. Mr. Jim Kacmarcik
6. Father Tim Kitzke, substitute for Archbishop Jerome Listecki
7. Ms. Alicia Manning
8. Ms. Greta Munns
9. Mr. Jeff Pralle

Mr. Mikel Holt was 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.

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Opening Remarks

DCF Secretary Eloise Anderson officially opened the 2nd meeting with the following remarks:

1. This meeting is subject to Wisconsin's open records law.
2. She does not intend the Commissioners to be or become policy experts.
3. The Commissioners have been invited here in order to come together as citizens and bring their opinions, backgrounds, beliefs, thoughts and values to the discussion. She wants them to be open to hearing others' values, opinions and backgrounds.
4. The Commission will make recommendations to the Governor's office, where policy experts will determine how to best act upon them.

Expert Presentation #1: Prof. Lawrence Berger

Professor Lawrence Berger, the first of two invited experts, discussed the following issues:

Family complexity and fluidity

1. Families are increasingly complex and fluid. Fluidity (instability) across households and parental roles has increased greatly over the last 50 years (slide 11 of his presentation).
2. There are many implications for family complexity and fluidity (slide 12).
3. Births to non-married mothers have doubled since 1980 and there has been a large increase in cohabitating families (slide 15).
4. Many children face multiple family structure transitions by age 9, and cohabiting families are nearly as unstable as single parent households (slide 16).
5. Most children born to single parents will be part of complex families (slide 18).
6. Parents, especially fathers, have multiple parenting roles (biological, step-, resident, non-resident, custodial, non-custodial, etc.), and this trend is higher for families of color (slides 20 and 21).
7. Over the past 20 years the trend of multiple parenting roles has increased for parents of all education levels except those with bachelor's degree or higher (slide 21), indicating that there are two tracks of family experience, distinguished by the parents' education level.

Family complexity influences family functioning and child and family wellbeing

1. Social parent families are more likely to break up than biological families. Mothers' engagement with their children is consistent across family types, and married fathers are very engaged, but not fathers within cohabiting families (slide 23).
2. Expectations shape how well parents perform their roles. As parents take on multiple parenting roles, it becomes trickier to establish clear expectations across households and children. This places more demands on roles and resources, leading to increased family stress and conflict (slide 24).
3. Low parental investments and family functioning lead to poorer childhood outcomes, including unintended pregnancy and non-marital births (slide 25).

How current policy addresses family complexity

1. Policy implications (slide 27)
 - It is difficult to categorize families and policies; complex families necessitate a substantial shift in how we approach families and family roles and responsibilities.
 - Relevant policies cross economic and behavioral goals.

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- Current policies were designed in an era of less complex families and when disadvantaged men had higher earning potential.
2. Approaches to custodial and noncustodial parents (slide 28)
 - Custodial parents have access to more income and social supports than noncustodial parents.
 - Noncustodial parents are categorized as non-parents and are treated with mandates (child support payments, for example) rather than supports.
 - Employment, child support and noncustodial parent involvement are interrelated; consider them as a package, not alone.

Policy recommendations

1. Prevent family complexity by making LARCs (long acting reversible contraceptives) available for women who want family planning services (slide 31).
2. Provide a parallel and proportionate package of supports, benefits, and tax credits to non-custodial parents, and coordinate with the criminal justice system to accommodate incarcerated parents (slide 32).

Questions / Answers with Professor Berger

Q: Could benefits incentivize parents to have more children?

A: He does not know of evidence to support that, but it could be possible.

Q: Could men work and earn money while in jail to continue to pay child support?

A: He knows of a program in Milwaukee that helped men stop accruing child support but it was not widespread. Under this program most men were not eligible, because to qualify they needed to have paid all child support for the prior year. That requirement disqualified anyone who had recently lost a job.

Q: What did the family planning programs in St. Louis and Colorado do to achieve their widespread reduction in unintended pregnancies when they offered LARCs (chosen by 2/3rd of the women seeking birth control)?

