

Marriage Diaries

Pending legislation that would reauthorize the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Program includes a proposal by President Bush to spend \$1.5 billion on government marriage promotion programs. This proposal is a waste of taxpayer money that will increase the risk of domestic violence, fail to stop the rise in poverty, and do nothing for the institution of marriage. Women are 40% more likely to be poor than men. And women on welfare need education, job training and child care more than ever to be able to compete in the marketplace. To squander \$1.5 billion on unproven programs urging marriage upon poor women, particularly in this economy, is fiscally foolish and morally reprehensible.

Iowa -- "Women and children cannot be expected to stay in situations where they are hurt and exploited. Promoting more marriage is NOT the answer! In doing this, you are telling women that their government (which is supposed to protect them) would rather see them beaten ... than help them achieve a better life. Please continue to help these women and children, as government assistance helped my family."

Of particular concern are the increased risks of domestic violence associated with such a program. The reality is that as many as 60% of women welfare recipients are survivors of domestic violence. (See the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund report *Surviving Violence and Poverty* at nowldef.org/html/issues/wel/Surviving.pdf.) These women need economic security so they can escape abuse, not government pressure to remain with their abusers. The Administration claims that it would never pressure someone to marry, or remain with, her abuser. But there are no provisions in the House marriage promotion proposals to ensure that officials will screen out couples in abusive relationships. It is therefore vital that if marriage promotion provisions are ultimately passed, the protections included in the Senate bill be retained and or strengthened and be included in any final welfare reauthorization bill. Trying to escape an abusive relationship can be one of the hardest things for a woman to do, particularly when a woman is financially dependent on her abuser. Women need to hear about how to leave the relationship, not get lectures on how to work through typical marital strife or cash incentives that risk further danger.

California -- "Without welfare benefits, grants, scholarships and child care, my daughters and I would have become homeless, fending for ourselves on hostile streets. His abuse could have easily continued and could have included taking my children from me. I'm so thankful these resources were available and the current day restrictions -- including the proposed marriage programs -- weren't in effect."

Government marriage promotion sends the message that the way out of poverty for women is dependence on someone else to act as a breadwinner, rather than economic self-sufficiency. They divert welfare funds from basic economic supports; coercively intrude on private decisions; place domestic violence victims at increased risk; waste public funds on ineffective policies and inappropriately limit state flexibility.

Montana -- "We must protect women in this country by not forcing marriage upon anyone. [Marriage] is not the solution to poverty or violence. Job skills, child care, and a focus on the person who perpetuates the violence rather than the victims of violence are the only ways that women living in poverty will be able to leave poverty and begin to support themselves."

Inside, you'll find additional narratives submitted by women across the United States. These powerful stories show the importance of public assistance -- including education, training, counseling, child-care, food stamps and health care -- in helping women escape domestic violence and become self sufficient.

For more information on marriage promotion, please contact the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund Public Policy Office at 202/326-0044 or visit nowldef.org/html/issues/wel/marriagepromotion.shtml.

ALABAMA

As a strong supporter of many things our government has done to maintain our liberty as Americans, I strongly disagree with the program that encourages low-income mothers to get married. I have worked for two and a half years for organizations that support and advocate for victims of domestic violence. I have seen victims controlled emotionally and physically, to the point where they don't feel life has purpose. I have seen women murdered by their intimate partners because he wanted control over them.

Since research has shown a strong correlation between poverty and domestic violence, I believe that encouraging marriage for low-income mothers could be very dangerous--even deadly. Although I do believe strongly in the sanctity of marriage for couples in healthy relationships, promoting this program allows a perpetrator to maintain control over his victim. Therefore, I plead that this program be dismissed or reevaluated to ensure that more people do not become victims of the crime we know as domestic violence.

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I am a counselor, and I have worked primarily in the community as a Vocational Adjustment Counselor. In that role, I have helped people with disabilities to enter or re-enter the education system or the workforce. I have worked with many women who [have] become disabled (mentally and/or physically) as a direct result of domestic violence. These women absolutely had nowhere else to turn financially during their time of escape and healing but public funds. I was glad to be part of the process as they continued to heal and entered the education system or the workforce, many for the first time as they had worked without pay in their homes for years. The most detrimental, cruel, and ignorant thing I could have told these women, as their counselor, was to return to the abusive situations that contributed to their disabling, sometimes near-fatal outcomes. It's simply irrational and has nothing to do with family values. Forcing marriage, as some kind of superficial political band-aid fix is not good for women; it's not good for children; it's not good for violent perpetrators who are never held accountable or taught a better way. It's not good for my community. I know because I work hard in my community trying to make it a better place.

ALASKA

My name is Paige, and I am an excellent mother that was firmly trounced in the Alaska judicial system. I was married for 11 years to a verbally, emotionally, and physically abusive husband. Typical to the behaviors of abusive men, he has continued to abuse the children and I through the court system. I have been financially ruined by being dragged through the court system with this man for 5 years now. Even at this, however, it was far better for the children and I to divorce than to stay in this violent and unhealthy environment.

I was one of the lucky ones because I had some assets to tide me through for a while. Many abused women and children do not have this financial stability or resources. Batterer's intervention programs all around the country have an average success rate of approximately 5-8%. Batterer's behaviors are the result of beliefs and behaviors that are long held and not readily changed. For the federal government to assume that couples counseling is going to "cure" a violent relationship is misguided and dangerous for the victims--women and children alike.

I went through 4 years of marriage counseling, which soon included individual therapy because our therapist did not feel I was safe in sessions with him. No lasting change was achieved. The courts forced co-parenting counseling upon us, which only endangered my children and me more while giving my former husband leverage in the custody case. [He] directed his anger at the children through things he learned through the sessions. There is [a] vast amount of literature detailing the danger to domestic violence victims during mediation, marriage counseling, co-parenting

counseling, and other presumed "collaborative" processes. It is incumbent upon Congress to become aware of these issues to protect their constituents--not to introduce "feel-good" policies, which in actuality put them in harm's way.

ARKANSAS

I know this is hard to believe. I couldn't believe it either. On the day of our wedding, my husband-to-be threw me down a flight of steps, and said; "Now you know how it's going to be and who's the boss." Up to that moment in our relationship, he had been perfectly charming. I went through the service and it took six months and many beatings before I got out of the marriage.

CALIFORNIA

"I was not on public assistance, but I was a target of domestic violence. I married a man who was verbally abusive. This marriage cost me dearly. I had many physical problems while I was married, due to the constant stress. He raped me four times when we were married. We saw a therapist together. He stopped going after a few sessions. He informed me that I was the problem, and that I needed to get "fixed", not him. I had to have surgery to get the damage fixed after I was raped. I face more surgeries, too. I paid all this money to therapists to try to help us, and wasted the money because the man I married is a monster. He doesn't see a problem with himself, and won't get help for his anger problem.

Please do not force women to get married. When women have low self-esteem, they tend to choose marriage partners who are abusive. Please put the government money into educating people about abuse and the need for respect. Debbie "

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"Look what you did to me. How could you do that?" My ex-husband cried as he jumped back after I poured boiling syrup down the front of his shirt. He fled without finishing the job he came to do.

The police seemed to agree with him when they arrived an hour later. "If he'd really been serious, you wouldn't be alive," the sergeant said as he refused to take a report even though bruises were plainly visible and my throat was swelling shut. One officer remained behind. "He was serious. He meant to kill you. If you even see headlights at the end of your driveway, call and say he's in the house with a gun. I'll be here within a minute." This officer met me at the station the next morning. "I can't override my sergeant, but I can help you file a report when the new shift starts."

The city attorney declined to prosecute because, "You weren't very serious. You waited until morning to file this report." Instead, he sympathized with my ex-husband, who was claiming I only filed a report to get more child support. More? I hadn't received a dime in the years since I'd filed for divorce.

The fact that my ex broke down my kitchen door -- O.J. style -- grabbed me by the throat and choked me until I was almost passing out was lost in all this official scorn, as was his bending me backwards over the open flame, trying to set my waist length hair on fire. Lost--was any consideration of the restraining order against him and all the previous times his violence caused injuries to me. Lost was any hope of escaping his violence, even though I'd filed for divorce three years previous. It was a family matter in the eyes of too many police officers and district attorneys. One officer told me how they hated responding to my calls because they were too dangerous -- for them.

He certainly was dangerous. He'd held a loaded gun in my face and pulled the trigger. I'll never know why it misfired. God's finger in the barrel? I wasn't so lucky when he threw me into the fireplace. I spent two years in a back brace, five more learning to sit, stand and walk again.

A divorced mother with two young daughters, I wouldn't have been able to raise them without welfare benefits. I couldn't work after my injuries and was prevented from working before the injuries by his abuse. I'd been harassed out of several jobs after my employers decided they didn't want to deal with him. During the divorce, the judge gave him the business I'd founded -- declaring him more in need of the income because he was going to have to pay child support. When I protested and pointed out he'd vowed never to pay child support, the judge threatened me with contempt. He was also allowed to keep assets I'd purchased before we were married, assets he'd stolen from my premises after I'd filed for divorce. He didn't have to replace my car, which he'd stolen and destroyed.

Penniless, disabled, without transportation -- all caused by him -- people were still advising me to go back with him "for the good of the kids." My kids were terrorized and begged me never to let him in again. How could anyone think staying in that marriage would have been good for them?

Desperate to support my kids and escape his abuse, I went back to college. I knew I could earn good grades, which would qualify me for grants and scholarships. Sitting up for an hour at a time for each class was agony, but I persisted. I graduated with a 4.0 in two majors. The subsidized child care on campus helped me spread my classes over as many hours as possible, with rest breaks in between, and to see my children between classes. It was a long day for all of us but, after graduation, I was able to set up my own consulting business. This allowed me to work at my own pace rather than face further agony struggling through an eight-hour day.

Life during those years was a nightmare, but it would have been worse if I'd been required to stay married to this man. We tried marital counseling. It became just one more way of abusing me. Years later, I found out research showed marital counseling can actually increase the risk of domestic violence rather than decrease it.

Without welfare benefits, grants, scholarships and child care, my daughters and I would have become homeless, fending for ourselves on hostile streets. His abuse could have easily continued and could have included taking my children from me. They could have ended up with their abuser or in a foster home. I'm so thankful these resources were available and the current day restrictions -- including the proposed marriage programs -- weren't in effect. In my case, the only person who would have benefited from these misguided programs would have been my abusive ex.

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"To read that educated people could actually believe that marriage is the way out of poverty, and could prevent women and their children from having to make use of public assistance, was beyond shocking! Evidently it takes more than education to open the eyes of some.

Hopefully sharing just a glimpse of the hell I (and my daughter) survived, because I bought into that belief system, will open the eyes of those in power who are making decisions that will affect the lives (and I mean lives in the literal sense!) of the women and children in our United States.

I lived with my ex-husband for 3 years before I became pregnant. I was not supposed to be able to conceive AND I was taking the pill at the time to regulate my menstrual cycle, so finding out that I was pregnant was quite a surprise! Since my ex was abusive to me before marriage, I was afraid to continue the relationship for fear that the abuse would not only continue, but also possibly escalate with a child joining us. But I had gone back to church and was active in my religious practice and firmly believed what I was taught --- that a family must stay together and that if we were to marry, that would take care of the "problems" we were having. We would be blessed with a much better relationship as well as financial state of affairs. So I married him.

Five weeks after my daughter's birth, he decided he could not & would not wait the full 6 weeks before having intercourse. Mind you, I was still recovering from the loss of so much blood and could barely function and I was still

passing blood. When I said "No", he raped me. Then he went to the store for more cigarettes. I lay in the bed hemorrhaging, listening to my baby cry. I managed to grab the sheets and a blanket from the bed to use to keep the blood from getting on the floor, for fear of making him angry and receiving a beating, and picked up my baby and stumbled to the bathroom where I sat on the toilet bleeding and nursing my baby. After he returned home he finally agreed to take me to the hospital once I promised not to say anything about what he had done. As a result of the rape, a severe systemic staph infection developed. I was again in the hospital for several days. Thank God I had MediCal.

Over the next two years he continued to beat me and rape me. A favorite activity was to tell me he wanted sex and if I dared to say "no," he would kick me - hard - until I would fall out of the bed, then he would drag me back into the bed and rape me after kicking me a few more times for good measure. Another favorite punishment was to beat my breasts (perhaps because I nursed my daughter) and stomach (perhaps to prevent any future pregnancies from occurring). He began abusing my daughter, too. And I stayed with him. Because I enjoyed the beatings, or thought I deserved to be treated that way, as some people choose to believe about battered women? NO!!!! Because I truly believed in the nonsense about marriage being the cure-all! Was I better off financially because I was married? NO!!! Did marriage save me from having to be a recipient of public assistance? NO!!! Was my child better off having a two-parent household? NO!!!

I finally, with the help of true friends and counseling, divorced him when my little girl was two years old. I received public assistance and worked my tail off by doing childcare and other stay-at-home occupations so that I could stay home with my child. It was always VERY important to me to provide her with a good education even before she went to school AND to provide her with playmates of various ages since she was an only child. I also went back to college as soon as she was old enough to attend preschool. And again, worked my tail off to be the BEST student, as well as the BEST parent possible. I could not have done this if not for receiving public assistance. Public Assistance saved my life & gave me the chance to better myself for both my future AND my daughter's.

As a result, she is in college, studying to be a teacher. I recently had the privilege of meeting the classroom of students that she is working with during her internship and hearing from them what they thought of her as a teacher! To hear that she is the BEST teacher they had ever had and that she understood them and made learning fun and always listened to them and helped them until they understood something they had difficulty with was such a blessing. AND it brought home to me once again that receiving public assistance is NOT a bad thing!

It is not a crime! It should NEVER be seen as a crutch! Those who find themselves in need of receiving this assistance should NEVER be looked down upon and treated as though they are "lesser than" or lazy or bad! And women who choose to raise their child (ren) on their own rather than marrying "because it's the right thing to do" are courageous, NOT bad mothers! So what if they receive public assistance for a while? That is ever so much better than the alternative, such as what my daughter & I survived until I had the courage to divorce him AND the nonsensical idea that marriage "makes it all better." Girls and women should never be forced to believe that lie. It was ever so much better to be poor and alive, without bruises and constant fear, and know that my daughter was well cared for and we were both safe.

Marriage is not a necessity, but the option of receiving public assistance most certainly is."

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At age twenty-one I was married with one child. Although I had hopes for a "happy ending" the marriage ended after a year in which I endured much emotional and psychological abuse. My husband was the breadwinner in the family and moved us to another state. When I finally made the painful decision to leave, I was unable to financially support myself so I moved in with my parents and applied for and received AFDC. I was very grateful for the second chance in life and I went to college. I got my Associates degree and was back in the workforce. That was over ten years ago, I am happily remarried now and have two children. I am a homeowner and pay taxes. I will always be grateful for the assistance of the government in my time of need, however, I don't think that I would have had such a success story had I not learned the life skills to support me and my child. I think that it is dangerous to encourage women to get

married as a means to get off welfare. Women need to learn how to become independent and self-sufficient. Women need to have the life skills and education to provide for their children. I would encourage every member of Congress to stop violence against women and promote healthy and productive families.

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If you are born female, you value marriage. If you are born male, you value freedom. Men do not want to commit to marriage. It is not mothers that you have to encourage to get married. Women should not marry abusive men.

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My twins, age 22, were beat a lot. They were on welfare and needed money. Their kids were seeing their mothers beaten each day. One daughter even got her toe cut off by her mate so she could not leave the house. He ironed her back with an iron. The other twin was beaten so badly that her mate broke her neck and left her by herself, at time carrying a baby. She has kids in foster care who were abused also. My girls, to this day, find mates who beat them. As a mother I have had to see men who've said [they] love [my daughters] try shoot them. They have lost housing. So know this law will hurt others [and make men feel they have the right] beat women. I beg you as mother, a grandma, and person who was, at one time, on welfare. I was beaten badly by the man I married. I married him very young. Don't do this, more women will be beaten or killed and it hurts the kids.

--Alicia Crews

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At 17, I married a drug addicted abusive man. I didn't know that he was on drugs or abusive. I had a child by him and wanted my baby to have a daddy. I believed in love. It started out as name-calling, belittling, isolation, and humiliation. For 3 1/2 years I was told that I was stupid, ugly, and that I couldn't live without him because I couldn't support myself and he would hunt me down and kill me anyway. Luckily, I had a family that helped me when the abuse turned violent- slapping me, tying a coat hanger around me neck and threatening me, pushing, [and] threatening me with knives. I knew I had to leave or he would eventually kill me. I did. And I got a job. But at minimum wage, I needed some help and that came in the form of food stamps and medical assistance. It wasn't long before I was able to support my daughter on my own and I did for 10 years before I married a wonderful man. Had I not had the support and encouragement of my parents and grandparents I don't know what I would have done. I can't image how women make it without that, but they do and many need financial help to do it. I can't imagine what kind of life my wonderful 24 year old daughter would've had, had I not left. She would be a different person I am sure, [other] than the honest, caring, smart, and successful woman she is now. Look at the big picture. Thank you.

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A female survivor of domestic violence, who is also an ex-shelter client, has said she will be marrying a man she has known for less then four months for reasons of economic comfort, financial stability, and convenience. She has said that her fiancé is very rich, has bought her a car, buys her nice things, buys her two children clothes, and anything else they want/need. They live with his parent's in their three-bedroom home and he is providing money for her to hire an attorney to get full custody of her two children. This client also disclosed that her fiancé has power and control issues. She feels this relationship is much safer than her past relationship with the father of her children, because her fiancé is not verbally or physically abusive to her.

This is a common scenario: a woman marries in order to ensure a more financially secure future for her children and herself. Many of these women who have fled domestic violence, some other type of violence, or other problems in their lives are either living on welfare, in poverty, or working a very low paying job. She may feel that by marrying someone will save her from a life of poverty and hardship. But at what cost is she willing to pay? Is this new person abusive, but not as bad as her last relationship/parents? What about the children? Are they going to continue the pattern due to learned behavior? Now we have our President recommending that these women and their families marry to avoid living on welfare, in poverty or working a low paying job. Is that the answer to our problems? I hope

not. I have worked with many women who have struggled to survive and raise their children in a healthy atmosphere and go beyond welfare and low paying jobs to be very successful. Many women choose not to marry/remarry and if they do it's because they are in LOVE and want to share their lives together.

We may see this client here come through our doors again as another victim of domestic violence. I hope and pray we don't. But, the odds are that when we marry for economic, financial or any other reason other than love or friendship, it usually goes from something that looks good in the beginning but turns sour later and then, due to the legal bond of marriage, is more difficult to escape.

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I was a victim of family violence and when I called the police all I got was "...what did you do to irritate him to cause this?" I was kicked out of bed, knocked down basement steps, hit, [and] slapped. [I asked] the officer "...what could I have done wrong when [I was] asleep?" I worked 12 hours a day, sometimes seven days [a week], helped farm, [and] and had two small children. And [I am] still abused by my second husband verbally and its just as bad.

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I was married for thirteen years to a college educator who emotionally and physically abused our three children and me. I couldn't leave him because I couldn't support my kids by myself. Finally in Dec. 1999 he tried to kill me. Then I finally had to leave, regardless of what it would take. I was able to move into the home of a family member. The courts then penalized me, for having been able to support myself thirteen years earlier, by granting no alimony in the divorce.

