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ABSTRACT: TO PROMOTE MARRIAGE AND THE NATURAL FAMILY

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The percentage of American children born outside of marriage has climbed sharply, and the rise seems to be continuing inexorably. For traditional families that are formed, divorce rates remain close to the unprecedented level they reached a few years ago. These trends pose grave social problems. Children fare best within the traditional family--both illegitimacy and divorce inflict great damage on children.

However, the law has great difficulty combating the underlying problems. At least in liberal societies, the state has limited tools to deal with couples who bear children and cohabit without marrying or who never live together at all and with parents who cease to live together. Serious legal restrictions on divorce are not politically feasible and, in any case, would probably be of little or no benefit to children. Nonetheless, government can do much to promote marriage and the traditional family.

Part I of this article explains the social value of marriage and the natural family (*i.e.*, a woman and a man and their biological children). Part II addresses claims that the problems of illegitimacy and rampant divorce are insoluble. Part III discusses the challenge of how to frame the message to the public about the benefits of marriage. Part IV proposes some steps for transmitting this message.