

## STRENGTHEN FATHERHOOD AND THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

America leads the world in fatherlessness, with approximately one out of every four children growing up without a father in the home. Fatherlessness often leads to serious problems, including children who are far more likely to run away from home, drop out of school, or end up homeless. Unfortunately, decades of political mismanagement and misaligned incentive structures within our welfare system have exacerbated the problem of fractured families.

Means-tested welfare programs, such as housing and food assistance, undermine their anti-poverty rationale when they sharply cut benefits off as household income increases. Policies like these discourage fathers from returning to the home and penalize all families for taking actions to move up the economic ladder. With government programs acting as a destabilizing force for families, out-of-wedlock births have skyrocketed from five percent in 1960 to more than 40% today. To address this crisis, we must first raise awareness about the issue of fatherless children and then work to find new solutions.

Of course, there is no “one size fits all” solution to the fatherlessness crisis in America today. Solving this problem will require policies that promote lasting marriages and responsible fatherhood by strengthening the nuclear family, empowering churches, and increasing programming and support for incarcerated and formally incarcerated individuals.

Eliminating benefit cliffs and reducing tax penalties on secondary earners can help stabilize lower-income working families by encouraging two-parent households and active labor market participation. Government officials can also support an all-out pro-fatherhood messaging campaign to amplify the importance of fatherhood across the Nation.

Americans overwhelmingly believe that parents bear the primary responsibility of raising children. When this is not possible or is not taking place, local communities are well-positioned to take care of fatherless children.

Local churches and faith-based organizations are well-prepared to lead on this issue, as they have the resources needed to guide fathers to their highest potential. At the federal level, removal of the Johnson Amendment, which restricts tax-exempt churches from engaging in political speech, would greatly empower churches to speak forcefully on new policies. At the same time, tax breaks for mentorship programs, civic service and engagement opportunities, and family resource programs can help equip fathers and families for success.

The federal government cannot reinvigorate fatherhood on its own. But it can and must stop getting in the way of families who are looking to rebuild from brokenness. The America First vision centers on reforming harmful policies that undermine the stability of the two-parent family and empowering private organizations that are the most directly invested in the success of their local communities. With the federal government as a partner for restoration instead of an instigator of decline, fatherhood will once again be celebrated in America as a core component of strong families who make up the foundation of our Nation.

### THE FACTS

- ★ 23% of American children are raised in a one-parent household.
- ★ Without a father in the home, children are five times more likely to live in poverty than a child in a married-couple family.

- ★ 90% of all homeless and runaway children come from fatherless homes.
- ★ 63% of teens who commit suicide and 85% of children and teens with behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes.
- ★ 71% of all adolescent patients in drug and alcohol treatment centers come from fatherless homes.
- ★ Children without fathers at home are 9 times more likely to drop out of high school.

employable skillsets to be successful upon their reentry into society, and bring fathers back to their families and communities.

- ★ Support the use of mediation in cases of divorce or transition from prison or military to co-parenting.
- ★ Support funds for non-custodial parents to get the help and support they need to successfully co-parent.
- ★ Promote policies that remove barriers to adoption.

## THE AMERICA FIRST AGENDA

At the federal level, support policies that:

- ★ Reverse the cultural crisis by empowering churches and community organizations by providing legal protections for political speech.
- ★ Eliminate benefit cliffs and reduce steep tax penalties on secondary earners that discourage two-parent working households.
- ★ Enhance programs that have successfully reduced recidivism, better equip men with tangible and employable skillsets to be successful upon their reentry into society, and bring fathers back to their families and communities.
- ★ Support parenting education for incarcerated parents to learn to parent and promote a “Continuum of Care” model for fathers as they return to their community and families.
- ★ Permit the use of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds to support non-custodial or incarcerated parents to get programing such as education, job assistance, and mental health and substance abuse treatment.

At the state level, support policies that:

- ★ Update income verification to determine appropriate and accurate rates of child support.
- ★ Encourage community organizations and churches to provide support for non-custodial parents who are actively paying child support and in good standing to spend time with their children.
- ★ Remove tax and benefit disincentives to two-parent working families.
- ★ Enhance programs that have successfully reduced recidivism, better equip men with tangible and

## REFERENCES

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