I had to go back to school to re-educate myself. Skills and experience that were attractive to employers thirteen years ago were no longer attractive. My children are struggling both emotionally and academically. My oldest one [has] dropped out of college. I need help with grants for school, vouchers for tutoring for my children, available low cost housing (Sect 8 has an 8 year waiting list!), and money to pay bills. Going back to the batterer will only put all of us at [a] huge risk of having our lives threatened.

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I am writing using a friend's email and computer, because I am very worried that my ex-partner will read or somehow see this, and I won't survive that experience. I was in an abusive relationship for over six years. I tried to leave countless times, however, [I] always had to come back. My partner would find me, threaten me or anyone who helped me with legal or illegal actions, or use police, intimidation, or property damage to make me return. He kidnapped the kids many times, and would stay away for days at a time and let the kids call me, crying for me to return to daddy so "nothing bad would happen." We were very poor, and each time I tried to educate myself or seek employment [to] help us out of the situation, he would show up at my job, my school, or training site stalking me and causing so much ruckus that I either had to quit the job, got fired, or had to leave school. I endured beatings, many rapes, and many [nights] screaming and ranting about how I was a whore, how I was lying to everyone about him, about what he would do to me and the kids if we ever tried to leave again, and how I was so crazy that he was going to have me committed. We were married, and he used that to control, batter, and almost kill the kids and me. I am finally away from him, after so many legal battles, custody hearings, false police reports and him breaking in to my home destroying my house three times. He told me (and his friends and family) that he was my husband, and had a right to do whatever he wanted with the kids and me.

Unfortunately, due to the way many laws are written, he was able to get away with many of the things he did. In California, all items belonging to a married couple are community property. Well, when he destroyed my car, trashed the apartment, and cut up the kids' clothes, and me I was told there was nothing I could do, because of "community property laws." We were thrown out of apartment after apartment, and finally ended up in his family's garage, where I almost died one night two years ago. His family turned a blind eye to his behavior, and told me I was crazy for thinking he ever did anything wrong. I finally escaped following the last rape and beating, and he was arrested. I

sought help at a battered woman's shelter, but he and his family constantly tracked me down using the legal system to file motions, seek family visitation [rights], etc. It was a nightmare. He and the family made false CPS reports without ever having to answer to the lies (I was the only one investigated).

Had it not been for CalWORKS, some great advocates, and the education and training I was offered, I know I would be dead today. Many poor women are like me, no family or support, very abusive and controlling partners, and living daily with the threat of death or worse. How dare the President be so arrogant and shortsighted in his ivory tower as to assume he knows best for me and/or my family?! He and the folks on Capitol [Hill] have no clue what it is like out here. Pandering to politics and special interests at my expense?? Family values? I'm sure he would encourage me to seek marital counseling with my ex husband. We tried that, and it only lasted a month. He would beat me so badly after the sessions, no matter what I said. We had to postpone several due to my obvious injuries. Maybe I didn't learn how to be properly submissive, so that he wouldn't feel the need to beat or rape me as often...Once again, we have a political ploy to balance the budget on the backs of the poorest of our country, all wrapped up in a pretty little pink and white package. I am enraged at his suggestion of marrying and or marital counseling to solve the poverty problem. Will he pay for my funeral and set up a trust fund for MY kids when there is no one to raise them? I am grateful to be free from the abuse, but he will eventually get out, and I will always be looking over my shoulder. Just what does the President plan to do about that?

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I did not grow up on welfare. I married a man and we moved to another state for employment opportunities. Without the support of family and friends, I was isolated. Over time, his behavior became worse and worse. What I was not brave enough to do for myself, I did for my young son, especially when it became clear that the example his father would set for him was one of verbal, emotional, and physical abuse. The one time I went to a marriage counselor he said to me: "How much worse does it have to get?" Eventually, I moved 500 miles away, so that I could go to sleep at night and not be afraid that he would be at the door. I had no job, and was very afraid of the future, but I figured I would have to be poor for a while until I could get established again on my own. It was a great struggle to make ends meet, but never occurred to me that it would always be like that. After a year, with some assistance with food and rent, I got a good job and have been working ever since. The church would have had me stay in that marriage even though he would have molested my son and possibly killed me. I was raised to believe that marriage is forever. Instead, my son and I are healthy, productive members of society - 25 years later. Marriage is not the answer.

Christine

COLORADO

When I was 19 years old, I met my first husband. I was reeling from my own parents' separation and desperately wanted a family. So, in spite of having grown up in a family that ran a battered woman's shelter, I ignored all the warning signs, and when I found out I was pregnant, I married him. (My parents' marriage problems were not related to abuse, but to my father's alcoholism and depression). I will never regret having my son. He is the light of my life, but I wish I had not married his father.

After a year of screaming fights, isolation from my family and friends, and constant threats of violence, I separated from him. The violence escalated and I lived in fear for many years. Without the Aid to Dependent Children and Families, I would have been stuck. The violence would have escalated. I became friends with his second wife and her life with him was a lot more violent than mine. So I know for a fact that he wouldn't have gotten better over time, if I had stayed.

Welfare allowed me to go to college. I dropped out after two years, but that two years was enough education to qualify me for a job with a group home for teenage girls, and to get off welfare. I was able to save enough money after a few years at that job, to return to college. I earned my Bachelors degree in biology, and went on to other jobs.

I never again had to go back on welfare. Without the help of welfare, I could easily have had to remain in a very scary situation, exposing my son to daily violence, and thereby setting him up for a lifetime as an abuser himself, or become a burden to my family. Because I had access to the safety net of welfare, I was able to build a good life for my son—one free of violence and one that was self-supporting. My son is now grown. He and his girlfriend are both college students. They have a healthy, happy relationship. I have recently remarried to a wonderful man. I truly believe that my son and I are the happy, productive self-supporting people we are today, because we had the option of getting out of a violent situation and had help doing so by the welfare system.

Encouraging women to marry is not the answer to poverty. The vast majority of women grow up reading fairytales, and we all want to marry prince charming. If he's not available, most of us seem to settle for the *schmo* down the street. Unfortunately, this sometimes sets women up for a violent relationship. Women don't need encouragement to get married. We need encouragement to stand on our own two feet. We need education, health care, decent paying jobs (most women still make less than men doing the same jobs), and safe child care for our children, and decent, affordable housing. We do not need to get married. We need the opportunity to have safe, happy homes for our children. Violence in the home results in a higher prison population, more child abuse and generations of victims. It is time now to end this chain of violence. Welfare is one of the tools available to women that can be used to stop this chain. Don't take this away. The result will be more abuse, more violence, more hospitalizations, more victims and a new generation of abusers.

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I was married for two years to a controlling, jealous, and verbally abusive man. Some people don't think that emotional abuse is as bad as physical abuse. I'm here to tell you--it's worse. At least if the abuser hits you, you can call the police and they'll arrest him. When I called because my husband threatened to kill me, the cops said they couldn't do anything. It was my word against his and I didn't have any injuries. He would say that if I ever left him, he'd kill my parents, my cat, and my best friend, just to make me suffer. "Until death do us part" was all too real for me. I called a domestic violence center hotline and they helped me look for an apartment that I could afford on my own. I got a restraining order and left my husband. I'm in the process of getting a divorce now. Mr. Bush, what type of marriages are you promoting? Because some of them are too dangerous to stay in.

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I got married to an abusive man when I was 17 years old. My ex-husband was unable to hold down a job because according to him every boss he had was a jerk. I quit high school so I could work to pay the bills. Finally, after our daughter was born, I woke up and realized I wanted a better life for us. My ex-husband was perfectly content with living with his family members so I applied for public housing and my daughter and I left as soon as a unit became available. Thankfully, there was a government funded child care program that made it possible for me to go back to school. After obtaining my GED, I applied for and received financial aid and began taking classes at a community college. Through Pell Grants, I was able to obtain a bachelors degree, and after working in my career field for three years I got a student loan to receive my Masters Degree in counseling. Currently, I am working at a non-profit agency that counsels youth who have witnessed domestic violence or [are] victims of child abuse [themselves]. I hate to think about it, but if I hadn't left my ex-husband (which I would have never been able to do with out government assistance) my own daughter might be one of the children needing counseling. Most of the children we see at our agency are living in single parent homes. The mothers of these children took the courageous steps of leaving their abusive partners in order to give their children a better life. Like me, these women are strong and capable and don't need to be married to feel complete. What they do need is a hand up in the form of childcare, housing assistance, and education that will lead to a career. Please do not spend government money on programs designed to keep women dependant on someone else.

CONNECTICUT

I was involved in a relationship with a man from another country, who in a very short time became very abusive. I suffered broken ribs, nose, wrist, cheekbone, and fingers. Public assistance was the only money that I had during the relationship to be able to put food in my children's mouths. ...[Afterward it was] the only way I was able to regain custody of my children and put my life back together. I went to school and finished my education and now am a professional, working a full-time job. My children are honor roll students and contribute regularly to the community to help those that were once in our situation. This man did want me to marry him--the man who did things like burn me, whip me with an electrical cord, smack me over the back with a crow bar, sexually assaulted me with a screw driver--all of this while I was pregnant. What would have happened if I had married him? Well, maybe the next time he played Russian roulette with me I would not have been so lucky and my children would have been bringing flowers to me at a cemetery on every holiday.

FLORIDA

I am a 34-year old mother of one. I met my abuser at age 15 and married him at age 17. I felt financially and emotionally trapped in this marriage--unable to escape the abuse. After 16 years of being with the abuser, I finally got the courage to get out because of the effect on my daughter and fear that I would be dead either by his hands or due to my own through depression [from] my living conditions. Due to public assistance, I was able to leave and am attending college full time. I will get my degree next year and become a teacher. At which time, I plan to teach and continue my degree in law so that I may be able to help those who were in a situation similar to my own. The welfare system needs to be available to women in these situations in order to be able to get out and make a better life for themselves and their children. I believe education needs to be pushed, not marriage, and that is my story.

✧

"Hello, my name is Suzanne and this is my story. I was married in 1984 to someone that I had known since I was 5 yrs old. We went to the same grade school and high school. One month after we were married, my husband tried to kill me with a razorblade. I was in shock for a while after that. You see, I did not come from an abusive family and had never experienced something like this and had never known anyone that had been abused. I was embarrassed and convinced that it must have been my fault. I was young and didn't know any better. The abuse didn't stop and it wasn't what you would call the 'normal' pattern of abuse. My abuser is what they call in domestic violence circles a 'cobra'. You never know when they will strike or for what reason. He actually never needed a reason--he just hit me.

About 2 yrs after we were married, I had a son. When my son was 3 weeks old, my husband had a screaming fit over his bassinet and that was it. I picked up my child and left him (for the first time). He went to a treatment program for alcohol and drugs and stopped drinking and abusing drugs. But the abuse did not stop. I left him twice in the next few years but in 1990 decided to try it again for my son. We moved to another city and the day that we moved, he threw a phone book at me and broke my nose. But I went anyway. During this time, I went to my church to seek help, but instead of help, they told my husband that I had told them about his abusive behavior. As you can imagine, that was not a good idea. I was beaten for that.

In 1992, he left me with 2 mortgages on 2 houses and 1 income. I eventually lost my job due to stress and in 1995, I received a phone call from my 9 yr old son that he had a brother, who I wasn't the mother of. That was the straw that broke the camel's back. I filed for divorce and it was final in November of 1995. I also ended up having to file bankruptcy and went through a foreclosure.

In 1997, I moved back to my hometown and went back to college. At that time, I started working as a case manager under the Welfare Reform Act. I helped women who had been in similar situations learn to rely on themselves instead of the abuser. I helped them get jobs and go back to work. I helped them regain their self-esteem.

In 2002, I graduated from college with a B.A. in English and am currently in my 2nd year of law school. My goal is to help women who have experienced the same things that I have. No one should have to go through the things that I did alone. Most of the women that I dealt with in my caseload had little or no education and multiple children, each from a different father. They never had anyone who could teach them how to take care of themselves. Most have no family members that are financially or emotionally able to help them. Offering these women financial incentives to marry the men in their lives is not the answer to their problems. Education and jobs are what is going to help them. Teaching them how to proud of themselves is what is going to help them, not encouraging them to rely on someone else.

My ultimate goal is to offer my legal services to people who cannot afford them. My story is not unique. What is unique is my drive to rise above my past and change my life, for the better. I knew that the only way I could increase my income and better my life for my son and myself was to go back to college and get my degree. I truly believe that I have a moral obligation to help other women overcome their abusive situations and realize their true potential and become self-sufficient and successful. But take it from someone who is there right now and continuing the fight--it is not easy. Our society, to this day, frowns on single women still and does not encourage women to stand on their own two feet.

Thank you for letting me share!"



"I married a minister in 1973. There were suggestions in our dating relationship regarding this man's control issues - extreme jealousy, a belief that women should not vote, a history of failed relationships, to name a few. But I had never witnessed or even read about domestic violence, and had no idea what was in store for me.

Within two weeks after our marriage he shoved me out of a vehicle on an abandoned road in the Everglades. Later when he came back for me, I tearfully apologized for the remark I made which had made him so angry. As the months turned into years, and years turned into three children. We lived in poverty. Our home had no heat or air. At one point we obtained a goat, which I regularly milked for the children. The children never saw a dentist. Numerous times, our utilities were shut off. I was not allowed to have a part in the money management. I was forbidden to work. The church supported his male privilege. I felt it was God's will for me to try to make the marriage last, in spite of the destruction of most of my belongings and his frequent temper outbursts and striking out. He threatened me, so I never told anyone about the violence.

The direction of the violent behavior was confined to me, until our oldest daughter was a junior in high school. At that time he began remarking "you are just like your mother." When she confided to a school counselor that her father had threatened to kill her, the school called me, threatening Department of Children and Family Services intervention unless I did something to protect her. At that point I called a family counselor who made an appointment to see our family as a group. Acting incensed, my husband attended. Although neither my three daughters nor I felt safe speaking in front of my husband, the psychologist was perceptive enough to suggest that my husband be evaluated by a psychiatrist.

Although my husband refused to see a psychiatrist, an inquiry I made regarding insurance coverage for the psychologist triggered knowledge of our marriage situation by the administrative personnel in our church denomination. The secret was out. I was asked to drive 200 miles to meet privately with the wife of one of the church's officials. The church officials were afraid of public embarrassment. I was advised to make a fresh marriage contract with my husband, let bygones be bygones, and let a church appointed "mandated" counselor help my husband. I was reminded of a fact of which I was already well aware - if my husband were to lose his job, we would have no income at all.

The "secret" being out, the next months were a blur of fear and desperation. The violence escalated. I remember being called by the church mandated counselor, who was afraid for my safety, and concerned enough to periodically check on whether I was dead or alive. I remember my husband "escaping" when transferring from one mental health facility to another. More than a year later, after obtaining counseling on my own, I left the marriage - just three months short of my twentieth anniversary. When I left I had no car, no job, and certainly no money. My daughters and I survived only by the help of friends. We were crammed into one bedroom for a while, but we were safe.

What happened to my husband? He remained a minister in the well-respected church denomination. As soon as I left, the church officials allowed him to quit the mandated counseling. I have no reason to believe he has ever "changed."

What happened to me? I am now the Executive Director of one of Florida's 39 domestic violence centers. I regret that my three daughters witnessed violence, which will haunt them for a lifetime. I should have left sooner."



"I am a college student and male volunteer working with, talking to, and trying to help abused women.

Consider:

1. A 20-something single [woman], 37-weeks pregnant and with a 6-year old child, whose boyfriend routinely hits her and curses her in front of the 6-year old. He has destroyed her home and self-esteem. He recently beat her again, she fought back, and she went to jail for domestic violence. He calls it love. I call it attempted-murder of both her and her unborn child.
2. A 37-year old unskilled woman with an 11-year old daughter whose husband refuses to give her a divorce. He deserted his wife and daughter and then moved in with a younger, fresher woman, pays nothing in child support, expects his wife to pay for and raise their daughter, and charged his wife with domestic violence. Is reconciliation possible here?
3. A 40-something woman divorced by her military husband after years of physical and emotional abuse. He left her with two teenage children, no skills, poor health, and no financial support. He then found a newer, younger woman, honorably retired from the military and is living in Utah. The woman is in constant fear for her life due to verbal threats from her ex-husband when she asks for help from him.
4. A late 30's single woman with Hepatitis C. Her boyfriend put a loaded pistol to her head, punched holes through the wall beside her head to keep her under control, destroyed her credit and caused her to lose her home, and threatened to kill her pet dog. Would you marry him?
5. A 19-year old female honors student, active in her church, but was raped and became pregnant as a result. Her parents declared her mentally incompetent, forced her to have an abortion, and did nothing to bring her rapists to justice.
6. College students condoning rapists' actions by blaming rape victims for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, wearing the wrong clothes, doing the wrong thing.

Marriage is not the solution. It's a band-aid to hide the truth--that ours is a sick culture that glorifies violence. Marriage as a solution ignores the fact that millions do not know how to have an equal and responsible relationship with another human being. Forcing abused women into marriage will result in an increase in domestic violence, shattered lives, damaged children, and unnecessary deaths."

GEORGIA

At the age of 15 I was raped by a friend of my family. I became pregnant from this assault. I gave birth to a wonderful baby girl and she was and continues to be one of the most incredible blessings God has ever placed in my life. Shortly after she was born I moved in with a man 5 years older than me who promised to take care of us. He and I married and had 4 other children. Shortly after we were together I came home from work one day to find him home fuming over something. It turned out that one of his friends had told him a lie about me. He placed a gun to my head, pulled the trigger and told me to never lie to him again. I stayed with him for all the reasons a young wounded woman stays with an abusive man. The abuse continued, became much worse over the course of the next 5 or so years. Finally one day I had the courage to leave him for good. It was not because of help from the police or any other "authority", but the women in my life, that I survived. He would not pay child support and I was afraid to pursue it. I did not receive public assistance at first, but when I did and the questions began about his whereabouts and paying money, I became afraid. I knew that he would try to find me and kill me as he has so often promised. I needed that money for my 5 children. I did not need that man who wanted to take my life.

Today my children are adults; I finished my undergraduate degree the year my youngest children graduated from high school. Two years ago I finished my Masters of Science in mental health counseling. I serve on several boards and domestic violence taskforces. I keep a home, so that none of my children have to live with a violent man or woman. I believe that there are ways out of poverty that have nothing to do with marrying a man who is abusive to you. Education is the key that I am using and it is the solution I advocate with the families that I work with. **NO WOMAN OR CHILD DESERVES TO BE HIT, SCARED OR ABUSED IN ANY WAY.**

The best solution to our current problems is prevention. Teach men not to use aggressive tactics to solve problems. Teach women that there are ways of living without having to put up with violence. Teach our children that we can live together without violence. I would never tell a woman I work with to marry a man who hurts her. You shouldn't either. If you've never lived with a person who wakes you in the night to beat you, you can't begin to understand the fear in which we live. If you've never been a child who hid underneath the bed or in the closet in hopes of not seeing your father beat your mother...you don't know what it feels like. If you are not an adult who can't enjoy the beauty of flowers because as a child it was easier to not see all that was going on around you...you can't begin to understand. Spend the money, time, and energy on helping families not hurting them.

ILLINOIS

I am writing this as a survivor of domestic violence whose sole support in leaving was public assistance, which included a monthly cash, food stamp, and daycare allowance. [These] provided me the monies needed to flee my abuser. If I had chosen to marry their father after a twelve-year relationship, I would have still needed assistance, as he never provided anymore than what he wanted to provide and used his money as a way to control my decisions and me. Promoting marriage as a way out will only promote needier welfare recipients, as they will need funding for legal help in which to aide them in divorce.