A: Health providers were able to give LARCs on the spot without a second appointment, LARCs were free, and providers were trained to give information about them.

Expert Presentation #2: Ms. Rachel Sheffield

Ms. Rachel Sheffield, the second invited speaker, discussed the following issues:

Marriage and poverty: how family formation affects income and earnings

1. Marriage decreases the probability of child poverty by greater than 80%; in Wisconsin the rate is 88% (slides 37 and 38).
2. Since 1960s the rate of births to unwed mothers has risen from 7% to over 40% (slide 39).
3. In Wisconsin, the rate of births to unwed mothers is 37% (slide 40).
4. In the U.S., 71% of poor families with children are not married (slide 41).
5. In Wisconsin, 77% of poor families with children are not married (slide 42).
6. In Wisconsin, the majority of unwed births occurs to women ages 20-29 (slide 43).
7. Less-educated women are more likely to give birth outside of marriage (slide 44).
8. Marriage and education are effective ways to reduce childhood poverty (slide 45).

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9. Non-married white families are ten times more likely to be poor than married families (slide 46).
 10. Non-married African-American families are five times more likely to be poor in Wisconsin (slide 47).
 11. Non-married Hispanic families are three times more likely to be poor in Wisconsin (slide 48).
 12. Single parents remain in poverty and married parents are less likely to be in poverty.
 13. Cohabiting couples are not as stable as married couples:
 - a. 50-60% of cohabiting families are likely to break up by the time child turns 5.
 - b. Cohabitors are less likely to invest in child well-being than married families.
 - c. Cohabitors are less likely to share resources and receive help from extended families.
 - d. Married couples are more likely to pool their resources and more likely to receive wealth transfer from their families.
 - e. Men benefit from the so-called “married wage premium”; marriage has a causal effect on increasing men’s wages—likely due to a stronger commitment to their jobs and life routines.
 14. Married men maintain higher levels of employment than non-married men.
 15. In March 2013, 90% of married men were working or in military, compared to 70% of non-married men.
 16. If marriage rates had not declined, more men would be connected to the workforce.
 17. The decline in marriage has contributed to declining socio-economic conditions.
 18. There are financial benefits to intact families and their children, the “intact family premium.”
 19. Marriage affects the well-being of children and adults and keeps fathers connected to the labor force.
 20. Married couples more effectively build wealth than single parents do.
 21. Marriage is doing well among the highly educated but less well among those who could most benefit from it.
 22. She wants children to hope for marriage.

Policy recommendations

1. Provide assistance grants to couples who stay married; reduce welfare marriage penalties.
2. Consider social marketing campaigns addressing the benefits of marriage, similarly to how the message about the importance of completing high school is ubiquitous.
3. Conduct education about the benefits of marriage.

Questions / Answers with Ms. Sheffield

Q: Is the reduction in teenage pregnancy part of more planned pregnancies? Is it reflective of delayed childbearing versus teenage parents?

A: She did not have specifics. Lower income women tend toward unplanned versus unwanted pregnancies. Maybe the timing was not what they wanted.

Q: Does getting married after having a child affect the poverty rate?

A: She did not have specifics. Marriage and child-bearing have become disconnected in lower-income families.

Q: Has sex become a sport?

A: The 1960s sexual revolution and birth control contributed to the disconnection of sex from commitment. Sex is no longer reserved for marriage.

Q: With the benefits of marriage, why do you think so many people don't want to get married?

A: Perhaps they have a fear of divorce, so they go about it the wrong way. Instead of choosing a partner, getting married, then having a child, they go about it the wrong way.

Q: What is the resistance to removing barriers to marriage if we have known for so long its benefits?

A: (comment from a Commissioner) There is a cost to that. A single parent family is cheaper. It is about the "now cost" versus the long-term gain. The conversation has to be about the long-term gain, which is longer than a politician's watch.

Q: Cohabiting families don't receive as much family assistance—what about step-families?

A: She did not have details; step-families are likely to receive more assistance than cohabiters but less than married families.

