

## THE COALITION OF FAMILY ORGANIZATIONS:

- The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
- The American Home Economics Association
- Family Service America
- The National Council on Family Relations

Formed in 1977, the nonpartisan Coalition of Family Organizations (COFO) is a consortium of four national professional and family service organizations committed to promoting a family focus in public policy and social programs.

September, 1988

**DEAR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES --**  
*Vice President George Bush,*  
*Governor Michael Dukakis--*  
*and other elected and appointed officials.....*

In this highly charged political season pro-family talk is everywhere. Interest in family issues is welcome and long overdue. **But pro-family talk is not enough. Family well-being must become a central concern of the machinery of government.** We urge you to transform pro-family campaign talk into postelection action.

Many now agree that our most important social institution -- the family -- is showing signs of serious stress. You are being urged from all sides to enact specific pro-family policies on issues such as child care, parental leave, and welfare reform. Yet, these legislative proposals ignore the basic problem which is that **while families are everyone's concern, they are nobody's responsibility.** Public officials declare their wish to help support family life, yet the basic machinery of government neither encourages nor requires attention to the family.

**After more than a decade of public concern, there are still no offices within government whose mandate is to monitor the health and well-being of family life, to develop sound family policies and to promote a family perspective in policymaking generally. There are no systems in place to guarantee that public officials ask the vital question: What effects will this proposed action have on families?**

This appalling gap can be remedied. Your leadership can ensure that in the future, government will treat family well-being as seriously as it treats the well-being of the economy and the environment.

### WHAT REFORMS ARE NEEDED?

To make wise policy decisions that affect family life, policymakers need regular, reliable information and dispassionate analysis. These should be provided by objective sources that undertake the following tasks:

1. To monitor, continuously and systematically, changing family trends and their implications for public policy.



2. To assess the impact of actual and proposed policies on family life.
3. To help develop and implement policies that are family-centered.

The current system is clearly not working for families. Policymakers are not receiving the necessary family-related information because no one is charged with the responsibility to provide it. In other important areas of public policy, such as the economy and the environment, a host of institutions exist to provide objective information. Similar institutions are needed in both the executive and legislative branches of government to promote family-centered policymaking. We propose several new institutions that should be established at the federal level. However, they can and should also be adapted for the state level.

Two analogous examples have helped shape our proposal: government's response to the environmental crisis and its efforts to ensure the health of the economy. The idea of requiring family impact statements has attracted considerable interest. It was modeled on the environmental impact legislation enacted in 1974. Its goal—to encourage awareness of the impact of public decisions on family life—has received bipartisan support. During the Carter Administration, an overwhelming majority of delegates to the White House Conference on Families voted in favor of instituting family impact statements. President Reagan issued an Executive Order in 1986 requiring federal agencies to review all existing and proposed policies for potential impact on families. Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) has proposed family fairness statements in the U. S. Senate. However, none of these proposals has been implemented.

Senator Daniel P. Moynihan (D-NY) has suggested that a more appropriate model is the Full Employment Act of 1946, which set forth broad national goals for economic policy and established several new institutions to help policymakers achieve these goals.

Similar legislation should be proposed which sets forth broad goals for *family policy* and creates new institutions to provide the objective information and analysis needed to help achieve these goals and encourage a family perspective. These should coordinate with and supplement, not duplicate, the work of existing agencies.

These are the institutions which are needed:

## IN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

### ● *National Family Commission*

Establish a National Family Commission as a permanent independent agency.

Functions: To collect, synthesize and assess family information; conduct hearings and commission special studies; issue reports directly to the public; provide assistance to similar state bodies.

Authorized initially for a trial period of five years. Commissioners to be jointly appointed by the President and U.S. Congress; professional staff.

### ● *Council of Family Advisors*

Establish the Council of Family Advisors in the White House to report directly to the President.

Functions: To issue an annual report to the public on the state of families; provide timely advice on policy development and program issues as they affect family life; coordinate closely with the Council of Economic Advisors, Office of Management and Budget and executive agencies.

Modeled on the Council of Economic Advisors. Three to five family experts appointed as advisors by the President; professional staff.



● *Executive Agencies*

Establish special family units within existing research and evaluation offices.

Functions: To serve as central coordinating point for reviewing the family impact of proposed and existing policies and programs; monitor the impact of changing family trends on department programs.

**IN THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH**

● *Senate and House Select Committees on Families*

Establish a Special Committee on Families in the Senate comparable to the present House of Representatives' Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families but the scope of both Committees should include family issues of adults and the elderly.

Functions: To conduct hearings and issue reports related to family policy; provide essential background for the work of the authorizing committees.

● *Congressional Family Research Office*

Establish a Family Research Office in the U. S. Congress.

Modeled on the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO).

Functions: To serve as a central congressional clearinghouse of family-related information; conduct studies and special analyses of family issues for the Select Committees and legislators generally; coordinate closely with CBO and other congressional research offices.

**WHAT CAN YOU DO TO DEMONSTRATE YOUR LEADERSHIP FOR FAMILIES?**

Reforms such as these need to be proposed, studied, debated and enacted. The Coalition of Family Organizations is ready to help. Contemporary family life poses challenges for public policy that can no longer be ignored. At present, families are everyone's concern but nobody's responsibility. Government must deliberately shoulder some of this responsibility. Pro-family talk is no longer enough. We urge you to take action now.



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P.S. We attach some *Questions and Answers about Family-Centered Policymaking* as a supplement to this Open Letter.