Thank you,
Tamela Oliver

✧

I married a man who showed a lot of potential but refused to hold a job to support his family. I saw an attorney who said that I could divorce him and get assistance, but if I stayed with him, there was no legal remedy to force him to support the family. Being married in no way provided our child or me with economic security.



I am a survivor. I was targeted ever since I was a child. At 10 years old I was approached by my uncle. He would give me a ride home and make me kiss him on his lips. I knew it wasn't right, so I told my aunt. Then she notified her sister. Then the family put the blame on me saying it was the clothes I wore and how I walked. Then I felt alone and did not know how to trust another person. Then I was persuaded by my high school sweet heart that he loved me. He beat me everyday and told me that know one knows the price I pay to wear name brand clothes and shoes, and to carry the status of being the girl friend of the most popular guy in the school. He would chase me in the school and slap me in front of all our classmates. He would interrupt me in tap class and make sure he was the only guy watching. Then I finally had enough and ran. I didn't communicate with any of the classmates from school.

I started [to go to a] community college until I got involved with another young man from the high school I graduated from. His whole idea was to get with the girl he wanted, but was afraid to approach me when we were in high school. I loved him but I compromised my beliefs and values. I vowed that another man wouldn't hit me. He did, my head got busted after one hit in the forehead. I have a permanent mark over my left eyebrow. Two weeks later my right middle finger was broken and busted open, [all because] I didn't want to hear his disagreement. I would hang in there, as long as he told me he was sorry and he loved me. Often, I asked him why he said I made him do it. I stayed in the house when I was abused, and told family I got hit by paintings or I fell and hurt myself. I even got thrown over the [overpass of the] expressway. I was so afraid of losing him [that] I never told the police who had done the damage. I had enough when I found out he was sleeping with someone in the same complex as we lived. I was his wife [and] I thought he would respect me. How [though,] when I married him during the abuse? I also had 3 children, 2 of whom witness it and a third one [who] I was pregnant with during the final separation. After I asked him to leave he returned to bust me in the head with a gallon of crown royal liquor. He stomped me in the chest with his foot and told me [that if] I kept getting up he would continue to hit me until I stayed down. I knew this was it; I was tired of walking around with black eyes and explaining where they came from. I left for good and moved on. I am a student at a university, on the national dean's list, and a recipient of the Johnetta Haley's scholarship. I put the lord first and he put me on the road to success. I am unemployed, raising my 3 children, and successfully continuing my education.



In 1992, just two years into the marriage, the mental, emotional, and sexual abuse started. I started thinking about getting a divorce in 1994, but my husband got me pregnant again. Thinking I could not support two children and myself on my low salary, I tried to make the best of the relationship. However, the non-physical abuse continued. Then, in 1999, my husband physically abused me and held me hostage in our home for a week, preventing me from getting medical or police assistance. I tried to get a restraining order (EOP) to protect my children [and I,] as soon as I could walk again, but the judge refused on the grounds that I didn't have any bruises, broken bones, or police or hospital reports as evidence. Instead, he legally separated us but ordered us to remain living together in the marital residence. The beating I received the day after the EOP hearing was much worse than the first. Again, my husband held me hostage in our home afterwards and threatened to kill me or kidnap our children if I ever did that again.

In an attempt to improve the relationship, I suggested marriage counseling. After a few sessions, the counselor prescribed a mood leveling sedative for my husband (in an attempt to calm my husband so he would be less inclined to assault me again), but he refused to take the medicine.

After approximately six months of sessions, the counselor realized my husband was a batterer and refused to accept responsibility for his behavior. So, the counselor told my husband the only advice he could offer was for my husband to divorce me, quit his job, move away, and start over again. Unfortunately for our children and me, my husband disagreed. For the next three years, I was a nervous wreck and walked on eggshells wondering when the next physical assault would occur. I also began planning for the day when I could divorce my husband to end the cycle of abuse. The next physical assault occurred in 2002 when I had accomplished the goals I had set out in my "exit plan" and was trying to leave my husband permanently. He physically tortured me for several hours first, then put a gun to my head and told me to get out (of the house). He also hid our children from me so I could not take them with me. A few

days later, he withdrew the money from our checking account, hired an attorney, filed divorce and custody petitions, and had an emergency hearing held in which he received temp. Sole custody of our daughters -- all because he was still residing in the marital residence.

Last spring, he told my parents, "It's my goal to put her in the gutter, kick her while she's there, and take our children away from her." At this point, he is very close to achieving his goal because the mandated child support I'm required to pay along with other court-ordered payments of marital household expenses and trying to maintain a residence for myself in a very high rent district (my only option if I want to have any chance of regaining custody) while paying attorney's fees has put me on the brink of bankruptcy.

During the court-ordered custody evaluation process, my husband became very angry and came out of his chair in an attempt to assault me once again when I began alluding to the domestic violence with the evaluator during a "mediation" meeting. At that point, the evaluator ended the meeting. However, since the evaluator was not educated in domestic violence issues, she did not realize that my husband's reaction was threatening.

So, as "my story" illustrates, marriage counseling or court-ordered co-habitation with an abusive spouse does not work. It only subjects the non-abusive spouse and children to more abuse, which can and does escalate to lethal levels. I was fortunate in that I left when I did because there is no doubt in my mind that my husband would have pulled the trigger and I would be dead if I had not.

INDIANA

"I was impregnated at the age of 17 by my boyfriend who had sabotaged the condoms we used. (He later admitted that he had put a needle through each package so that it looked like a fresh condom but it was no longer effective) During our marriage, he insisted that his money was his, my money was his to spend, and public assistance was only for other people. I was able to sign up for the WIC program behind his back, although it caused a huge fight between us. My children had to wear old hand-me-down clothing to school and were called names for being poor. Today, both sons, now adults, still suffer self-esteem issues from growing up poor with a drug-addicted father and a mother who suffered from emotional and verbal abuse, with some episodes of violence. Yes, I was married, but it only gave my husband a license to "own" me. Only after I was able to divorce him, was I able to provide adequately for my sons. Counseling was a joke. My husband said that if the marriage was to survive it was up to me, because he had no desire to change things, give up drugs, or become a better parent or spouse. Marriage was ideal for him, hell for me.

Please, marriage is not the solution [for a] problem is complex. Increased access to birth control and information, education and opportunity is the solution."

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"I left a 16 year abusive marriage in August of 2001. I left through the Outreach Program of the YWCA. I was 37 years old with four children (ages 2-14) and homeless. The women's shelter has a limit of 30 days and two one-week extensions. I had no place to go (we had just moved here 9 months ago, I had no friends or relatives here), I ended up having to move back in with him until a 2-bedroom apartment became available at the Wayne Township Outreach Program. This is where I learned what roaches looked like and how it is to have mice. After I was on my own, my normally well-mannered teenagers were acting almost like my ex and I was told this was normal. I had always been the best mom that I could be and forgot to realize what my children had seen growing up. Since we always had good communication between each other, we worked things out. I decided to get my GED and go back to school. Since I didn't have any money and my name had not come up for child care assistance, I took night classes in my first semester and my older children helped out with the two little ones. (I started college in spring of 2002). In June 2002 I finally got a bigger apartment through Public Housing. It was not easy and it took a lot of determination. My ex tried to get joint custody of the two youngest ones so he would have some kind of control. He finally gave in, in giving me

full custody of all four children after he found out that the two oldest ones were going to testify against him in court. I will be graduating with honors in May of this year. I have one class left for my Associates degree and I'm also taking three classes towards my bachelors. I'm studying human services and my current GPA is 3.902. I'm proud of myself, I have dreams and goals that I thought I could never have again. I smile, laugh and I am finally able to look in the mirror again.

My oldest (who is my only son) just graduated a couple of weeks ago and he also started college this spring. I talk to my two oldest children a lot and it is painful to realize that they don't have a nice childhood to look back on. (I wanted to leave years ago but he always blackmailed me and I was brainwashed and scared). I could have given my children a childhood to look happily back on if there would be more help for women and children that want to leave their abusive marriage. The children are our future. Why would you promote marriages that will end up in abuse and rob children out of a nice childhood? If you want to do something, do more for women and children that want to leave. I made it because I'm very strong and determined. There are a lot of women that would leave if they would get a place to live and some help till they are back on their feet. When you are in an abusive marriage for years you can't think clearly anymore...your only thought is not to make him upset...(I had planned everything out for weeks with my advocate before I left and I was scared to death)...I have my life and my freedom back, I don't have to be scared anymore when I open my door, my children don't have to be scared to laugh too loud and to say what they want to say...I wish more women could leave and have their life back, have dreams and goals...We don't need marriages that end up in violence, we need education, help for victims that want to leave, give those children a childhood that they can look happily back on one day...

I hope my letter will help,

Finally free and happy, Denise

If you need more information, you can e-mail me at monique64us@yahoo.com "

✧

I was on public assistance after a divorce with [my] 2 children when I met my husband. I was raised [to believe] that welfare of any kind was "bad," and decided that marrying this man was my way to provide a good home for my children. He claimed Christian values and I was sure my life would now be complete.

The next 6 years of my life were hell. He was emotionally and verbally abusive to my children and me. When I became pregnant, twice while trying to save my marriage, the violence escalated into graphic descriptions of how he would kill me and hide my body if I left. We tried marital counseling, several times, were I was counseled to stay as long as he didn't "hit" me. Forget [about] the toll the emotional abuse took on my soul! I was told [that] a woman with 4 children would never make it in the world alone. My belief that being on welfare was for bad people kept me stuck there.

After those 6 horrible years, I found out my husband was molesting my daughter and son, age 4 and 18 months. When I left, he found me. He held me hostage at gunpoint and raped me. Only because I learned to play the game of "survival" over the years, was I able to survive this ordeal. He was finally convicted of criminal confinement and is now in prison, but my children will forever be scarred because the system doesn't help abused families. It's not about the money. Every case has a face!!

IOWA

Growing up, I knew that the relationship between my mother and father wasn't good. He was physically and emotionally abusive to her, and I remember hearing their yelling and him hitting her at night. I remember one morning, I woke up and found her in the bathtub, bruised, and covered in vomit--he had beaten her unconscious and she threw up all over herself. I was 5 years old. He sexually abused my sister and I, and even 20 years later we are both still dealing with the consequences of HIS actions. Mom tried to get help from family on both sides, but

they all told her that she needed to keep her mouth shut, [and] be a "better wife." When I was 6 years old they finally got divorced, and the three of us were on our own. Dad was only ordered to pay \$150 per month in child support, which was not nearly enough to cover our needs. My mom was humiliated the day she had to go in and apply for welfare, and cried the first time she used food stamps in the grocery store. That government assistance helped provide childcare and meet our basic needs so that mom could go to work. Welfare gave us enough of a cushion that she could take that leap to self-sufficiency. Over the next year, Mom worked three jobs (simultaneously) and was able to get off of welfare. She was lucky that she already had a college education---jobs would have been a lot scarcer without that.

Women and children cannot be expected to stay in situations where they are hurt and exploited. Promoting more marriage is NOT the answer! In doing this, you are telling women that their government (which is supposed to protect them) would rather see them beaten and their children raped than help them achieve a better life. Please continue to help these women and children, as government assistance helped my family all those years ago.

KANSAS

In my first marriage I had no access to money to leave. My husband controlled the finances. He counted my change from the grocery store. I got three different jobs in two years. He called one and told them I quit. He beat me up so bad that I was fired from the second one for missing work. I finally got out with the third one.

My second marriage was abusive as well. I believed in working for a good relationship. My husband and I attended church regularly. When he started beating me I thought the minister could help. The minister told me he was a good guy and I should give him some time to change. I did, but the abuse continued. I tried to leave him several times. Once I got away for four months. I was living on my own and started attending a different church. My husband started attending the new church as well, even though I had a restraining order against him. The minister there was impressed with my husband's work ethic and contribution to the church. He encouraged me to give him another chance. He said he would provide counseling. In the counseling the minister told my husband he was wrong, that his actions were a sin. But he counseled us together and never spoke to me separately. He never asked me if things were still going well. They weren't. He was becoming more and more unpredictable. I wanted to move away, to leave him, but I had no money. I worked a good job and made over \$30,000 a year, but my husband refused to pay any of our bills and continued to run them up. I was only able to escape when a friend offered me a place to stay in another town and enough money to move. I also was able to get a new job in the new town. Without those things I would have been forced to continue being a good wife, being raped, and being beaten."

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I was married to a verbally abusive man [who] also an alcoholic, which explains a lot of what happened, and is still happening. Verbal abuse does not show any physical bruises, but there are definitely bruises of another sort. I divorced this man over 6 years ago, but our 4 children are still suffering. After I left him with our 4 children (whom he had heavily influenced against me), I was in a low paying job, renting a 2 bedroom house, not receiving any child support, and on welfare. At that time, welfare was the only way I could support my 4 children. My ex-husband called me awful names in front of our children and in the front yard of my home when he would come pick them up for his visitation. This continued until I obtained a better paying job and could move away from him. I was able to get off welfare at that point. But the verbal abuse continued, by phone and email. After he called me a b**** on the phone to our daughter, I charged him with harassment. He pled guilty and was ordered to go through anger management, but it was nothing more than a slap on the wrist since it was not enforced. He filed for a change of custody after our children had been with me for almost 5 years. He lied to the court about his work history, and was successful in coercing our children into hating me. Now, he has another failed marriage, been through alcohol treatment for only 5 days, still drinking, and my children have finally seen him for what he really is. I have been remarried for 5 years and am in a successful job.

I did not want to be on welfare because I knew that was not what would sustain my children or me. I had an education before all this began so I just needed to put it to use after I could get out of the chains of the verbally abusive relationship. I remarried because I found someone who was loving, patient, and not abusive. He has helped me to overcome some of the abuse. But he has been very patient in this process, since I still have a lot of the abuse to work through. As I said before, verbal abuse does not show physical signs, but there are definitely scars that remain far longer. Many women have come from abusive relationships but did not have the education I did, these women need opportunities to gain [an] education [in order] to allow them to better themselves and become self supportive for their children as well. There must be a way for women to gain success from within themselves. Forcing them to marry when they are not ready or to try to remedy another situation is not the answer. My success came from me, not from the government or any government program. Do I still have the verbal abuse to contend with from my ex? YES. This will always be there until HE learns how to help himself. No government program will stop him from being abusive. What have my children gained from this? From their dad, hate. From their mom (me), unconditional love and support. They now realize I have been there all along for them. But they still have scars, just like me.

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I married after graduating from business school with an Executive Secretarial diploma. My former husband moved us from state to state during the marriage, as the bills and law enforcement caught up to him. Our families bought groceries for us because we had a small child. The final chapter was when he moved to Arizona where he hid his girlfriend and her children, and after three months, sent plane tickets for our children and me to join him in Phoenix. During the short time we were there, he made regular trips to various agencies with false stories where he got food stamps and other state assistance. He never allowed me to go because he knew I would tell the secret of this abusive marriage. When I made the decision to leave, because our children were starving (I never saw any of the food stamps because he used them for his girlfriend's family), he strangled me, locked me in a room, and violently raped me for a 24-hour period. After escaping with the help of a Christian friend, and moving back to the state where my parents lived, I was forced to receive food stamps and daycare assistance so that I could work my way up the workforce ladder to fulltime employment. Had I stayed in this marriage, I would have been killed. This man never paid child support. It has been over 25 years and we are still trying to locate him through the red tape of the Child Support Enforcement program. I raised my children on my full-time employment in a law office where I have worked for 24 years. My son is a professional firefighter/paramedic. I have a daughter who works three jobs along with her husband's full-time employment; and another daughter who has recently earned her Associates of Arts Degree in a Christian college. Our story would not have the same positive ending had I been forced by the system to stay in this marriage. Programs to encourage me to keep building our future are what saved four lives.

KENTUCKY

My ex-husband and I had dated for over a year. He was possessive and quick to anger but he was never violent. I didn't know the red flags of domestic violence. When he proposed we decided to have pre-marital counseling to help work on the problems. We were in counseling with a minister at a counseling center and he diagnosed him with manic depression and told me that medication would help and that a lot of people had it and lived fairly normal lives. Looking back now I can see a lot of red flags that he missed. He even married us. One week and one day from the day we got married came the first of many beatings. The counselor sent him to a doctor and he changed his medicine. This started a chain of doctor and hospital stays. After eight months of beatings, doctors and hospitals I had enough. I filed for divorce but later found out I was pregnant. Just to clarify, I was on two birth control methods and only having sex when forced. The law in KY would not let me divorce him while I was pregnant. So I began working with a domestic violence advocate on how to get away safely. He stalked me, beat me, harassed me, [and] threatened me, and the most time he ever got was three days in jail. He tried to kill me in 1997 after I proceeded with the divorce. [Our divorce] was final Nov. 27,1997. Three days later he came to my home at 3:00am

and turned off my electric at the main breaker outside and began a four-hour game of harassing and threatening me, and running from the police. He was finally caught and taken to jail. We went to trial may of 1998 and he was convicted of felony stalking and sentenced to 3 years in jail. He even told the judge that I still belonged to him because he didn't sign the divorce papers. He said he wasn't finished with me. He got released March 1999. I had to leave my home, family and friends and relocate. It doesn't seem fair that I am still a victim. He gets to go on with his life as before with his friends and family but I can't. My children and I have had to lower our standard of living. I can't pay my bills, I can't afford to get my children the things they need but I make too much to receive assistance. It is not fair. Something needs to be done to change the law. He should be the one in exile, living in a sub-standard environment, not us. This is a condensed version of the hell I went through. The laws are a joke, the assistance offered is not adequate and he has a life I don't. I will never date again. I have absolutely no desire for any kind of relationship, how dare someone suggest marriage!!!! He may as well have succeeded in killing me in 1997. Cindy

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I am a victim advocate for victims of domestic violence. I feel that one reason in Kentucky why women get caught in the cycle of violence is they feel trapped in the relationship with the abuser. If women are married to those individuals, they [become] more trapped. Getting married is not the answer to ending domestic violence--the answer is more services, more education, and better understanding and empathy of society. Women need to feel like they do not need a man to survive in the 21st century!!

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In December of 1990 my fairy nightmare began. I married my sweetheart just months after meeting him. We were on top of the world. The day of the wedding, he turned violent. I remained for 2 and 1/2 years before deciding that I was not going to be able to repair him & live a normal life. Marriage allowed my husband the "authority" to do with me however they chose. Encouraging women to marry is reckless and irresponsible. I have just recently, 10 years after my divorce, found that I have enough confidence and self-sufficiency to marry. Please stop this ludicrous encouragement of [trying to marry] off the welfare lists.
Jennifer

LOUISIANA

"I was married to a man for 8 months, [and] had known him less than a year when we got married. I thought he was my soul mate. I discovered after a few months that he was an alcoholic, and when cocaine was around he 'had' to have some. One night after drinking about half a fifth of whiskey and snorting some coke, he physically threw me out of the house. I didn't go back then, we divorced, but he continued to stalk me and threaten my family and me. After he 'dried out' for several months, our relationship started again. He promised to never drink again. Long story short, he starting drinking again and violence became a part of my life. Not only was there the emotional, mental, and financial abuse, there was more physical abuse. I have stared down the barrel of a .357, being promised that he would take my life in a second. I have had that same .357 fired into the concrete floor of our house and had bullet fragments & concrete miss my left eye by less than an inch. I have been beaten, had teeth knocked loose, [and] been told that he would kill me and everyone in my family if that's what it took. The last night I spent in our house, he choked me, screamed in my ear that women didn't deserve respect that they were worthless, except for one thing - sex, had my head slammed into the concrete floor, had my clothes torn off my body, [and] had bruises and scratches on various parts of my body. He then told me to get the ** out of his house and life. I immediately threw on clothes and grabbed my purse - the whole time praying I would get out of the driveway before he could open the safe containing an SK47 and an AK47 along with lots of ammo. By the grace of God I escaped and survived. I am a very low statistic. We had counseling and he would tell the counselor exactly what they wanted to hear, just as he would tell me that he would quit drinking, get a job and start treating me the way I deserved to be treated - like a human. But he never did. Please, please do not tell these women that marriage is the solution for them and their children.