Q: Have there been programs to target teen pregnancy that could be applied to unmarried 18- to 29-year-olds? Could we learn from the reduction in teen pregnancy rates?

A: There have been efforts in the past 20-30 years to address teen pregnancy; it was an "all hands on deck" approach. We could apply this to the unmarried pregnancy issue.

Joint Discussion with Experts

After their individual presentations, the two experts and the Commissioners jointly discussed the following points:

1. To increase marriage success, we need to support men and delay childbearing.
2. If we could support male employment and male earnings, we would probably see more marriage and less out-of-wedlock births.
3. Sexual activity is a cultural issue. Young women want to get married and like the idea of marriage, so maybe we need to address the benefits of marriage for men.
4. Women seem to be generally more inclined toward marriage. Men need to hear other men tell them about the benefit of marriage and the dignity of "malehood" and fatherhood.
5. The message is "you're not cool if you haven't slept around." We have a lot of media messages to overcome.
6. Sexual behaviors among high- and low-income people are similar and have not changed. What has changed is that high-income people have easier access than low-income people to a better type of birth control (LARCs). Higher-income people have healthcare providers who know about LARCs and can discuss them in the clinic setting; they have health insurance that covers this type of birth control; and, they have enough control over their lives that they are able to make a return appointment. In contrast, lower-income people do not typically benefit from such factors. In modern chaotic lives, it is hard to make consistent decisions to use condoms and the Pill. With LARCs, women only have to make a decision once every three years.
7. Low-income folks say they want to get married. They delay getting married until after they've "made it" and can afford a wedding. Economic factors are entwined with marriage.
8. How has the divorce rate changed since manufacturing and low-skilled jobs started to fall apart in the 1980s? Have we looked at divorce in the context of economic stability?
9. If we could delay pregnancies beyond the late teens and early 20s, would that allow people to choose more effective life partners?

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10. We have delayed the age at which a lot of young disadvantaged women are having babies. Every additional year that they delay childbearing makes a big difference.
 11. Less advantaged women are still having babies early and they have little access to upwardly mobile choices. There is less to lose if you have babies at a young age and are disadvantaged.
 12. We have to consider the impulsiveness of young adulthood as well as the choice sets that people have, and the potential benefits and costs of those choices.
 13. Children learn by watching their parents; how can we get young women to envision putting off having babies?
 14. Three different populations that need help were discussed:
 - a. Kids born into poverty
 - b. Teenagers in poverty who need help to gain upward mobility
 - c. Families in tough situation
 15. Less than 3% of youth in foster homes go to college. There is a lot of financial aid available for them, but there is little awareness of it.
 16. DCF has a project that helps kids in foster care get jobs at age 16.
 17. At UW-Madison, organic relationships with professors are effective ways of mentoring students who were in foster homes.

Reflections

Following the expert presentations, the Commissioners were asked to reflect on the discussion and to identify key things that stood out to them. They identified the following (not prioritized):

1. Education and economics are big barriers for the success of the family; these barriers are exacerbated for complex families.
2. We need to think of adjustments to monetary / fiscal policies for complex issues.
3. There are many different ways you can put together a family. How can a child understand what is “normal”?
4. There is hope.
5. Marriage is a strong defense against poverty.
6. When the expectations and roles of a father are not met, there is lot of stress, anxiety, frustrations and pressure, and fathers are more likely to leave. Is it easier for them to give up?
7. The lower teen pregnancy rate is good, but we still need a behavioral and mindset change. The symptoms are changing in the right direction, but we have not yet addressed the root causes.
8. How do we help fathers deal with their multiple roles and expectations, especially regarding complex families?
9. Societies with polygamy and polyandry lose wealth. Monogamous societies tend to be wealthier. What can we learn from the historical transformation from polygamous to monogamous societies?
10. More and better opportunities and options are needed for men and women age 20-25.
11. There is an increase in family complexity for all but those with bachelor’s degrees. How do we get vulnerable young men and women to decrease that fluidity, by for example, going to college?

