

# PROMOTING HEALTHY MARRIAGE

## *H.R. 4 Provides Reasonable Approaches to Promote Healthy Marriages*

### **Historically, the welfare system had a bias against marriage.**

- While AFDC was created to support widowed and deserted mothers, its restrictive rules made it virtually impossible for women to get married and receive assistance.
- Perversely, welfare programs tend to entice women to have children outside marriage at very young ages. Nearly 10 percent of children in 2002 lived in families headed by never-married single moms compared to 5 percent in 1982. The percentage of children born outside of marriage is especially high among teenage girls (79 percent in 2001).

### **Research is clear that children do best when raised by 2 married parents.**

- Children raised by single parents are 5 times more likely to live in poverty, 5 times more likely to depend on welfare, 2-3 times more likely to show behavioral problems, and twice as likely to commit crimes or go to jail.
- Children raised by single parents also are more likely to suffer from abuse and neglect, commit suicide, take drugs, and drop out of school.

### **The President's plan and H.R. 4 do not mandate marriage. They dedicate a small amount of resources to test strategies that might reverse the devastating trend of out-of-wedlock births.**

- Nearly three-quarters of non-married mothers are in a relatively stable romantic relationship with the expectant father around the birth of their child. Almost all these couples believe there is a good chance they will marry. It is reasonable to think that some type of assistance at this "magic moment" could have important benefits to children.
- The President's plan and H.R. 4, the House-passed welfare reauthorization bill, would direct some current welfare funds to allow States to test various approaches to assistance, promote education and marital preparation programs that can help couples decide if marriage is the right course, offer courses in high school about the benefits of marriage and relationship skills, and provide counseling to strengthen healthy marriages.
- H.R. 4 directs as much as \$300 million per year to be available for these purposes – a modest amount of funds that will not detract from the \$17 billion in TANF and \$5 billion in child care available each year. The President's FY 2005 budget proposal increases this amount slightly for each of the next five years.