Marriage is NOT a solution - it can become the end to the lives of their children and them or it can make those children orphans.
Gail Kilman"

MAINE

"Although I agree that a healthy marriage is a better environment to raise children in than as a struggling single mother living below the poverty level, I don't agree that spending 1.5 billion to campaign this is the answer.

I am a third generation woman of single mothers raising children while living in poverty. I am also a third generation woman who has escaped living the cycle of domestic violence and child abuse. I have worked extremely hard, since I discovered I was pregnant 8 years ago, to escape these many dysfunctional cycles that has plagued my family for generations. I have been able to do this fairly successfully with government-funded programs that help young single mothers who are living in poverty. I have been involved in many programs since the conception of my son 8 years ago.

First starting at a free prenatal class for young, single mothers at the local YWCA. After the birth of my son I became involved in the Teen Center Program, for young, single mothers through the same YWCA. I also took parenting classes, self esteem workshops, a fitness & nutrition class, and I enrolled in the counseling services. Much of this [was] made possible through Medicaid. While involved in this program, I gained the support, encouragement, and self-worth I needed to make a very important decision: to leave my son's abusive father. Before beginning this program I was being medicated with Prozac, which was freely given to me through my physician without any counseling for my suicidal thoughts & anxiety. Shortly after leaving my son's father, I was able to stop taking the Prozac, [and] by this time I was being counseled through the YWCA. I had been depressed and suicidal because of the awful relationship I was involved in. I didn't have a strong, healthy, [and] supportive family [that] I could turn to because they were struggling with their own dysfunctions.

While working with the Teen Center Program I got childcare assistance through Child Care Connections and was able to get myself a job, which was also one of the reasons I stayed so long in my unhealthy relationship, I didn't know if I would be able to support myself. Over the next two years I went to work at a remedial job and went to college. I was able to do this because of a strong financial aid package, and was able to keep my child in daycare because of the childcare subsidy I was receiving. By this time I had also been involved in programs such as WIC and food stamps. With my new college degree I was able to get a very nice job with benefits. The years have passed now, my job has become more and more lucrative and for the first time since MY birth I am not involved in ANY welfare program and I am not receiving ANY funding or assistance from any program. I am 27 years old. But I can be absolutely sure that I would not be the person I am today if it was not for the help of these programs. The reason I write all this is because women who grow up like me need support, encouragement, and self-confidence to create better lives for themselves and for their children. I don't believe the way to achieve those things is through marriage, especially when you are young and leaving a cycle of dysfunction, which is the only life you have ever known. As new adults, out on our own for the first time, we tend to make poor decisions based on the knowledge and experience we have lived with all our lives. We need opportunities to heal & grow as people. I suggest we use that money to fund programs that will help these young women find direction with their lives, help them find the support, encouragement and ultimately self-worth they will need to build successful lives. We are not all fortunate to be born in to homes where love and happiness is plentiful. Some of us, by no choice of our own, are born into homes of great pain, pain of all kinds. We live in fear from day to day, and we make drastic decisions that will do anything to help get us out of these environments. If we want to solve this problem, we need to go to the root. We need to continuously work on ways to help break these cycles of dysfunction. We need to offer support to those people who are fighting hard everyday to find a new way to live their lives."

Three weeks after I was "married" and five months pregnant, my "husband" severely battered me, throwing me against a wall, kicking my legs, and hitting my back with his closed fist 14 times! Then he got into a karate kicking position [and tried] to kill our unborn son, his FIRST and ONLY child and me! I threw him off balance and fled out into the night. For the next 3 hours into a neighborhood in Redondo Beach, California, that I did NOT know. He beat me 5 more times before he finally left, including strangling me because I was wrapping our son's first Christmas presents.

After totally depleting my entire inheritance, and abducting our son in Maine and taking him back to California, I had to go on complete welfare, effective 2001. It is only [because of] SSI, Section-8, and Food Stamps that I am beginning to deal with all the PTSD and severe depression his unrelenting abuse caused. Finally, I am just beginning to rediscover the woman and person I was before I met him in 1988 in Maine, and was severely abused by him in California, physically, emotionally, and psychologically; and IN THE COURTS!

However, in CONTEMPT of OUTSTANDING, current CA Superior Visitation Court Orders, I have NOT seen my son now for 11 years, AND I have not had any phone or mail contact with my son now for 3 years.... per the CA Superior Court Visitation Court Order of 1994!

No, marriage is NOT for poor women who are victims of violent batterers!

MARYLAND

"I am a victim of years of emotional and mental abuse to which I have found no help in the current legal system. My children suffer from clinical depression as a result of mental abuse, again no legal help [is] available. It took me six years to win sole legal custody in attempt to protect my kids from the ongoing abuse. Social services has also failed in my case. Promoting marriage to low-income mothers is only asking for more abuse to occur. These women are already preyed upon. My county does not even have a domestic violence unit in their police department. There are a lot of other things that can be done to help us, instead of putting us in bad situations all over again. You couldn't help me in the past; why not try helping me with my future?"

MASSACHUSETTS

I have not personally been a victim of domestic violence, but I work at a social service agency that offers, among other things, a domestic violence program and mental health counseling. A cardinal rule that we abide by here is to not offer marriage or couples therapy to couples with a history of domestic violence. There is never any reason for a woman to remain in an abusive relationship. The best thing that a woman in poverty or an abusive situation can do is to get out of it by becoming self-sufficient. With the help of the government and agencies like mine, we can empower abused women to make a life for themselves without the "help" of an abusive partner. The proposed budget for this plan would be much better spent on education, child-care and career counseling.

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I was one of the lucky ones - divorced my abuser before he seriously hurt the children or me. Because I spent 25 years raising his children, and washing his underwear and cooking his food so he could advance in his career, he now is a professional who earns \$200,000 year and I earn less than \$15,000, working two jobs. [I am] not receiving welfare now but [I] did in the past. Please don't take away this safety net for women - others may not be so lucky. Marriage is not an answer - and often is a trap!

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I'm a therapist who currently works in a battered women's shelter; prior to this I did family stabilization (short-term, intensive home-based work w/at-risk youth and their families). While the vast majority of my clients have been poor, single-parent families, the idea that marriage will come to their rescue and to imply in any way that the lack of a legal commitment is the root of the problem is pathetically naive and absurd. These women do not need a legal commitment to a man who is also poor, who is often abusive, and often abusing substances. First of all, good luck even finding the father(s) of the women's children. These are women whose lives are often at risk because these men have been at worst dangerous and violent, at best irresponsible and non-committal. How about starting with teaching boys to be responsible, caring, sensitive, committed partners and teaching girls to be empowered, in control of their own lives, teaching them they have choices? How about starting with quality, honest, sex education that includes information about birth control and HIV protection? How about expanding outreach and mental health services in schools and communities so that the trauma epidemic can be addressed and young people can heal and get in the driver's seat in their lives? What century does Bush think he's living in?

✧

"Dear Congressperson,

Let me tell you about my experience with marriage. First you should know that the wonderful man I married was very abusive. That abuse took the forms of physical, mental, & economical. He made good money and we should have been living a fairly comfortable life. Within this marriage 2 children were born of which he was the father of both. Instead of the 4 of us living a comfortable life we lived in poverty with more furniture coming off the dump than trash was going in. He handled the money and it went to whatever he saw fit which was usually in the form of what entertainment he chose for himself. He never paid the bills & most of the phone calls coming into the house were from bill collectors. It got so [bad,] I didn't want to answer the phone anymore. By the time I decided I had enough 14 years later, after a night in which I received a black eye, bloody nose, and two of his 5 fingerprints, one on each arm, I got a restraining order. He then decided to lose his job, which was my fault of course. He stopped paying child support and I couldn't earn enough to pay the bills. I received an eviction notice and ended up on welfare. This gave me a chance to get my life back together and was off welfare within a year. I spent a lot of that time in court trying to get some kind of child support and finally gave up 2 years later. Both the court and the legal system encouraged this poor man who was just having a bad time, and I was the vindictive ex-wife [who was] just being a bitch. Through this whole time I had to give up my rights for my children not to be exposed to abuse and to be constantly disappointed that their father never showed up to see them. I was left to console my children and let them know that it wasn't their fault [and that] their father chose not to see them. He was encouraged by the legal system to abuse his family because there would be no consequences for him. He had more rights than the people that he was abusing.

It is very dangerous to be encouraging women to marry abusive men. It is never a good idea for anyone in an abusive relationship to be going to counseling with that person. Maybe Mr. Bush should be looking at why women are on welfare and try to do more to fix that problem than to be encouraging them to be in unsafe and unhealthy relationships. Maybe he thinks that marriage is a cure all for the world's problems but people can die from this. I have been working for 15 years since that relationship and it was the best decision I ever made when I got my divorce. I have never received any money for child support and our children were 7 and 14 years old when we separated. I wonder if Mr. Bush would be willing to help me get some of the money still owed to me. I wonder if deadbeat dads were actually made to pay child support if that wouldn't be a better way for the government to save money. Why is it that you are willing to blame victims for the actions of perpetrators? It was not my fault you allowed my ex-husband not to pay his obligation to help support our children. It might be no big deal to you that my children and I were going to bed hungry, and as you can see we did not die, but it would have been so much easier if he was made to pay his fair share. I encourage you to vote against the proposal to put money into encouraging women to marry anyone that might put them in harm. And that is truly what you are encouraging them to do. "

I was a 19-year-old virgin when I met and started dating my husband to be. He was erratic then, totaling my car with a shovel, breaking my things, and attempted to sideswipe other cars while I was in the passenger seat. I just thought he was passionate. I became pregnant during the relationship and knew that a nice girl does not have sex before marriage, and gets married when pregnant. So that's what we did. I lost the baby before the wedding, but my mother had made my wedding dress by hand and people were invited so we proceeded. By then my husband-to-be's substance abuse reared its ugly head. I thought if I were just a good wife it would all go away.

I come from a "good" Christian upper income family, and as far I knew, no one in my family had things thrown at them daily, had their things destroyed by their husband, or was abused. So I never told anyone. I believed all the horrible things he said about me (i.e. I didn't deserve friends or nice clothes). No one, but he, wanted to be with me so I [felt that I] shouldn't have friends or go out- except to work. I went on to get my Master's Degree in Social Work, of all things. We tried marriage counseling but luckily for us, the minute the counselors got wind of the abuse they separated us into individual counseling [sessions]. Again, I had a strong Christian up bringing in a strong intact family [and] I had never witnessed violence or even anger in my family of origin. I was ashamed of my situation and always thought it would get better. I committed to this man and had to stand by him, through good times or bad, and maybe if I did, he would start treating me better. He got sober soon after our wedding, and at times treated me better, but while the sobriety lasted, the violence returned with a vengeance.

Nothing I did seemed to help so we had children. I thought maybe with kids around he wouldn't be so violent and disrespectful [toward] me. But that didn't stop him. Our second child was born with multiple birth defects that could have been life threatening. It was then that he had his psychotic breakdown. He went crazy for real. He started having affairs, smoking pot, and eventually taking Valium constantly. When the baby was 3 months old I returned to work, he didn't work enough to afford food or housing, I thought it was the right thing to do for the family. He would call me at work, threatening the baby, calling her horrible names, [and] and screaming at her. I could hear him screaming at this horribly sick baby and her weak screams in return, and [I] felt couldn't do anything about it. Whenever I confronted him, he either promised to be better or kill himself. I was not going to have his death on my hands, and could not get past the "in sickness and in health." He was sick that was for sure. I always had excuses why I didn't kick him out. I was afraid of him, but I was also dependant on him. We couldn't afford housing and food or anything else without his meager income. What would I do alone with two babies and what if he killed himself? It would be all my fault, and the family would be destroyed. So I did nothing, and my daughter, who did get better with growth and heart surgery, grew into a cowering, fear filled little girl. She referred to herself as the "little fucking bitch" because that is what daddy called her. Still I did nothing. She had her final open-heart surgery in the midst of her father's psychosis and poly drug abuse. It was awful. He was completely incapacitated, but keep driving our 6 year old all over the state, or leaving him alone in the house. In sickness and in health I kept telling myself. When he shook the baby, when he left them alone, when he did drugs in front of them I thought "in sickness and in health" and "I can't raise these kids without him, I'll have to go on welfare." I was hospitalized for a severe throat infection related to the self-neglect typical of women in abusive relationships. When I got out of the hospital I was informed by the local police that he had begun drinking. He had been dry 20 years and now he was drinking. He was leaving the kids 6 and 8 years old in the car while he went into the bars. My son had learned how to open a beer [by] using a seat belt. He was proud of being Dad's drinking buddy. He was proud that when Dad's hands were too shaky to clean the handguns himself, he asked our 8-year-old son to help. He was proud that he had learned how to load a handgun. "Isn't that great mom? I can load a gun and open a beer, I'm almost a man."

That is when I kicked him out. That was the end. He threatened suicide, even tried it. He continued to drink for months afterwards. The police who had warned me of his drinking and their concern for my safety, based on threats they received, renewed his pistol permit. He has never had a job, hobby, or other need to have a pistol. He was a crazy, abusive, drunk whom the police were concerned about it, yet renewed his pistol permit. While our marriage counseling experience was appropriate, our dealings with the police were not. With him gone, I was now eligible for welfare, [however,] I didn't apply, and instead muddled along for months working four jobs until I was able to find a better primary job, cut down to only 3 jobs, and get above the poverty line. Marriage to an abusive man took 20 years of my life. While it gave me two beautiful children, they will probably be in therapy for years to come. I struggled

with poverty and abuse throughout my marriage. It was only through divorce and single parenting that I became a strong productive taxpayer and a good American Citizen. Marriage is not the answer; in fact in many cases like mine, it is the problem.

Sincerely, a gainfully employed, tax paying, not abused single mother of two healthy, safe, and better adjusted children.

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I am a social worker in Massachusetts and have been working primarily with low-income Latino women for fourteen years. I know from listening to [the life stories of] many women that domestic violence is rampant in our society. Keeping women in an abusive relationship victimizes children, and is not the answer to poverty in our society. Taking financial resources away from mothers only further ensures that the next generation will continue to live in poverty. Supporting marriages will not solve the problem of poverty. This is my firm belief after spending my entire working career listening to the life stories of women in color living in poverty.

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"In 1980 I divorced my first husband because he was a violent alcoholic. Back then, there was a program called the W.I.N. Program, I believe in stood for Women In Need. This Program was handled through the local welfare office in Southbridge, Massachusetts. The program allowed me to attend a secretarial program at the MacKinnon Training Center; it reimbursed me for my mileage, provided day care for my 3 yr old son. It also helped restore my self-esteem and self-worth. Before completion of the course, I finished all the necessary curriculum and was hired on a temporary basis at a hospital as a ward clerk to fill in for someone out on maternity leave. I took the position to obtain the experience and to have something on my resume. However at the end of the eight weeks she decided not to return and the job was offered to me. I stayed at the job for five years, during which time I passed the National Unit Secretary Exam. I then went to work for my local school department in the Business Office, starting out as a clerk, I worked there for 16 years and left as the Secretary to the Asst. to the Superintendent, transferring to the Police Department as Records Clerk. By the way, I have been remarried for the past 17 years. I do know that should anything happen to my husband, I can and will be able to take care of my daughter and myself.

So instead of looking to marry off people on welfare, you should be looking to make them productive human beings with a sense of pride and purpose. Those people will then pass on to their children the same sense of pride and purpose making this country a more productive place. I strongly agree that there needs to be welfare reform. However, I take GREAT OFFENSE to the Cupid Project as another male way of insulting and degrading the women of America. Our constitution states, "All men are created equal..." Let us all live by that and provide single/divorced parents male or female with the assistance and education to support their families—instead of just marrying them off and making them a MAN'S responsibility."

MICHIGAN

"I was 20 years old when I married my first husband. Life was miserable for me with him. He would yell and punch holes in the walls and verbally abuse me. In 1978, after 3 years of marriage, I delivered our second child. Ten days after he was born I was raped by him. He dragged me into the bedroom and pulled off my underwear and did his thing. I had a low-grade kidney infection for over a year from [due to] it. He then began to hit and shove me around. Once he threw a butcher knife across the room and almost hit both our children. I found a place to live with my sister and when I went to get the children's things, he had a knife and said I could not take my daughter. It was devastating mentally, for I was a fit mother. But he had money, so he could pay off my lawyer, which he did, to keep me from getting her. Verbally, he would tell her that I did not love her nor wanted her and that I abandoned her. It tears my heart out to relive this. We separated but he didn't want any more children so he set up an appointment for

a tubal ligation and brought me there. The surgery did not go well and I almost died, and all the bleeding left adhesions that eventually led to a hysterectomy at the age of 25. He wanted to get back together for the sake of the children so I went back. He began abusing our son, and when I found out, I left again, for good this time. However, I was still unable to get my daughter. Since I had a lot of physical problems, I was unable to work and was confined [to my] bed until I got my hysterectomy. I had to rely on welfare to pay my bills and [for] medical assistance. If it weren't for the [government's] help, we would not [have] had anything to live on, for my family did not have the resources to help me.

To make women on welfare marry, so [that] the welfare burden is lessened, may make more [of] a prison sentence for women who are abused by their husbands. If the money isn't there to help them then they are stuck in an abusive relationship that could lead to [the] death of the wife or child. I know welfare assistance is a burden on society, but the burden of having to live in a loveless [and abusive] marriage would be worse. I hope this bill does not pass. The welfare of children would definitely be jeopardize and that of the woman [as well]. Children of child abuse, when they see their mom [being] beaten, are something that does not leave them healthy but instead in need of counseling. Yes, poverty is no good, but I would rather live in poverty than have to live with a man who does not have respect for me and treats my children and me as property instead of human beings.

I hope this helps you understand just how hard it is to live in a relationship that is abusive and that no woman should be subjected to that just to save society's money.

Thank you for your time. "

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"Dad beat and abused all of us, but mom the most. I managed to get a degree from a top ten university. [I] had a very disabling accident working as a teacher. [I] was on welfare [when] along came a sweet talker promising marriage. [I] thought it was a shot to get off the dole. After we married, five years later he horribly hurt his 3-day-old son and his stepdaughter. It was only [federal] money that gave my family and me the opportunity to move and start over.

If you want to stop abuse give women and children a way to really build a future. Give them what they need when they need it. When mom gets back on her feet let her pay back the state slowly."