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12. There are lots of mandates and not a lot of support for noncustodial parents, so how can we encourage noncustodial parents to contribute more financially and emotionally to their children?
 13. At the “macro level,” the economic policies that are help create jobs also significantly help families.
 14. At the “micro level,” there is a lot of hopelessness and not enough role models to help people understand the link between their choices and related financial outcomes.
 15. Should schools teach financial independence? Would that bring hope and control?
 16. The disassociation of sex and marriage and the impact of early exposure to sex, pornography, especially via social media, is troubling.
 17. Young kids still want marriage and families, but there is disconnect between reality and the choices they make.
 18. How do we normalize marriage?
 19. We need to move from mere education about family issues to “formation” of strong families, and teach families how to deal with hard issues.
 20. The “male issue” has to be addressed; there are a lot of hurt men out there.
 21. How does a man operate in the world? What is men’s understanding of their role?
 22. Marriage education and the role of child support are important.
 23. Why does a dad who has partial custody not get partial support from income support programs like SNAP, Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), etc.?
 24. Why are people penalized for being married in income support programs?
 25. For people with less than a college education who are married, what are they doing to become marriage-ready? What encourages marriage in this subset of people?
 26. Family complexity and fluidity put pressure on all families, not just the poorer ones.
 27. Members of complex families with stresses may have a hard time becoming the best employees, parents, or community members if they are just trying to keep things functional in their households. This has a high social cost.
 28. Marriage inoculates against poverty; let’s create incentives for or remove disincentives to marriage.

Barriers / Challenges / Problems

After the above reflection, the Commissioners were asked to identify key barriers / challenges / problems that they thought were relevant for the day's topic; their responses are listed in the 1st column in Table A below. The Commissioners then grouped the barriers / challenges / problems into summary topics, presented in the middle column. Lastly, the Commissioners voted to prioritize the topics; each Commissioner received two votes (total = 18 votes across 9 Commissioners present), shown in the last column. The priorities are preliminary.

Table A: Key Barriers / Challenges / Problems

Key Barriers / Challenges / Problems	Summary Topic	Votes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Policy disincentives to marry; the accompanying challenge is that "it's always worked this way," and the challenge of changing mindsets about these policies. 2. How EITC (earned income tax credit) is currently applied to non-custodial parents. 	Incentives/disincentives to marriage	6
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. How can we help get society to be ready to invest resources in men, and especially low-income men? 4. How to invest resources in teaching incarcerated men about parenting skills, marriage skills, financial skills and job skills? 5. Helping incarcerated men through mandated classes in prison. Requiring programs about healthy relationships, life skills, marriage stability. 	Societal investment in men	5
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Changing the mindset of what is a healthy sexual relationship, through cultural messaging. 7. Rethinking marriage as a journey or adventure, as something that could be "normally achievable" by most people. 8. Marriage as a partnership—what does a partnership look like in the modern day? Historically marriage were contractual partnerships, what do they look like today? 	Relationships / marriage / sex	3
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Providing men with support such as counseling, information, faith initiatives, support groups. 10. Helping men understand the role of fathers and expectations from them. 	Supporting men – the "male issue"	3
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Lack of education that focuses on family impact and financial management, in addition to academics. School choice, because without a functional family with good role models, the schools become the next vehicle for teaching. 12. There are no mandated classes for parents. How do we educate parents to be parents? 	Education / school	1
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Helping fathers and mothers who are in multiple family relationships. 	Existing complex families	

Potential Recommendations / Focus Areas / Solutions

Next, the Commissioners were asked to identify potential recommendations, focus areas and solutions that the Commission should consider, pertinent to the barriers / challenges / problems identified earlier. Their responses are listed below in Table B. The Commissioners voted to prioritize these ideas; each Commissioner received two votes (total = 18 votes across 9 Commissioners present), shown in the last column. The priorities are preliminary.

