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Tallahassee, Florida

**Public Statement of John Stemberger  
with Florida Family Policy Council on Announcement  
of Florida Cultural Indicators Report**

Good morning.

My name is John Stemberger and I am the President and General Counsel of the Florida Family Policy Council. The focus and purpose of our organization is to strengthen Florida's families.

Our organization is one of 36 state-based policy groups throughout the country who are associated with CitizenLink, the policy partner of Focus on the Family out of Colorado Springs.

In 1994, former Reagan-Bush administration official William J. Bennett published the first Index of Leading Cultural Indicators (ILCI). Bennett developed ILCI because he felt social and cultural trends should be monitored carefully just as fiscal trends were being tracked in the Index of Leading Economic Indicators.

Seeing the national conversation that developed around those Cultural Indicators, we have developed our own state-specific Cultural Indicators study. For the Florida edition, we have chosen to follow not only the typical social trends but also several fiscal areas that have an impact on families as well. This extended focus is indicative of the desire of the Florida Family Policy Council to expand the scope of the organization to address financial issues as well as social concerns as they relate to the flourishing of Florida's families.

Evidence concludes that strong marriages and families are critical to the success of both our economic and social future. At the most fundamental level, the institutions of marriage and family produce social order and fiscal stability in society. This human flourishing reduces the need for the government's safety net and reduces the financial burden to the state caused by the family fragmentation.

Among the more remarkable findings of the study include:

- While Florida's violent crime rate has fallen 55% since 1990, since 1960 Florida's violent crime rate has always been 36% above the national average.
- On average, 83,000 couples are divorced each year. Florida has the ninth highest divorce rate in the nation and the divorce rate has been above the national average for more than 50 years.
- Comparing with national averages, Florida's SAT scores are four points lower in reading and 24 points lower in math.
- The total number of births out of wedlock has jumped from 28% in 1960 to 62% in 2012. Since 1960, the percentage of births to non-white unmarried women has increased by 126%.
- Since 1960 the number of single parent families has risen by 260%.

- Enrollment in Medicare by Florida's seniors has risen by 61%.
- Florida has the fifth-highest HIV infection rate in the nation with 78% of HIV in men being the result of male on male sexual contact.
- One in six Floridians now receives food stamps, quadrupling this rate since 2008.

We can find hope in the fact that every problem measured in every metric in this publication can be reduced with one cultural change: Stronger families.

All can agree that weak family units lead to social maladies that are detrimental to the bottom line for government and for business. Strong families are simply indispensable to a prosperous state.

The issue of thriving families is not a Democrat vs. Republican issue. It's not a liberal vs. conservative issue. It is not even a religious vs. secular issue. It is a universal human issue which is critical for us to continue to exist as a civilization.

Most of the public debate over marriage focuses on the role of marriage as a social, moral, or religious institution. But there is a very real sense in which marriage is also an economic institution, and one which creates human and social capital. Family fragmentation as a result of divorce and unwed childbearing has significant economic implications, including expanding expenditures for state governments.

A recent study done by the American Enterprise Institute indicates that in Florida taxpayers spend 1.9 billion dollars annually on the cost of family fragmentation from divorce and unwed childbearing. Among the findings in this study are programs that result in very small decreases in divorce and unwed childbearing could yield big savings for taxpayers.

Virtually every domestic issue in public life and in culture is connected to the level of thriving in Florida's marriages and families. While the role of government is limited in shaping culture there is so much that legislative and government leaders can do to strengthen these institutions.

Our plea to officials and opinion leaders all across Florida would be to begin a dialogue about how we can strengthen the institutions of marriage and family. Our hope would be that future legislative leaders would create a joint commission, a workshop, a summit, or an OPPAGA study on marriage and family to explore solutions to reducing family fragmentation and increase the thriving of marriages and families.

This document is intended to start a state-wide conversation, provide a benchmark for Florida's progress in various areas, and make readily available research for others to use. By looking at an array of cultural trends in statistical and chart form, elected officials, community organizers, business leaders, pastors, and other concerned citizens can come together to chart a course for solving the problems that these numbers reveal.

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