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"I married at the age of 19. Soon after my marriage my husband became physically abusive. I went through 20 years of being physically beaten and emotionally and mentally tortured. As a Christian, I felt it was my duty to stay in the marriage. My two sons grew up afraid to be in their own home, afraid of what their father might do next, afraid of what may happen to their mother. During the marriage I lost my self worth. I felt like I could not care for my children or myself. I began to feel completely dependent on my husband. I was hospitalized several times during those years for depression and anxiety. This made me feel even more dependent on him. He did not let me work and develop any employment skills (another way to keep me dependent). Through the counseling of my pastor, the urging of law enforcement I finally worked to leave the relationship. Having not worked for 20 years, I was faced with [question:] '...how do I support myself let alone two teen boys.' I called Michigan's Family Independence Agency to make an appointment for assistance, [although I] canceled [it]. I did this 3 times. Finally things were so bad I had no other option but to go in, although I felt degraded, and ask for a hand out. It was one of the most difficult days of my life, when I first walked in those doors. The caseworker looked at me and said this is hard for you isn't it. He saw that I had called before and canceled. I received financial assistance for a short time. I was given the opportunity to explore what type of employment I was best suited for. In just a few months I had part time employment, which later led to full time employment. I am now the director of the [same] DV agency that I came into for safety at the time my marriage ended. If it would not have been for the fact that financial assistance was available to me I am not sure if I would or could have been able to leave. I may very possibly be dead today. I work with hundreds of battered women who share my history. The importance of having assistance available to them is vital, without financial assistance more women would die before they could be safe. Women and children should not have to face injury and/or their own [death] because of a few dollars. We need to keep in mind, [that] the most

vulnerable [are] the children. Every child has a right to grow up in a home free of violence. It is the responsibility of each of us to make sure every child has that opportunity.

Cheryl

MINNESOTA

"I met my abuser when I was almost 18. I lived with him for about one and a half years. During that time we lived with relatives, in a truck, and finally an apartment when I got a job at White Castle. I was pregnant with my oldest daughter at that time. We were married when our oldest daughter was 6 months old. He wasn't physically abusive to me for a long time. He was very controlling and didn't hold down jobs for long. When I was 8 months pregnant with our oldest he grabbed me by the throat and was going to hit me, but his sister stopped him and told him he had better never hit me. When our oldest daughter was two years old I bought a house that needed work. It was around that time he joined an outlaw motorcycle club. I continued to work and care for our child, him and everything else. Oh, prior to him joining the club he went to college and I was supposed to be able to go when he was done, needless to say it didn't happen.

When our daughter was four I became pregnant with our second daughter. By this time I knew not to do anything he didn't like. I watched what he did to people on the street and knew what he was capable of. When our youngest girl was two years old I took over the mortgage on one of his sister's house's that was in foreclosure. We then took custody of his stepson, son, and daughter from his first marriages. I was then working in a massage parlor in order to support us. He did have a job for a couple years. When our children started to get older and I could finally have some freedom to go to lunch or shopping with friends he became more controlling and verbally abusive. One night I caught him with his girlfriend and told him he needed to get out. He left that night and came back about an hour later and when he punched me I had to fight to keep from blacking out. For the next eight years he made my life a living nightmare. He would come into the house in the middle of the night, and, while I was sleeping, would drag me out of bed by my hair punching me and kicking me and accusing me of being with different guys.

I remember one time, it was early morning, and there were some of my children's friends at the house and one of my girlfriends. I was sleeping on the front room floor and my friend on the couch. I woke up to him kicking me in the head saying that I better not take the phone off the hook when he was trying to call his children. I had taken the phone off the hook because he had been calling every five minutes to see if I was home. Once early in the morning he chased me down the street and through peoples yards on his motorcycle. I was in my nightgown. No one called the police because they were just as afraid of him as I was. He busted my ribs twice. I never called the police because he didn't care if he went to jail and I didn't know who he would send after me. I stayed in the house and put up with the abuse on a regular basis because I didn't know what else to do. I couldn't go to a shelter because I knew he would find me. The few times I did leave he found me the next day. The last time he beat me I had pushed him away. He beat me really bad. When I looked around all I could see was my blood and when I looked in the mirror it didn't look like me. I decided then I needed to leave. That was in April of 1986. I left in August of that year. I had to leave without my daughter. The rest of the children were already gone. I had been divorced from him for three years before I left. A friend helped me get out. I went to Arizona for eight months and then came back to Minnesota. I went to my brothers but knew he was looking for me still, so I went to a shelter in St. Cloud, Minnesota. I had to go on welfare because I had a newborn baby and needed a place to live. It took three months to get it because the house in St. Paul was granted to me in the divorce and they said I could go back there. I filed for 'good cause' with doctor records and was denied because it had been too long since the abuse. I was one of the lucky ones because I always have worked and knew I could make it no matter where I was.

My abuser is now dead and I still have nightmares. It's been eighteen years since I left. What women need to get out of abusive relationships is for our society and government to take responsibility for this. Women shouldn't have to leave their homes, children shouldn't have to give up their friends and schools, and no one should have to live in fear in their own homes because of someone who says he loves them. I now work as a women's advocate for battered

women. I have done this since 1987. It is scary to think that our government really believes marriage is the answer to welfare. Please stop this bill from becoming a law. I can guarantee the numbers of women and children murdered will increase because you will leave them no choice at all.

MISSISSIPPI

"I am now a single mother of two children. Granted I was never married, but it was very close, and I was very lucky to get out of it. My experience began when I only had one child. I tried my best to make ends meet on my own when my son's father ran away from us...but it was difficult. I am well educated, but finding jobs that paid well enough to pay the bills, afford daycare, and provide the basic necessities was hard. I got re-involved with an ex-boyfriend from high school, who was at this time my closest friend. I thought I knew everything about him. Things were going quite well until we agreed to get married. Then things really changed.

I was no longer allowed to dress as I chose...I became a Barbie doll for him. I was not permitted to have any friends, though he brought many over. I was forbidden from speaking my opinion because it was not my place. He made me quit my job and stay at home with my son, which wasn't so bad. But his temper and drinking problems escalated until I was afraid to move without permission. I was trapped with a son I couldn't provide for without this man's help. There were many battle wounds throughout my home. Holes in the walls to mark just how bad it could be...holes through the doors to remind me that even locking my son and I up away from him, was not a safe alternative. Everything I owned and had worked so hard for was broken in front of me. Dishes were shattered on walls behind me as I dodged them time after time. My little boy got cut in the back of his head from one of the plates that missed me and hit the wall, only to ricochet to him where he hid. He has scars on his knee where he was cut by other broken dishes when he crawled away. His lip had been split by being hit so hard in the face when at 1 year old, he mimicked the words that came out of my fiancé's mouth. But I was still too scared to leave him. I figured I'd never make it on my own. How could I raise a child without someone's help?

One day when I went shopping with a friend who I rarely ever saw...I came home to find the house in complete darkness, a busted pipe in the hallway leaking water all over my carpet, and every phone in my home was clipped neatly near the phone plug. That was when I knew I had no choice but to leave. I called the cops, who weren't too willing to help...but they put patrols out. I lived in fear. My son and I slept on a mattress in the living room so that we would have numerous routes of escape. Our door was barricaded nightly. I found myself completely in debt and looking at being on the street if I couldn't repair the damages my fiancé caused. I found we had been 3 months behind in rent, though he never mentioned it to me.

I finally sought help. [I] applied through the states job program to find work. [I] applied for medical assistance for my son, received food stamps to feed us, got daycare assistance so I could afford to work, without paying it all to the daycare centers, and sought counseling for myself. The state services provided all these venues to help guide me and get me back on my feet. After all, I had a child to raise.

Now I am working at a decent job in a new state. I have two children, who make my life worth living, and make me more determined than ever to protect what is in there best interest. I am receiving WIC and am applying for Medicaid here so that my children can see a doctor when they need since my work doesn't provide insurance. I am a hardworking mother just trying to do her best. I understand I have never been married, but my experience was just the same. I trusted and loved a man who I had known for 10 years...and I never knew how cruel, angry and violent he was until we were almost at the altar.

No, I have no intention of marrying anyone for a long time. Because I have two very important children to look after...and no man will ever hurt my kids again. It was very hard for me to first apply for any public assistance money that the government provides...but I had to. I do everything I can on my own, but I do need help. Losing this kind of assistance, which only helps to put back the pieces broken in someone's life isn't fair. I never asked for a man's

cruelty, but I got it anyways. Marriage isn't the answer...I thought it was, then that one vicious man taught me with violence that marriage wouldn't fix everything. And I'm grateful I got out before it led to my son's or my [own] death. We were lucky...but there are plenty of women who get trapped thinking that marriage is the only way to make it and provide for their families...and some of these women pay with their lives to the husband they trusted. I refuse to be one of those women. I am stronger. That experience was almost 3 years ago. I am almost able to make it on my own now, but I wouldn't be able to say that if the public assistance wasn't there to help out when I needed it. Please take that into consideration before doing something that will lead to the demise of women like me. There are reasons that some women are single mothers by choice - and it's usually fear and love. They fear what they already had to endure...and they love their children too much to do it again. Thank you."

MONTANA

Hi, my name is Maggie Bagon and I fled an abusive marriage. Even though I had a restraining order against him after he fractured my skull, he still continued to stalk me and threaten to kill me on a continuous basis. The police stated that [the] threats were nothing and unless he did something they would not interfere. I moved back to Montana where I had friends who promised to help me. Rural Montana had few jobs so I went on welfare to make sure my kids had a home and medical coverage. If I had been forced to try to maintain my marriage I would not be writing this today as I am sure that I would be dead...and in fact my ex's next girlfriend was murdered by him.

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I am a Crime Victim Advocate who works in the criminal justice system. Just last week a woman came into my office to receive an Order of Protection against her husband. The story she told me is a good example of why this legislation is a bad idea. Because this woman did not have potatoes ready for dinner one night, her husband became angry and violent. He gave her a black eye in front of their children. The next Sunday she went to church (one that professes to be very community-oriented, and tight-knit) and NOT ONE PERSON asked about her eye. Her mother, who does not belong to the same church, called the pastor to ask that he intervene with the husband (who respected the pastor). The next time this woman saw the pastor, he said to her, "You just need to do what he says." Over the next few days, several women from the church visited her and insisted that she return to the husband, despite the violence. When she came to my office, she was distraught about the violence, but even more so about the attitude of her church community. She knows she needs to leave this relationship or she and/or her children will get seriously hurt, but she is also in fear that God will strike her down for breaking up the family. She is also concerned that she will be unable to support her children when she leaves the relationship. She is reluctant to go on welfare, having been told that it is bad to take handouts from anyone outside the church, but she knows that neither she nor her children are safe within their church--and they must eat and have a roof over their heads. She has not been allowed to hold a job while married to this man, and has few job skills.

This is not an unusual story of those we hear in my office--of the 1500 people or so we talk to a year, we frequently hear stories of women who are forced to live in poverty by their abusers (I remember one woman who was not allowed to buy shoes for herself or the children, and so came to my office in flip-flops on a snowy day); who are not allowed to develop their job skills while in the marriage, and so, if they choose to leave the violence, must go on welfare to survive; and who are abandoned by church communities that hold rigid gender expectations--and thus, perhaps inadvertently in some cases, support abusive behavior by the men in the church. Additionally, throughout the country, women are threatened by social services with [the] removal of their children if they "allow" themselves to be abused in front of them. Yet, if they don't allow it, and get divorced, legislation such as this threatens both women and their children with more severe poverty. This is an unacceptable double bind.

We must protect women in this country by not forcing marriage upon anyone. [Marriage] is not the solution to poverty or violence. Job skills, child care, and a focus on the person who perpetuates the violence rather than the victims of violence are the only ways that women living in poverty will be able to leave poverty and begin to support themselves.

NEBRASKA

I was engaged to be married when I was 19 years old. Fresh out of high school, I did what I thought was expected. My then-fiancée suffered from Cystic Fibrosis and had a hard time keeping a job, so I was supporting both of us on a minimum wage job. We lived in a run-down apartment in a very bad neighborhood in Denver, Colorado. There was gang-violence, bugs, and much anger. Kevin resented me and blamed me for all of his problems. We were forced to try and sell our belongings at the flea market so that we could keep up with his medical expenses. One particularly hot day, Kevin went off and told me that I smelled bad from the sweltering heat. We came home and I ran a bath. We got into a huge fight and he continued screaming at me [about] how bad I smelled, [and] how I repulsed him. I climbed into the tub fully clothed and he stayed in the bathroom with me, splashing water at me, and continued to berate me. I believed he loved me and that I was doing the right thing by getting married. This wasn't the first, nor the last time he attacked me verbally, emotionally, mentally, or physically. About two months later, my parents rescued me from our "happy home" and sent me to Hastings College. I wanted so badly to return to Kevin, until one of my friends pointed out that I was better than that. I stayed in school. I graduated with a B.A. in three and a half years. I took a position at a large Denver newspaper and I never went back to Kevin. Later I would earn my Master of Arts in Teaching and would teach in Hawaii for a year before returning to Nebraska, where I'm a copy editor and columnist at the third largest paper in the state. I am now involved with a wonderful man who is a college professor in Chicago. He treats me with respect and care. He will never try to hurt me. It's true that education can help women break the cycle of violence. Without it, I would be the "nobody" that Kevin always told me that I was. The act of getting married is not a guarantee of safety.

Thank you,
Laurie Cicotello
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I was married at 21 years [old] to a very nice man. A very nice man who thought that the man was the head of the household and had total control over the woman. He worked on a ranch and we never had enough money to survive. We received public assistance for lunches for our three children, [and] free medical and other services because of his income. I have always been a very hard working person (I started my first job at the age of 14) and was not happy to stay at home (he insisted that I not get a job outside the home) when I could have helped support my family. He was a man that had other job options but would never take them to better our family. Finally, after our children were in school, I got a job managing a restaurant/kitchen (against his wishes), and our family had enough money to no longer need help from welfare.

That is when everything came apart. A man who, up until then had only been controlling, [now] became out of control. One night he even became violent and hit me. I packed my clothes and was going to leave. He talked me into staying but I told him that if he ever hit me again his children and I would be gone. He never hit me again. Instead he stalked me. He would take our three small children out of bed, when they had school the next day, to come into town (15 miles) to see whom I was having coffee with after work. He would tell me later who I was talking to at work, although I never saw him watching me, and never [knew that he] came in to my work place. He constantly accused me of sleeping with other men, although I was totally faithful to him. All this was done in front of our children. I finally decided to leave when I realized that every time he started, my daughter (5 years old) would come in whatever room we were in and sit and cry. I realized that by staying, [I was emotionally harming] my children. I left with almost nothing because he was not willing to let me go, and used everything (including the children's furniture) as a reason to fight with me.

I moved with my small children to the town where I had grown up [in] so I would have the support of my family. What I could not find was a job that paid enough to support my family. What I got was sexually harassed by my employer, and fired because I refused to go sit in his hot tub after work. At the time, I was trying to survive, and did not have the strength to report this. I decided my best option was to get an education so I could support my children. I ended up using public assistance for four years while I went to school and worked two jobs. The state paid for my food and day care. At the end of those four years I had a degree and a job that I still have 8 years later. I have supported my children. One [child] is in college, which I am helping pay for. One is joining the Navy next spring, and the oldest has a job at twenty, that pays more than I make (where I work for a program funded by government grants). Had I stayed in that situation my children would not have had the opportunities they did. They would have grown up in chaos and learned that life is not about being happy and productive. I urge you to stop this legislation. I grew up in [a] home with a two-parent family and agree that two parents are ideal, unless, however, the two parents are emotionally harming the children by staying together. Because I had the opportunity to leave an abusive marriage and get an education, not only have I, but my children [as well,] become productive members of society, that have the ability to pay into the welfare system not live off of it.

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I was 17 years old living at the YWCA after leaving a foster home that was abusive. I got pregnant and married within 3 months. I endured a very abusive marriage for 15 years. [I] had 3 kids and a low paying job. When I finally left, moving to another state in complete silence and hiding for a year, I received state assistance to help feed my kids. I worked and went back to school. Eventually, being able to support us. But, if it wasn't for the help of the state, I couldn't have done it. Marriage isn't the answer to poverty or women on welfare. I lived in extreme poverty being married. [It was only] when I left [that] I bettered my children and myself. Education, support, and assistance are the answer to saving women and children in abusive families and/or marriages. Please don't waste your money on gimmicks to convince welfare mothers to get married. It could be their worst nightmare not the answer to their poverty.

NEW JERSEY

"I am 42 years old and I am a survivor of an 11 year marriage to an abuser. I survived because I was able to receive food stamps and cash assistance. I was also fortunate enough to meet a woman who ran a group for battered woman. For the first time in my life I was told I DIDN'T need a man to be okay. I was taught from my parents that marriage made you who you were as a person. My marriage showed me I was worthless, stupid, ugly, and needed to be beat into submission.

I now work under that wonderful woman Geri Esposito Reale and I spend countless hours empowering women to depend on themselves and to begin their journey alone. Our Agency gives woman a choice in their future. I can remember living in a trailer counting bread and eating less so I could feed my children because the man I entered into marriage with almost destroyed my soul. I thought many times about the security I left when I ended my marriage. I knew my children would eat, I never knew, however, if they were going to watch their father drag me by the hair or spit in my face. Marriage for many women is worse than prison. Living in this relationship for many, includes having no money, he controls it all. Having nothing that belongs to you alone including your thoughts, opinions and your body. Everything you do or say is subject to his approval. I survived and raised three children because I was empowered by welfare and the Cumberland County Women's Center to further my education, to begin to think whole thoughts, and have feelings that were all mine. I was empowered to break the ridiculous notion that I needed a man to be whole.

Ending Domestic Violence is to begin to empower women to depend on themselves. Marriage is a dangerous place for an abused woman."

✧

I was married to an abusive alcoholic and had a child with him. The courts gave him visitation [rights] even though I had a restraining order against him. I made a home and a life for us and though it wasn't easy it was a lot better than the abuse we suffered. The last thing a women needs to feel is that she can't make it on her own. We should be encouraging these women instead of keeping them down. They need to feel secure and made to feel that they can accomplish things on their own instead of feeling that the need to depend on others.

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"Does Father Really Know Best?"

Ask Mr. Bush, if he knew that one of his daughters were involved in an abusive relationship, and were pregnant, if he would encourage marriage? Would he tell them to stay and suffer if they were dependant on that extra "government money" to feed their children?

Well, in my situation, my dad did just that -- I thought my father knew best.

With violence embedded in American culture and what's expected of a women, especially one who's 18 and pregnant, what's a girl to do, but trust the person she's intimate with and trust the other adults in her life who offer advice?

You know, the Irish/Catholic father telling you that you have to get married if you want to live in his 2-family home. The dad who loves you, and knows that the person you're about to marry is a violent person, but puts the way society and the church will view his unwed, pregnant daughter before her safety. That's what this administration will do if this Act is passed.

So, I married this abuser. Accepted his physical, mental, verbal, financial, and sexual abuse for over 10 years. I struggled to feed our three children, while he drank, drugged, and gambled his earnings away. I believed ""till death do us part"" because that's what I was taught.

Divorce was my only answer - it was my only escape. If I stayed married, I would be dead, have killed my husband or something very bad would have happened to our three boys. I visited the emergency room more times for being physically assaulted by my husband, than for the births of our three sons.

Programs like WIC helped me make it through those financially challenging years--being married didn't. I knew I could depend on WIC for baby formula, juice, eggs and cereal instead of my abuser supplying these necessities!

Incentives for marriage should be love, hope, peace, serenity, joy, understanding, friendship, commitment and non-violence, not \$50 or \$100 more a month! That's just encouraging the same uncertainty for the millions of women and children already living in violent homes. Until we can open our front doors and allow hope in, peace will never come knocking.