Table B: Potential Recommendations / Focus Areas / Solutions

Potential Recommendations / Focus Areas / Solutions	Votes
1. Delay pregnancy in order to get men and women into healthy, committed relationships by supporting LARCs. Learn from the programs in Colorado and St. Louis. Consider offering LARCs to those at most risk, e.g., young women in foster care who are twice as likely to get pregnant by age 19.	3
2. Remove governmental barriers to marriage such as income support and the marriage penalty.	3
3. Provide support to help men re-enter society after incarceration – look at Department of Corrections policies and procedures that would do less harm – e.g., enabling identification cards in advance of release, changing time of release from county jails (currently midnight), helping former inmates connect with 3 people outside the prison as support group (similar to Alcoholics Anonymous approach – support groups help people understand they are not alone), considering family distance when relocating prisoners to facilitate family contact, etc. “Ban the box.”	3
4. Develop healthy marriage formation programs that encourage “living / existing in marriage”. Reframe marriage to teens and young adults.	2
5. Support programs for disadvantaged men, especially those incarcerated, and unemployed African-American men. Make programs for incarcerated men mandated rather than voluntary.	2
6. Skill development for young men is lacking, which tends to push men in undesirable directions. Increase high school exposure to technical fields in at-risk rural and urban communities, and explore new models for vocational education. Look for information on ways to reduce the stigma associated with two-year technical education.	2
7. Provide in-home education programs for new fathers similar to the home visiting nurse programs for new moms. Teach about relationship formation because it is as important as birth control.	1
8. Provide more opportunities for former offenders, such as restoring their right to vote and offering skill certification programs while incarcerated to improve their employability and rehabilitation.	1

Potential Recommendations / Focus Areas / Solutions	Votes
9. Make men of color less threatening to employers, and young tattooed white men more acceptable to employers.	1
10. Offer high-quality childcare subsidies, and review income thresholds for eligibility so that available family resources and incentives to participate in high-quality childcare are aligned.	
11. Redirect current fiscal resources away from current policies designed to cope with a declining state of marriage, and increase spending on developing, strengthening and building families.	
12. Provide divorce intervention to try to salvage marriage even after filing for divorce. Create opportunities for marriage repair. Provide resources about strong marriages, for example, when couples apply for their marriage license.	
13. Promote school choice.	

Commissioners also discussed the following points:

1. If it is within the scope of supporting families, the Commission can include in its recommendations reducing the number of incarcerated non-violent offenders. The U.S. incarcerates more people than any other country.
2. We could look at how men get themselves into situations where they are making illegal choices, for example, when men cannot get jobs, they are pushed in negative directions. Schools have not provided young men the training they need to get a job.
3. We have pushed 4-year education at the expense of technical education that will help young people find good jobs.
4. Could we bring back vocational training in high school?
5. Are we seeing the decline of the family from trends started 20-25 years ago?
6. Alabama has a program in which they have a training center of excellence for robotics, welding, etc. They meet with employers who are looking for specific skills. How effective has that been?

Questions and Data Requests

Lastly, the Commissioners were asked to identify a few key questions that would help the Commission reach better informed recommendations. Table C below lists those questions. The Commissioners voted to prioritize these questions; each Commissioner received two votes (total = 18 votes across 9 Commissioners present), shown in the last column. The priorities are preliminary.

Table C: Questions and Data Requests

Question	Votes
1. What are examples of current private and public investments from other states (e.g., Alabama) in technical colleges (beyond high school) and training, inside and outside jail? What information is available about their effectiveness?	6
2. What is Wisconsin's current investment in vocational / technical educational programs? What examples are available currently (e.g., Beloit)?	3
3. Are there existing evidence-based programs that reduce recidivism? What types of programs are more effective – those that are managed by the state, or those that are faith based?	3
4. What information is available about ways to reduce the stigma associated with the 2-year vocational / technical colleges?	2
5. What is Wisconsin's data on home visiting nursing or other similar programs? Are there any parallel programs for new fathers, particularly in at-risk communities?	2
6. What is the rate of non-violent incarceration and the demographics of those incarcerated? Are there alternatives to incarceration for some of them?	2
7. What are the societal costs of putting the children of incarcerated men in foster care?	