Regards,
Cynthia

NEW MEXICO

I am Kayla Michael. (kaylarynn@aol.com) 10 years ago, my mother and older brother forced me to marry the man that had impregnated me. He was 30 and I was 19. It was a 'shotgun wedding' at the courthouse. During the year of living with that man, I was mentally, emotionally, and physically abused in the worst way. I was locked in the house

with my baby son (no food). When I heard about the women's shelter on the radio, I packed one grocery bag full of baby things, broke out of the window, and went there.

[I spent] 3 months in the women's shelter, a few months homeless, [and] 2 years in the homeless housing projects. During that time, I entered and graduated UNM. [I] got a job as a social worker. [I] am still a social worker, working with victims of domestic violence. When you have kids and you're poor, as welfare mothers are, you don't find a nice man to marry. The welfare mothers who marry, marry abusive men. Abusive men seek us out, we're vulnerable.

I have never received child support and never been able to afford a lawyer at all. A better idea (instead of making us get married) would be to provide us legal assistance to obtain child support from the fathers of our children. (And to file for divorce for us.)

Thank you,
Kayla Michael

NEW YORK

"Hi, my story will be a little different. I was a child recipient of food stamps. I am 41 years old and my parents divorced in 1972 when it was very difficult to get a divorce. My mother showed great courage in doing so. My father, like so many, never paid child support after he left. He then moved out of state and court orders did not go past state lines at that time. My mother had married right out of high school and never had a full time job. She worked for minimum wage in a factory. She then put herself through nursing school while raising the remaining two of five children, with myself [being] the youngest. I started doing "chores" in the neighborhood at 11 and full time summer babysitting at 12. I paid for all my clothes and anything else I needed. We also got free lunch at school. Without those programs, survival would have been at the barest level. Had the government "encouraged" my mother or rather "forced" my mother to stay married by elimination of programs, my life would have been totally different. As I said, I am the youngest female of five children. Because I watched my mother walk away, I am the only one out of five to not be in unhealthy relationships. My sisters followed my mother and were married and [became] mother[s] by 21. My brothers have both had multiple marriages, children, stepchildren etc. I saw a different way of life. Growing up with a single mother is not easy, but you band together and it was certainly better than the constant fear. My father was a high functioning alcoholic and abusive. We had a beautiful home, went to church, had the right friends and to the outside world, looked great. The inside was a nightmare. I learned from that and watched my mother take control of her life. I did the same. I am the only one out of five with a bachelor's degree. I worked my way through school. I was determined to never be dependent on a man. That it would always be my choice to stay with someone. The trickle down effect, in that I sought help, educated myself and now am happily married in a healthy relationship raising two wonderful kids. I broke the cycle. My children and grandchildren will never know the realities of that kind of life, because my mother was able to leave with the help of free lunch and food stamps. Forcing people into ""survival marriage"" is opening the gateways to hell that so many have worked so hard to shut.
Susan Morgan-Rosicka, New York"

✧

"I was poor and married. My husband drank and beat me daily. He raped our daughter and myself more than once. After a divorce I went to college, became a successful clergywoman and then got a P.H.D in psychology. Without a husband I am free of violence and poverty, free to earn a good living, and free to nurture my children. It is abusive of the President to spend \$1.5 billion to force poor women into slavery and violence. If congress supports this they will be guilty of the heinous crimes perpetuated by poor men against women and children."

✧

"The times that I was on welfare were when I was married. I tried marriage twice and was on welfare for 3 years with the first marriage and for a few months in the second marriage. Now that I am single I have not been on welfare for

over 14 years. When I was able to get off welfare it was because I became educated. I am now an R.N. I don't think I will ever be on welfare again. I needed welfare because the two husbands I had, wanted children and then didn't support them. I didn't want children. The first marriage was dangerous. I was physically and mentally abused and he threatened to take away my girls if I left the marriage. It took years and some risky steps to achieve a divorce. I have been the soul supporter of my family, neither ex-husband paid child support. If anyone thinks a husband is the answer to support the children they need to look at the specific situation much closer."

✧

"My story begins with date rape. I knew the father of my baby was not, I repeat not, marriage material. But my mother didn't want any "bastards" in the family so I got married. My "husband" was in the Navy. The abuse began when he came home on leave. He had kept track of every penny that the Navy had sent me to live on. Which wasn't a whole lot I might add. Of course I used the money to support our son and myself so I didn't have any left. Well, because I didn't have the money for him to spend when he got home I was beaten beyond belief. From that point on whatever didn't go the way he wanted it to go, I took a beating for it. If he lost all his money gambling I got beat for it. If we didn't have anything to eat, I got beat for it. His needs came before the baby's needs. My son slept in a carriage for the first six months of his life. When I won \$100 at bingo, I bought him a bed, some nightgowns, a mobile, some toys and whatever I could until all the money was gone. I didn't give my husband a penny. Yes, I got beat. When he was tired of beating me and stopped I couldn't help but tell him that I would do the same thing again if I had to. I took the abuse because I wanted to make the marriage work. When I started fighting back I almost went to jail for assault so I didn't fight back anymore. The first time he hit my 2-year-old son I realized that it was time to leave. Unfortunately I was already 2 months pregnant, this time it was marriage rape. I still left.

If it weren't for welfare I don't know what I would have done. I do know for sure that if I had stayed with my "husband" I would either be dead or in jail. Either way I would not have been able to raise my children. Because of public assistance I was able to pull myself up, get a job, raise my children, and teach them to be decent, responsible adults. My son is a teacher. My daughter followed in my footsteps. When her marriage got violent she got out too. Public assistance helped her get a foothold. She is a LPN, owns her home, and raises her two boys "by herself."

✧

"I was 24 when I became pregnant. My boyfriend and I had used birth control but it failed us. We decided to go ahead and have this child. About two and a half months into the pregnancy he lost his mother's support. He began to freak out on me. First verbally, then physically. Because I was working as a Nanny for a local family, I was not able to afford health insurance, so I sought support from Medicaid. After the accusations of cheating on him escalated to physical threats I began to wonder what sort of life this child and I would have with this man. He fluctuated between adoring the idea of a family and hating me for wanting to go through with this pregnancy. Badgering turned to grabbing, then pushing, then to knocking me down. The last time he touched me was when he pulled me down causing me to trip and fall on the stairs of our apartment. The baby didn't make it and I had to be hospitalized for a D & C. "

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That's all well and good that the government would like single mothers to get married. I'm sure we would like that too, but to subject ourselves to not only physically but mentally abusive men just for the sake of the government's deficit is crazy. For a few years I endured the mental abuse of a relationship just so my son could be around his father. This is not a healthy way to raise a child. A child needs to see a strong, independent parent [in order] to believe in him/herself as well.

Thank you.

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I became a single parent of one child at the age of 23 and was employed with benefits that enabled me to provide for my son and myself. Though, I provided for myself, I was ashamed of the fact that I was a single parent because my mother raised me "better than that." My parents died when I was young and my being an only child made me feel alone, so I wanted a family.

My son's father and I split up four years later, and I met my daughter's father. I had no intentions on having a serious relationship, but he claimed me. He had a bad habit of showing up at my door unannounced and calling at all times of night. He also demanded that I call him as soon as I returned home from whatever it was that I was doing or once I arrived to my destination. He said that he worried about my son and me. There were times when he would become upset if he saw me speaking to a man, no matter [what] the age of the man/boy. So one day I decided that it was time to call it quits. One day he came to my home and I decided that I would not let him in. He knew that I was home and continued to ring the bell; the constant ringing was disturbing my son, so I let my daughter's father in, and that was the beginning of my physical abuse. Feeling that I had nowhere to go, I continued the "relationship." I became pregnant again at age 28, and again, [I was] not married, though he promised marriage. Trapped, rejected, and embarrassed, I continued to take his verbal and physical abuse. I had no one to go to, and when I did stay at a cousin's home, her husband told me that I should "never let a man run" me "away," so I returned to my hell. I wanted so much to be married when I had my second child, I now thank God that we never [got] married or lived together. I believe that my situation would have been worse [than it is now as] he continues to be a thorn in my side (for the last 9/10 years) since I could not afford to relocate.

During the onset of my abuse, I applied for assistance [that would] relocate [me] from my abuser. I qualified because of the abuse, but my salary placed me above the poverty line. But not enough above poverty to be able to do it alone, thus, eliminating any aide for relocation or childcare.

I feel that marrying your abuser it not the answer. By providing assistance to the families that will enable them to relocate, gain the education and job experiences necessary, and quality child care would better benefit families.

NORTH CAROLINA

"I am a disabled vet, a single mother, and an unmarried survivor of an abusive relationship. I was married to an abusive man for nine years. I would have done almost anything (at that time) to make my marriage work for the sake of my child. Indeed, I actually did, including marriage counseling in which my husband lied to the therapist about the abuse in every session. My last straw incident was October 12, 1996, being smacked in the face in a vehicle he was driving after he attempted to break my arm (again while driving the truck) in front of our daughter.

The only reason I was able to change my life, Thank you God, is that two friends who had been in abusive relationships and are married to each other (heterosexual) made me come to their house when I called after the incident, showed me both of their files about their respective abusive ex-spouses, and all the help that was available to them and to me to get out of the abuse. Because of their direction to programs: domestic violence shelter & the empowerment classes, child support enforcement through DSS, and the protective order and ex-parte order in the state of NC, I was able to extricate myself from this horrible and dangerous marriage.

Because of those programs, and my friends, I gained the support and courage I needed to go back to school and get my masters degree in family therapy, gain an immeasurable understanding that if I did not make my health (emotionally and physically) the utmost priority, I would chose another abuser and stay in that pattern. As a result of my education, I was able to transcend my abusive past, work for three years on the domestic violence council, and am now screening for family violence, providing personal safety plans, and linking victims (male and female) to programs to get healthier."

OKLAHOMA

Domestic violence occurs more often than you realize. While my life and sanity have been threatened more times than I would like to think about, it is the emotional abuse that does the most harm. Continual threats and put-downs cause knife wounds [that take] years to heal.

OREGON

My story begins as a single mother of 15 years. Raising my children, I met this man, and of course with the loneliness of my children moving out I hastily decided that he would fill the void that I was missing at this time in my life. So after a short courtship (1 year) I married this gentleman, [however] it took the next month to see the change. He became controlling and began his crusade to physically and emotionally abuse me to the point I had no self-esteem, I was losing myself. There [were] bruises, (up and down my arms and legs) on places that could be hidden. Then the name calling [began], vulgar names, telling me I was worthless and nobody would love me cause I was a pathetic human being. He slowly, without me becoming aware of it until it was almost too late, took control of every aspect of my life. [He] ran off my kids, my friends (from my past) and took control of [my] money.

For my 1-year anniversary, I left him. He got a hold of me and said he would go to counseling. So, we both went, the second visit, he was mad at the outcome and we left the meeting with me getting a beating on the way home and verbally abused. I then in about 3 months left again after he beat me and pulled me by my hair around the house. I left him and stayed in a safe house for a few months. With the help of the district attorney and the help of the Coalition For Domestic Victims I was able to get enough strength to divorce this man. I'm now in counseling and I [will] continue to be in counseling. This abuse left more then just physical abuse; it left emotional scars that will take time to heal, if it is possible. The fear and the scars that this man did to me were extreme to the point [that] I fear going out into public. I have isolated myself for 2 years from the world at [what] was done to me. Let me remind you that it took 11 months of this to completely change me from a working class woman to a frightened woman. He continued to stalk me to the point that I ran out of [the] state and lost everything that I worked hard for (materialistic items). I went into the marriage with a house, a Monte Carlo (2000) and money in savings, and I walked away with a beat up 1989 car, no money, no house, and most of all [no] self worth as a person, let a alone a woman. He had beaten me down to the point [that] at one point I wanted to end my life. [It was] the only way I could figure out to get out of that marriage. The coalition of domestic violence gave me funds to fight and a safe place to stay, and made sure I got counseling for this terrible violent act towards myself.

Please don't take any more away. Women need this so they can get out of violent situations and hopeless situations that could typically affect the children involved. We need to know that there are resources out there. If it saves one woman or one child in this situation it has done its job. But, I know first hand how it helps so many women and children that otherwise would have continued in these violent situations, and worse, possible death because [there was] no way out. Please don't take from this important cause and don't encourage women to get married to get off welfare. Instead, encourage education and self worth as a woman, a person, and mother. I fight everyday to find the self worth and dignity that was taken from me.

Thank you
Suse Hamilton

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"To Whom It Concerns:

I would like to start off by just saying that I have been married and divorced twice. So as far as the theory that marriage is an answer to all problems, I would have to strongly disagree. In my particular case, it actually made things worse. Instead of just carrying the weight of my children, I began to have to pull more than my share of responsibilities. Which is typical for a woman, however, not at all realistic for a good, lasting, strong, healthy relationship. We are taught to have to learn to deal with this. There is only so much a person can take.

A marriage should be a sacred union between two people who vow to work together no matter what obstacles [arise]. Not an ongoing battle to protect yourself and your family from your own husband. There are men in this world today who spend bill money on drugs, or other women, or who go out with their buddies all the time. There are men who refuse to hold down a job. There are men who owe most of their checks for child support in prior marriages. There are men with no skills who don't earn enough to provide for their families. Not having enough finances is the root of bitterness, resentment, and finally anger or rage. That is when abuse can start to take place. A lot of the time the abuse factor is already there as well.

There are controlling husbands who will not allow their wives to have a job, or go to school. There are men who won't help out with the kids. You see, there are a number of reasons why marriage is not the answer, in fact quite the problem in certain situations. It is unhealthy for children to grow up in an environment that is counter-productive. Where only one parent is making all of the efforts for the whole family. One cannot survive on bread alone. It takes two willing people in a marriage. Children will grow up to mimic this thought process and ultimately become a part of the vicious cycle.

Receiving state assistance has literally been a form of survival for my family and me. We would not have made it without these supplement programs in place. When I divorced, I decided it was better to be poor by myself than to be married to someone who was potentially dangerous to me and my family, and someone who was not reliable or even trustworthy financially as well. This is my story; I hope it helps you to understand that being unmarried with children can ultimately be very good and empowering for some families. I feel that if there was more affordable housing for people this could also make a huge difference for the better.

Respectfully,
From someone who remains hopeful"

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I spent 15 years with an abusive husband. When I was finally able to extract myself from this nightmarish existence I was forced, for survival's sake, to receive welfare. I had a son to raise and no means of support. When I attempted to attend college, so as to become employable in a family wage job, I was immediately removed from the state aid. The message my removal from welfare sent was received loud and clear: We don't want you educated; "We don't want you independent; we want to force you to return to a violent husband." Well, I was one of the lucky ones. I didn't return (I would rather have died than returned to the violence), and I eventually got my college degree, but I did so in abject poverty. I spent much of my time not knowing if I would have enough to eat, have electricity, or be able to clothe my son.

If I had stayed with this man as the, "system," would have preferred, I would be dead today. Please do not continue to send battered women the message that I was sent, that abusive marriage is the place to stay if you want financial security. Women do deserve to be educated, independent, and live violence free. These are rights routinely afforded men.

S. Star

PENNSYLVANIA

I am not currently on public assistance, but my children and I [have] depended on it in the past due to our need to escape [from] domestic abuse. I had been married to a man who had an explosive anger problem, which I was not aware of when I married him. Due to this problem, he was often fired from whatever job he would get. When I was 6 months pregnant with our second child, I left the job I had due to health reasons related to the pregnancy. A month later, my husband lost his job (he was fired). Since he was fired, he was unable to apply for unemployment benefits. We lived on our savings while he looked for work, but we did not have much saved, so that ran out after one month. After the birth of our second child, since my husband could not find work, he turned to using drugs (I did not condone or approve of this; in fact, it was the source of much argument in our home, as I was concerned that the police would find out about his drug use and arrest him, and that I would be implicated because I lived in the same house as he did, as he kept marijuana in his closet.) Due to conflicts about this and about money, the domestic arguments escalated and physical abuse was frequent. I could not immediately leave because I had a tiny infant to care for, and I did not at that time have a job. On one trip to a hospital emergency room after having been punched repeatedly on my thigh, choked, and picked up and thrown into the bathtub, the examining physician said, "I can't tell you what to do, but maybe next time you won't be so lucky." What the physician meant was that I lived through the abuse that time, but perhaps the next time I could die. I went to an emergency shelter, with my children, and filed a protection from abuse order.

After a divorce, which my husband caused to drag on for a long time by filing all sorts of motions (as he said "no one divorces me and gets away with it easy,") I found work, but it was only part-time. I applied for public assistance in order to feed my children and pay the rent on an apartment. But threats of physical violence continued (by phone and when my ex-husband would come to pick up the children for visitations). I moved several counties away and lived with my parents for several years, while I went to college. I now have a master's degree and a fairly good job, which means that I have been able to provide my children with a normal childhood (free of exposure to domestic violence or bill collectors coming to the house, and always with enough to eat, and the ability to take advantage of opportunities for recreation and education), but I could never have done this if I stayed with my husband.

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"My wife and I had a difficult time about 15 years ago; communication breakdowns, arguments, control issues between the both of us. I left the relationship and in scornful retaliation she placed a PFA against me due to the misguided advice of a local domestic relations group. We were apart for most of the summer that year, and got back together in the fall mainly because that court order would not allow me to see my little girls. The PFA did not stop the arguments, and in the winter of the next year, my wife called the police in anger. I was put in jail. It ripped our family apart. As soon as I was in jail, the reality set in with my wife; she was without a husband and income. She furiously worked to get me out through the EAP administrator where I work. I was released 3 weeks later and was off to therapy for a 30-day stint. That was one of the best things to happen to me. I learned a lot of coping mechanisms, assertiveness, [and] communication skills. They had a hard time diagnosing me because I had no alcohol/drug addictions, but in order for the insurance to pay, they came up with depression nos. We got back together later that year and have been married ever since.

If it would not have been for the interaction of the mental health treatment facility, our family would not have been together. My daughters would have been raised fatherless, and we all know the statistics with that situation. I agree marriage and family is the building block of our great society, but when problems arise, the problems need to be dealt with no matter what they are. I have heard way too many horror stories, and due to the help I received, our family did not become one of them.

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"Congress:

Think about a time when the world looked rosy and you were happily anticipating the future with the one person in the world you promised to love in front of god and family.

Your husband also promised these things only to take the blanket of hope and promise and happiness from around your shoulders and replace it with shattered [a] mantle of depression, pain, indignity, confusion, degradation, poverty, deep wounds, and loss. Having an abusive partner is worse than death and living in such a high degree of stress and fear that it causes medical problems that lasts as a lifetime reminder. You learn mistrust, doubt, and hate replace love. It's so easy for others to tell you what to do when they haven't a clue as to what happens in a horrible marriage, thus fixing you with shame on top of it all. It creates a hole in your life. You spend the rest of your days re-examining your judgment. It sets an example to the children of that marriage to think that's the way life works.

It's absurd to expect another man to take on the ruins of a bad marriage when the abuser didn't want the wife and children originally! The only thing that's going to occur is another poor family! I lived this life of abuse in several forms. After the threat of jail was made as the only recourse, abuse took on other forms. It left its scars but they are invisible to others. Handing down a solution by the government as pres. Bush has is not a viable answer to poverty. It's a recipe for disaster! Why are we allowing the government to tell us how to govern our personal circumstances?

If I hadn't been able to count on welfare to escape a dangerous marriage I fear my children would be without a mother today! I suffered a lot of abuse before I finally took my children and fled in secrecy. I thank god welfare provided a way for me to leave the torture of a dangerous marriage before I became another death statistic. Getting re-married to get out of poverty is such a simplistic and ignorant solution to such a horrific way of life that for an abused woman and her children it's a condemnation to more of the same!

What of the man? Why doesn't an answer present itself in the way of an abuser? Stricter laws? Protection? It's unfair to expect a new husband to take on [the] problems caused by someone else! The final insult, to have those who don't have a clue, brand us abused with shame for not doing what they think we should! This way of ending poverty is an insult to the many who have suffered and even died in the past."

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I am a nurse who works with new mothers, and I am a survivor of a very abusive alcoholic marriage. Although we were wealthy, our children lived in the poverty of abuse and addiction. The women I work with are no different, except that they need public assistance, our public help, to live a healthy life. They can't afford to walk away like I could. Marriage is not the salvation for abusive relationships. It is the tie that binds and controls. Public assistance has given some of the women I work with [the ability] to walk away from an alcoholic partner, a drug dealing boyfriend, [and/or] an abusive man. Your temporary help enabled these girls to begin college, get a full time job with child care, and choose health [insurance], as I have done. Marriage is not the fantasy that makes everything work out all right. Our help and their hard work make the difference that matters. Today our family is rich in values and life.

PUERTO RICO

"My mother will never write this note. My mother, a catholic, stayed married to my father from 1950 to 1988. She had six kids and two miscarriages. My mother stayed with her husband for "our sake." My father served in the army during Korea. My father came back a stranger, familiar only to alcohol. I know none of us children were born out of love. My father 'took' what was 'his' and 'sired' all of us. My father had his own business. He drank it down to bankruptcy. My father mortgaged my mom's house three times, forcing her to sign each and every time. At the age of 71 my mother continues to work to meet the financial obligations of a home. My father was never there. His bottles and foul moods always were. My father did not give my mother or us any money. We all learned to steal from him to

make ends meet. My family never had visitors: my father fell asleep drunk on the floor. There was always too much shame. We all became ruined souls for many years. My brother sexually abused 2 of my sisters and all of his daughters. We are all obsessive over achievers distrusting of any relationship. I don't regret my siblings but I wish my mother could have been free of the burden of 'marriage'. Believe it or not it took a priest to intervene and annul her marriage.”

TENNESSEE

My name is Kathy McCann and I am a survivor. I was sexually abused as a child, which is one of the reasons [why] I married my first husband. I wanted to leave my abusive home and he seemed to be the man of my dreams. He turned out to be a nightmare. I was not allowed to see my family. I was not allowed to drive. I could not work because he would not let me, the one time I got a job he forced me to quit because I made more money than he did. After three years of beatings and being sexually abused by him I left. I was lucky or unlucky to have a place to go to, my parents let me stay with them. I tried to go back to school to get an education. After three years of being told I was stupid, I had something to prove to myself. My parents agreed to watch my two small children and help me get through college. That did not happen because my father began beating my oldest son. I had no choice but to be homeless once again. If it were not for shelters, food stamps, and other assistance it would have been impossible for us to survive. I had no car when I left my parents for the second time. I had nothing but what I could carry for my child and myself. That was 14 years ago. I now have a home, a van and some of the better things in life. Yet, my first husband still does not pay child support that has been ordered through the courts. He still is not helping raise his children. Without the help [that] the state offers women like me, what would the children have? He is no dad, and never will be. I have been trying to get this support for the children, but every time we track him down and get the order for the company to pay the support, he up and quits his job. Leaving me to raise the children. His abuse will never end, and it is a shame that my children suffer. I am thankful for all the help I get from the state and without it I do not know where we would be today.

TEXAS

Mine was a second marriage, four years following my divorce. The wealthy, controlling man I married, promptly took over my life. After two beatings with two trips to the emergency room, I began divorce proceedings. Then my troubles really started. He felt that because he was wealthy (and I wasn't) he could get away with anything. He constantly harassed me by phone (until I had it changed), and at work by calling my boss and telling him lies about me. He brought lawsuits against me for libel. He sued many of our friends, saying they had libeled him. Then he called me at work and told me that he had hired someone to follow me and he would eventually kill me with a baseball bat! This was after I had obtained a warrant to keep him away from me. In the midst of all this he remarried (90 days after our divorce), but his harassment of me continued. He would follow me in his car to and from work. The police at the time (1986) would do nothing, saying that only after he did something could they take any action. He refused to pay me the court ordered divorce settlement, saying, "Sue me!" I finally had to quit my job, and move to Ohio. But the phone calls and letters continued, until about two years later he died of a heart attack. Only then did my life return to normal. There is a constant fear of being hunted, [and] being physically and psychologically abused. At the time it seemed that no one could help me. I am so grateful that now women in that position have shelters, and some of the laws have changed to perhaps stop cases of similar terror. All terrorists are not from other countries...many of them are married to abused women...and appear to their communities to be model citizens.

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This is not my personal story. This is a compilation of some 40 women whose stories I have heard in my job as a counselor at a center for domestic violence and rape victims. Time and time again, these women endure unbelievable abuse, including being choked, thrown against walls, having furniture hurled at them, having limbs broken, being bruised and battered, not to mention times when they have been shot at or cut. They do this because, due to little or no education and thus no source of income, they feel they must stay in the home so their children have a roof over their heads and food to eat. Having an incentive to marry will NOT correct this injustice nor the horrendous conditions children must face. A single loving mother who can work and provide for her family with the help of some welfare funds is a better answer than raising a generation of children exposed to brutality. Children raised in brutal environments grow up troubled, often become batterers or battered themselves. What kind of society will we eventually end up with??? Please reconsider this idea of promoting marriage over other sorts of help for single moms. The future of our country is involved here, not just the individuals affected immediately.



The Ruppert Wedding Album

Hi, my name is Cyndy. I had my first child in March of 1994, and was on welfare during my pregnancy and for a short time following. This assistance helped me greatly. I was able to get the medical attention I needed and buy formula and food. This allowed me to eventually become self-sufficient. However, I knew I needed an education to be able to get a good paying job, one that would sufficiently support my child and I, so I signed up for college. During this time, I met a man with whom I fell in love with. After my first semester of college, I found out I was pregnant with my second child. My boyfriend at the time asked me to marry him. So we married in February of 1996. My husband worked in the semi-conductor industry making \$86,000.00 a year. At that time, I didn't know how much money he made, but I thought we would make it as a married couple, and that our relationship would benefit our family. In the spring came a new semester, but my husband discouraged me from returning to school. He said that since I was pregnant, I should return to work to help support our child. I did not return to school, but instead received training to become a real estate agent. Upon completion of the courses, I prepared to take my real estate exam; only to discover my husband would not pay the fees required to do so. He then told me, it would be better if I stayed home with the kids while he worked.

The physical abuse started when I was 5 months pregnant. My husband pushed me into a playpen in the heat of an argument while my son was in the playpen. My husband then started calling me repeatedly, up to 12 times a day from work. With each phone call, he would become more and more angry until he was cursing at me and humiliating me. When I was 6 months pregnant, I received my first beating. It started in the kitchen and finished in the bathroom. He was hitting me on my back and head as I was bent over with my arms wrapped around my stomach trying to protect my unborn child. He took the phone off the hook and did not allow me out of the bedroom for the remainder of the night.

A friend of mine suggested counseling, and my husband and I went to a local Christian Counseling Center to seek help. The first thing my husband told me was that I didn't need to mention anything about his hitting me, because after all, I was partially responsible. I did mention it to our counselor during one of our sessions, and he then refused to go back. Marriage counseling won't work unless both partners really want the help.

The violence continued even after we separated, and he was never arrested for any of it. If he had paid his support, I would not have qualified for food stamps or Medicaid. This assistance helped me tremendously during this time in my life. My ex-husband would not provide medical insurance for our child, even though he had a full-time job and had his other children on his insurance [plan]. Without Medicaid, my child would not have had access to good medical attention, which he needed for his eczema and other health problems. My oldest child had asthma, and I wouldn't have been able to afford his medication without Medicaid. The food stamps helped our family as well. I was able to feed both of my children and myself.

Marriage is not the answer. Education, childcare, and temporary financial help are. I have since gone back to school and on June I will receive my associate's degree. My plan is to go to a four-year university in the fall of 2004 to

receive my Bachelor's degree in Government with an emphasis in legal studies. My children and I have lived violence free since January 1998. I have chosen not to marry for now, but if I do I know I must take serious precautions. I don't ever [again] want my children and I to be exposed to living in a violent household. As a matter of fact, my children have told me they prefer [that] I do not marry until they are grown up and gone. They feel safer knowing it's just us. Your legislation to encourage single mothers on welfare to marry will not solve the problem, but may actually add to it, and affect and endanger the lives of countless women and children. If anything, increase financial funding for single mothers going to college to obtain an education [in hopes of] better supporting their children. Give them a chance to save money and receive assistance simultaneously so they may become self-sufficient and in turn teach their children the values of a good education.

UTAH

This is actually not my story, but the story of many of my female students. I serve as a counselor to students [who] return to college to obtain an education so they can rise above [the] poverty level, and provide for themselves and their children in an acceptable manner. Many of my female students walk in the door as welfare recipients. I admire them for their decision to humble themselves to accept whatever is available [in order to] come to school [and earn] a degree or [acquire] skills that will get them a good-paying job in the marketplace. In fact, I encourage them to take advantage of all that is offered so they can get through school as quickly as possible and start to realize their dreams. I even [them] help find sources. [What is] my reasoning? If they can get through school as quickly as possible, they will taste that first measure of success. They will set an example for their children as they study with them and walk through the graduation ceremony. (What a wonderful way to break the welfare cycle!) They will now be taxpayers in their own right. They will no longer be victims, having to "settle," because they [now] believe they deserve [an education].

To encourage people in poverty to wed is the worst possible solution for them, their children, and the economy as a whole. This only keeps the vicious cycle going. Women who are victims of domestic violence [become easy] victims for the rest of their lives, unless, [they obtain an] education [to] break the cycle. I have witnessed time and again [that] the women who drop out and marry again end up in the same cycle of poverty and violence. It breaks my heart that these fine women and children end up no better off than they were before. They automatically attract the same caliber of person. The student, who finishes the program or obtains job skills and is no longer dependent on someone else to survive, goes on to gain a successful position in the marketplace. She is no longer a victim. If she decides to marry again, it is to an entirely different caliber of person. I firmly believe that the best possible solution to both poverty and domestic violence, which more often than not go hand-in-hand, is to offer adequate education and funding opportunities. I also firmly believe that while a woman with children is going through school, her main responsibilities should be to her children and her homework. I believe it is irresponsible legislation that requires a woman to work while she is attending school and raising children. She needs to be in school when they are, and home when they are, to guide them to be responsible citizens, rather than leaving them to their own devices while mom is forced to work. I speak sincerely from seventeen years of experience.

Bonnie Cook

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My story begins with marrying a man that knew how to charm his way into your heart. He had spent a couple years in prison but was showing that he had changed. I soon found out differently. He [continued to] drink, and [did] not really try to stop or stick with the goal of stopping. Money that did come in never really went to bills, but went to things that were not necessary, that he wanted, which led to bankruptcy. When he would drink heavily his temper rose, and he would become [verbally] violent and sometimes physically [abusive]. He would like to use me as a sex object, if I couldn't perform he would greatly show he was disappointed. The world revolved around him. After our son was born he entered the drug world and things became worse. We divorced [and] I gained a protective order

[against] him and moved out of the house we once lived in. I went into [a] shelter, and only through housing assistance was I able to find a new home for my son and I. Also, I received financial assistance [and insurance from] the state. If this [had] not [been made] available to me, my son and I would be homeless and in a worse situation now than before. Getting out of the marriage was the best thing for my son and me. I was [one of the] lucky ones. My ex-husband now sits in prison for life, for murdering a teenage girl and raping many other women and some children. Marriage is not necessarily the best thing to encourage women to do if on the welfare system. After all of this, I am learning to become independent and support myself. I am back in school in order to improve my source of income. If it were not for the assistance of the government, my son and I could either be dead or homeless. Abuse is no way to live!

VERMONT

Marriage is not the answer. Believe me I know. I married just because I was pregnant and I would of never left if it wasn't for public assistance. I was so afraid I would of never made it on my own if I didn't have the help and support programs out there for single mothers with children. Marriage, especially, with abusive relationships, only gives more power to the "man," he thinks he has the control and essentially he does.

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Twelve years ago I dropped out of college to marry a man I thought I loved. I thought, since I was expecting our first child, that I was "doing the right thing." I ended up in a marriage to a man I really didn't know. My husband was controlling and abusive. So here I am, trapped with one son and another on the way, always living in fear. I had to stay in my marriage because I couldn't work anywhere. I had no skills. Then in the summer of 1996 my husband decided he didn't want to be married or be a father anymore and threw us out on to the street. So pregnant and with a four year old son, I ended up in a shelter for abused women. I stayed in that shelter for seven weeks. During those seven weeks I had to get back on my feet. I signed up for public assistance and began looking for an apartment. I found nothing. Even the shelter had to shorten my stay due to [a] shortage of beds, and the need for abused women to be in shelter. So once again I found myself on the streets. Finally my grandmother, in Vermont, heard of my ordeal and said she would take us in. So from Illinois to Vermont, I moved half way across country for a chance to make a life for my children and myself. In Vermont I found my way. Not by getting married, but by hard work. Because of the educational, child care, and social welfare programs instituted in the state of Vermont, by Governor Howard Dean, I was able to graduate from the *Vermont Adult Diploma Program* and the *Office Administrative Assistant* course at my local Technical Center. I was able to find employment with my skills through the Job Training Partnership Act at my local town office. And while I was getting an education my children were able to go to daycare, paid for by the state of Vermont. I was able to access many social programs and supports like counseling (paid for by the generous allotments for Medicaid) and parenting classes in order to enrich my life and the life of my young children. Marriage didn't save me, community support and my own hard work saved me. I have worked many jobs since then as an Executive Administrative Assistant. I live in a beautiful low-income townhouse, I drive a fairly new mini-van, and I am still a SINGLE working mother. This year I'll be thirty-one. I am not looking for a husband but for ways to consolidate my college loans. And this summer I'll be starting courses at the Community College of Vermont. A man with a bank account or a job to support me DID NOT get me here. I GOT ME HERE!

I'm Kerry Bibens-Gray and that's my story. Thank you.

VIRGINIA

I was a victim of domestic abuse for 8 years. Marrying my abuser was the worst decision of my life. After our marriage, he was able to control me to an even greater degree. He controlled our finances, so that I felt I was unable to leave him, because [if I did] I would be on the street. Although I worked, he insisted on seeing my pay stub, and had me account for every penny I spent. All of my pay had to go into our joint account. I was unable to hide any money in order to make a getaway. Of course, he had already done all that he could to destroy my support network, so I felt that I didn't have anyone close enough to ask for help. Getting married was exactly the opposite of protection- it was a horrifying prison.

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"I was married to an abusive man. Marriage did not help keep me out of poverty. My (now ex) husband wanted to control all of the money, including the money I earned [money] from working, and [saved] the money my parents had set aside for me to attend college. He refused to pay our rent on time even though he made twice as much as I did. He was always making threats on my life and was physically and emotionally abusive as well. I finally realized that I might lose my life if I continued to stay in this marriage, so I escaped with our son in 1999. My infant son and me had to stay in a shelter for battered women for a few days because I was afraid of what my husband would do to us when he found out that we had escaped and I had taken out a protective order on him. When I petitioned the court to get legal custody of our son, my husband said that he didn't want to pay child support and that nothing would make him happier than to see me spend my last dime in the courts.

He was able to get legal aid to represent him while I had to empty my savings account, take out a bank loan, max out my credit cards, and drain my college account in order to pay for my attorney's fees. Thank god the judge saw through all of my ex-husband's and his family's lies and gave me sole custody of my son and supervised visitation to my ex- husband. I have since had to declare bankruptcy, which has a very negative impact on one's credit rating, as a result of all of the thousands of dollars I've had to shell out in attorney's fees. My ex-husband continues to use the court system to harass and control me. I have been forced to appear in court at least 75 times in the past five years because my ex-husband continues to ask the court for custody, even though custody was decided years ago. I had to go on public assistance for a period of time and even lost my apartment after I was forced to declare bankruptcy.

I now have two children and my ex-husband continues to abuse the judicial system and harass me by bringing me to court almost every month. Trying to get women to marry abusive men is not going to solve anything- it just creates more problems.

Signed, Angela D. Sargent"

WASHINGTON

Thirty years ago I married a man who beat me up, kicked me, belittled me, and called me names. After 10 years of marriage we divorced. I was able to receive food stamps and welfare assistance. He learned this form of behavior towards a woman from his father who beat his mother. Joint counseling did not help because he said he would change, but he didn't. It only made my situation worse at home. After my divorce I met another man, only he was 18 years older than me. I was struggling, working in a low paying job and trying to make ends meet financially. He seemed to be the way out of my poverty. Alas -- he was worse than my first husband. He was an alcoholic who was verbally abusive to my children and me. My children had no respect for this man. We divorced after six years of marriage. The fairy tale life he promised in marriage was not true. I [only] felt alive and safe after I left him. The loneliness I may have experienced was exhilarating [as] compared to the constant belittling, watching him drink and

verbally abusing my children. [It] was not worth it. I loved being free to come and go in my own place without him. It was hard again being poor, but being married was not the answer. After 6 years of working to figure [out] who I was, and [in] finishing a bachelor's degree in social work with the help of government programs, I am remarried again to a man that treats me with respect. I continued on to my master's degree and post-master's degree and I [am] now a family therapist. I am a good counselor for women/men that have been abused through domestic violence along with helping people with [low] self-esteem. In my educational program and my own counseling, I learned how to advocate for myself and choose wisely in my next marriage partner. If [I] had not have [had] the help of public assistance and had to stay in the two bad marriages I would have [either] killed myself or [had] been killed. What is even worse is that my children have their own emotional problems from the trauma they experienced while living with me through these marriages. They had to witness and be a part of the abuse from both their father and another man. It has [both] ruined their lives and changed them. My sons may turn out to be batters too [although] they aren't married yet. I hope not. My youngest son doesn't have a lot of respect for women or me. His father was his role model. Getting married is not the answer to stop people [from] using public assistance. Giving them meaningful employment, education, and support through counseling to learn how to be able to live alone and advocate for themselves will help. It helped me!!

✧

"I broke up with the father of my child because he was using my AFDC grant to buy marijuana. After nine months I started to hear from friends how he had been sleeping with various female[s] and "experimenting"" with drugs more potent than marijuana. He never hit me, but the mental abuse I was subjected to had convinced me that I was lower than dirt [, and] That I was incapable of becoming anything more than his doormat. Since leaving him in 1986, I have gone on to complete an Associates of Applied Science, regained my self-esteem, and I now earn a respectable living as an Administrative Assistant. Our child was not subjected to his abuse and so I have hope that she too will live a productive life.
Marriage does NOT solve all problems!"

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I was married to my abuser for nearly twenty years. He was a successful businessman and a corporate vice president. We moved often, so my support system was always changing, which worked in his favor. For most of those years, I attempted to get him actively involved in couples counseling. He went for a few visits, until he felt secure that he had adequately charmed the therapist; he's very intelligent and very charming, when he wants to be. At some point, he would always say, " I've done all the changing that I want to do; you're the one who's sick!" At one point, he was the Vice President of the state mental health association in the state where we were living, and he was addicted to cocaine, and abusing me mentally and physically every weekend when he came home from his travels! It was not until he beat up our 16-year-old daughter, that I got the nerve to leave. The financial uncertainties were always the reasons that kept me from leaving; I knew that he would do everything he could to make sure that I lived in poverty. He took me to court every chance he could to whittle away at my funds. Because I could never afford the retainer to get an attorney to represent me, he was successful at reducing me to poverty. If it weren't for public assistance, I wouldn't be here today. My children are now grown and gone, and I'm currently working as an advocate for domestic violence victims in Washington State.

✧

I was raised in a loving upper middle class home. I married [for] the first time in 1982. That marriage lasted 11 years. He was unfaithful. I met my second husband in Oklahoma, he was wonderful at first, and then after about a year, the honeymoon was over. We were not married but living together. I was frightened of him; he was physically and emotionally violent. I packed what I could into my car, and my son and I left for Washington State while he was at work. We had 6 weeks of peace [until] he followed us. We left again, while he was at work, all the way to North Carolina. [Again,] he followed us. I gave up. I couldn't get away, and after each time he found us, the abuse was worse. He forced me to marry him. I did so under duress, I was terrified, he had punched out the windshield of the car, torn up furniture, and ripped a built in bar out of the wall with his bare hands. He was uncontrollable when he

was on a rampage. After two months of marriage, I left again while he was at work. [I went] back to WA where I had family. Of course I never told my father what was going on. My father had no idea of the extent of the abuse that my son and I were living with. My abuser followed me to Washington. He moved in with us. I had 3 months of peace before he showed up. After 1 year of abuse, he tried to kill me. He was on top of me with his knee in my chest and his hands around my throat choking me. My dogs saved my life by attacking him. I had to play nice and pretend that everything was ok, and that I forgave him. I knew he would kill me before the police could get there if I called them. After he left for work, I went to a local DV program and an advocate there told me my options. The one I chose was an order of protection. She helped me file it that day, and he was served at work. My story doesn't end there. When it was over, he was charged with Felony Domestic Violence and Felony Stalking. I am free now, but I know that I have to keep looking over my shoulder. Although I have divorced him, He hasn't let me go in his mind. I receive letters, and anonymous phone calls [every] now and then. I know whom they are from. His sentence was to leave the state of WA, and not return ever. There is a standing lifetime warrant for his arrest if he enters WA State. He will do an automatic 5 years. Do I live in fear? Yes. Do I let it rule my life? No. But I am careful. If I had remained married to him, I would be dead and buried by now, and possibly my son as well.

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"I was a very smart high school student and went on to college, but my boyfriend at the time believed we should be married and told me how stupid school was. I quit college and got married rather than do the right thing and staying in school. My getting married only fueled the abuse and it became worse and worse. I was going nowhere really fast at 20 years old. I got pregnant and now my husband believed I should have no goals at all in life but care for his needs. I tried to go back to school and he did everything to destroy that. I was his property. I felt by 24 my life was over. As things escalated I decided to take matters into my own hands. I took out every student loan I could without him knowing and worked my dead end job around his hours and school. It was very stressful and difficult for my son and me. After I began earning scholarships my husband found out and would take the money to buy stuff for himself. I was getting deeper in debt, but wanted out. I finally graduated and earned my degree over 8 years after I should have had I stayed in college after high school rather than getting married. I went on to law school and am now married to a great man. He is 34 and has his act together rather than a 21-year-old guy who had no clue about life.

This proposal is a horrible idea. I learned the hard way, and feel as though I wasted too many years of my young life being married. I have so many regrets that I did everything backwards. Here I was a 30 year old living the college life. How lame is that? People should wait to get married. Even now, my marriage is a very difficult thing to keep going. To stress that kids should marry is crazy. They do not know who they are or where they are going yet in life. Don't take the opportunities away from them by thinking marriage is the answer. Being able to care for oneself is the answer!"

✧

"Twenty years in an abusive marriage. Four children. Twenty years of walking on egg shells. Sixteen years of welfare because he wouldn't work. Raising children in poverty. Volunteering everywhere and anywhere just to further my education. [But] finally, freedom. He hurt our daughter and was arrested. Single mother now, but four more years of welfare. Formal education and volunteerism. Finally a job, a very good job. Off of welfare and on a roll. Freedom from fear, hunger, poverty.

I know I would never have been able to travel the path that I have, with him still in my life. He dragged me down, told me I was stupid, told me I was ugly, told me that my family was ashamed of me, pitied me. HE was the one, for twenty long years, that used everything in his power to make me feel that I was only worthy of scorn. I now work in the same organization that helped me gain my freedom, the domestic violence program in my county. Everyday I see women who reflect my past, who are mired in the same slime that held me down for so long. I also see many of these women break free of their abusers, and I watch as they begin to grow strong in their own rights. The struggles they have to contend with are difficult, but not impossible. For so many of them, it is an uphill battle, but at least the dead weight of their former abuser is one less impediment.

Do not put force us back into the dark ages, but light the path to freedom with health care, affordable childcare, education, counseling, mentorship.

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I am a mother of 4 kids who got out of a 22-year abusive relationship [only] a few years ago, finally here in the United States. I could not do it in my country, [I had] no way to get out; he would be more aggressive toward all of us. I felt very protected by the laws [of the United States], and I found a safe place for my kids here. I was out for more than 2 years, and he said, "You will come back on your knees to beg for money." I did not do that exactly, but when he did not pay child support, when I could not qualify for any private nor state financial assistance, and my credit was ruined totally I made the decision to go back. Thanks to God, I had my work, and the emotional support of my mother who helped us get through a lot, until she became very ill. Her health insurance, the bills for emergency, and the medications were additional expenses that I have not figured out. I have stopped coming back to this long time relationship, I have learned to stand up for myself, but he always finds ways to tell me that, "I was not able to make it without him." He insists we get married, and he IS STILL THE SAME PERSON THAT I RAN AWAY FROM. He is still abusive whenever he can, he wants us to open a bank account together, and do our taxes together. I have said no, and he has gone back to the same behavior, the one that he uses to control people [with], [it's] very bad.

I know [for a] fact, if I went back [it] is [only] because the system that exists is not developed to support victims of Family Violence. [Another reason would be because] we are still lacking culturally relevant programs designed to provide services to diverse populations. Please, make sure that women and children have their basic needs to survive, I beg you. Help them to have food, housing, basic health [care], and develop policies [where] everyone understands the difficulties of the process to survive. I am preparing my way out, dealing with my cultural barriers [and] social barriers because I am a "divorced women." Other husbands don't allow their wives to come around. So, you can see isolation in my own community. But when [my ex-husband] is present everyone is gentle, even at our church. That is what some people would like to see, the perfect couple, no matter what. The children I have raised are my concern, [and] what example I have provided to them. So, I have committed myself to make every effort to communicate [to my children] what is not ok anymore in my life. No more family secrets, as I use to hide my pain for them not to suffer. I ask my God for guidance every morning, and every Sunday at my church when I sing. I am still poor financially, but my spirit is up and alert all the time. I have beautiful children, and ask myself how they would be able to make it better than me. I am committed to spending the rest of my life making every effort to be present and available [to my children]. I constantly nurture myself with knowledge about such issues that impact us all at all levels.

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Marriage to an abusive person is a fearful, frightening, [and] controlling experience. The person uses whatever issue they can to control, manipulate, and keep you under their thumb and power. I am a single mother of six children. I was on welfare for long enough to get through three years of college, and come out with two degrees [allowing me] to be able to support my children and myself. It was a lifesaver, and gave me some sense of independence [in decision making, that helped me] to get out of the horrid situation that we all were in. Not just I was caught up in it, but the children also. They wished to protect their mother from the stepfather who blamed them for what their father has done (and is doing). He takes it out on them. The answer is education, [which] lets them know they can become women of independent means, with choices and the example for their children to follow. Of those six children--two have served our country in the Navy and the Air Force. Three are married and two of those have BA degrees in their fields. The third is still in the military, proud to be there and she is going after her BA degree while serving in England as a Linguist. Four of those have been over seas to serve on missions or through their service in the military. The last two, will graduate from High School next year. Education to make the most of themselves is the answer.

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My name is Kathy and I was in an abusive marriage for 15 years. I was freshly divorced with a 13 month old baby when I met what I thought was a "wonderful" man. He was kind, gentle and nurturing - like a great big teddy bear. He was very romantic and tender, and after having been hurt, it was wonderful to love again.

He told me he had had a vasectomy two years before, so I did not use birth control, thinking it was "safe." When I became pregnant two months later, I panicked. He said the vasectomy apparently didn't work. I couldn't imagine how someone would lie about something like that, so I believed him. The timing for this event couldn't possibly have been worse. I am a traditionalist when it comes to children. I believed that it was important for children to grow up in a two-parent household, and I didn't want my children to suffer the stigma of having people say, "They have two different fathers, you know." After a good deal of soul searching, I agreed to get married.

It was an ideal courtship of six months, to be followed by 15 years of sheer hell. As soon as the wedding was over, he became extremely moody and temperamental. The changes were subtle at first, and I chalked it up to the adjustments of marriage. He had a Jekyll and Hyde personality, and I never knew what to expect from day to day. Anything could set him off. In the beginning, the abusive episodes were only occasional. At the end of the marriage, they occurred daily. I stayed for the same reasons all women stay - sheer terror, a belief that I could not make it on my own, and being dependent on his income to support the family. How would I be able to take care of the kids by myself? And pay the mortgage, and all the household bills? The very prospect was overwhelming.

I have managed without Public Assistance because I have a job. While it would appear that my story would not be of value here because I was not on Public Assistance, I can tell you how awful the alternative can be. My ex fought for sole custody in the divorce (and lost) but ran my attorney fees up into the thousands. Both attorneys pressured me into "closing the deal" and allowing him to lower his child support to less than we were entitled to. He followed up by immediately filing bankruptcy as soon as the divorce was final, sticking me with 100% of the bills, including our daughter's hefty orthodontist bill, which had to be paid or she would not have gotten the braces off of her teeth. I had about \$75,000 worth of debt to manage on one third of the household income we had when I was married.

I lost my home, my car was totaled in a car accident, the children and I were forced to move, and we were stranded walking on the highway many times when my old "clunkers" broke down. My power got shut off 2-3 times, bill collectors called around the clock, and I "made too much money" to qualify for the reduced lunch program at school. I was sued (garnished) by two creditors. I spent many sleepless nights pacing the floor, trying to figure out how we were going to survive. We've shopped at the Dollar Store, frequented garage sales, gone without vacations, cleaned houses, babysat, done whatever we had to do.

Was it worth it to leave my husband? YES!!! The worst day I have now is better than the best day I had with him. It is wonderful to not have to live in fear, and to live in a house where there is peace, serenity, and contentment. My daughters are strong young women, who know what they want, and who believe they can do anything. They even stand up to their father when he calls. Empowering women is the ANSWER! NOT TELLING THEM THAT THE TICKET OUT IS FINDING A BIG STRONG MAN TO "TAKE CARE" OF THEM!!! If men took care of women, we wouldn't need a Support Enforcement Program, would we?

I will say, from attending battered women's support groups, that Public Assistance is desperately needed by these women. The world is NOT kind to poor women with children. Your creditors don't care "why" you can't pay your bills. The power company will shut off the lights even if you have kids. Your pride doesn't put food on the table. Most women cannot support a family on minimum wage, and if they have to pay for child care on top of it, they might as well not even leave the house in the morning because there would be no money once they paid the babysitter. With Public Assistance, their children can eat good, nutritious food, get quality medical care, and their mothers can get the assistance to eventually become self sufficient.

More aggressive efforts to collect child support, better laws to close the "loopholes" that let deadbeat dads get out of paying their obligations, [and] tougher laws to punish abusers and treat domestic violence LIKE THE CRIME IT IS would all make a huge difference.

My name is Linda, I come from a family of abuse, I was abused and now daughter, my grandchildren, and I are being abused. I was almost killed 2 times by my ex. He abused my children as well. I was only 18 years old when I left home with my ex. I already had a baby girl and her daddy would not marry me, although he lied [and] said he would. I was desperate to have a father for my baby, and the emotional abuse I suffered at home. It didn't take long before I was emotionally raped. I was so scared. I was drinking, and blamed my drinking, at first, for the beatings. I got a broken nose and black and blue eyes. It got worse when I caught him hurting my daughters.

Finally when he tried to kill me, and he had the blanket over my head [so that] I could hardly breath, I said "go ahead and kill me you will go to jail and I will be free." He stopped. I [was] still afraid to leave him. He had threatened to take my kids and I would never see them again. Even after the second time he tried to kill me, I still was too afraid to leave. I didn't have the help [there is now] to turn to. It was when my daughter was at her little table playing and her dad was mad and started to take it out on her. He started to kick her with his cowboy boots. I got in front of her and he broke my nose, blacked my eyes, and left bruises all over my body. I didn't sleep that night. I waited until he left, and got the kids and took a bus to the welfare office. The Lady was so nice. She filled everything out for me, she got the girls and me a place to stay, and gave me some money until the paper work was done. I would not have survived without welfare's help.

While I was on welfare I was ridiculed and shamed. [When I] would use food stamps people would look at what I would buy. Like I was not supposed to have anything good in my basket. And I never had enough to even get soap or Toilet paper (I guess since we were so dirty we didn't need to get clean). At times I felt [that] maybe I was better off back with my ex? They give criminals more to live on than they gave me. I had to live on \$5,000, for a year to raise my 2 daughters and try to better my self.

I did get married again to "better my situation." What a mistake! I wasn't allowed to work, I couldn't even go to the store alone or even to [visit] my family. He was so controlling. I finally ended [up] back on welfare. This time, I got help from new programs to help me get work. I got to go to a real college. I found out I was teachable! I found out [that] I was not dumb. I [even] had [a] 4.0 average a couple of times. I got involved with another program while I was still on welfare to help me start a business. I got off welfare and ran a business for 8 years and got married, but this time I was not "needy." I got married to share my life and he has been a wonderful husband. We are now raising and helping our grand children and doing foster care.

No, making an incentive to get women to marry [in order] to get off the system wont work, and it will only add more pain to the family. The only way to help is by building the self-esteem [of battered women] and helping them realize they are capable of living on their own. Give them incentives to take classes and seminars. Open up opportunities for women to start their own business and help them get started. Help them have pride in themselves, and then you will see a big drop in the welfare system. [Without welfare] where else are women to go with their children?

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I became pregnant at age 18. I married the father even though he was extremely physically abusive to me throughout my pregnancy and after my baby was born. I married this man not out of love but because I felt I had no other choice. This man couldn't keep a job for more than 1-2 days. He was an abusive drug addict. We lived on what was known as AFDC. This was barely enough to survive on. My husband sold drugs to make ends meet. On one particular night, about two months after my son was born, my husband beat me severely [all] because I did not want to have sex with him. He broke my ribs and left me black and blue. I made a plan and left a few weeks later. I never went back. I got off welfare. I obtained a full time job. [I] put myself through college and now help other battered women. I gave my son a chance to grow up in a healthy, loving home free from abuse. I definitely feel that marriage should not be promoted as an answer to women's poverty or to keep women from receiving welfare benefits. The only answer is job training and [obtaining a] college education [in order] to [achieve] self-sufficiency. Toni

WISCONSIN

I know at this time that if I had not left my abuser I would either be dead by his hands or my own. I know this may sound dramatic to you, but it is the truth. I was so far into the relationship that the verbal abuse had broken my self-esteem. My two children (who were from a previous marriage) were not enough to keep me going. When I met my ex-husband I had divorced my children's father. I owned a house, worked at the same job for 8 years, had a steady income, and two great children. After 6 months, my ex-husband moved in. At first, everything seemed great but as I looked back I should have seen the signs. [He was] jealous, [and] possessive, but yet [in a] devious way he convinced me that his way was the best way.

After 7 years together, 5 years in [our] marriage, and 3 restraining orders later, I finally got enough courage to leave the situation. He went through alcohol and drug therapy, and the anger management program, but started to drink again. It was only with the help of the food stamp program and local charities that I received enough financial support to live on my own. I left my house [which] I had lived in for 15 years! But I knew if I did not leave I would not be able to live a healthy life. We tried counseling with our pastor. He moved in with me for a few months, but it didn't work. The fighting came back worse. Finally one night, after months of using the survival tips the local YWCA had taught me (like keeping my cell phone on me at all times), I had to call the police because of his threats and pushing me around. Even after he was kicked out and under a restraining order, I still tried counseling. During our counseling session when my ex-husband spoke of the abusive incident, I disagreed. The counselor said, "Well just like in an accident everyone perceives reality differently." What a joke! I was crushed. I realized that I needed help but not hers or his. During this time, I was counseling with the Retention and Advancement program at the Rock County Job Center. I had gone back to school to receive my Associates Degree in Radiography. I am currently on the waiting list for my clinical studies, and I am taking courses for a Bachelor's Degree in Management. I would not be able to feed my two children and myself without the assistance of food stamps. I also received help with gas vouchers, uniform assistance, career counseling, and psychological counseling.

I am a Christian, and believe wholeheartedly in the sanctity of marriage. But to give incentives to someone just to stay married [who are] in an abusive relationship, or penalize someone indirectly for leaving an unhealthy marriage, is very dangerous. It takes an average of 7 times for a woman to leave an abusive relationship. I was fortunate it took me 4 times. A great motivating factor was the fact there was some assistance out there for me. I could never have left this situation without the assistance. I am now a full-time student, full-time employee, and full-time mom of two wonderful children. Thank God that I am still able to be here for them. There was a time when I did not know if I was going to be!

✧

I worked as an advocate at a domestic abuse shelter for 2 years while in college, and even though this shelter was in a small Wisconsin town, I saw 100's of women and families there each year. The majority of the children were young, under 5, [and] had been abused themselves, or saw their mothers being abused. I recall a specific incident where a woman left in the middle of the night with her children, while her husband was at work. Two of my co-workers helped her move, and went to check on her the next day, where they found the husband trying to break into the apartment. I remember thinking, "man, just leave her alone, she doesn't want to have anything to do with you." Most of the women in the shelter were from lower-income families and had little work skills or education. Forcing women to get married in order to receive financial assistance is not only dangerous, but plain ignorant. It sends the message that you're not worthy unless you have a husband. I realize [that] it is difficult to raise a child with only one parent, but let me ask you this; what's worse; having just one, loving mother who must rely on government assistance or having a father around to beat her, but bring home the bacon? Thank you.

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I'm a strong black woman filled with determination to have a professional career. I married at a young age and I had hopes and dreams of raising a family with someone who would be reasonable and dependable. Those thoughts soon

came to a crashing halt because I lived with domestic violence for twenty-one years. My ex-husband was an active drug user throughout our whole marriage. He made life unbearable at times. He would verbally and mentally abuse the whole family and would often physically abuse me.

The abuse had taken its toll, and after seven years we separated. After the separation we just kept going around in the same circle. For most of the past fourteen years we did not live together and the following incident describes the find of violence that was in my home. The police were called to my home many times because of the fighting. Before our divorce, we lived together for a short time. It didn't go well at all. One night my ex-husband woke me out of my sleep. He was in a drunken rage [and] was demanding money from me for drugs and alcohol.

I wouldn't ever bring money home because he would constantly ask for it or he would just steal it. He started a fight with me, and in order to protect myself I pushed him out of my way. He pinned me to the floor and started hitting me with his fist, which were aimed at my head. He left the house and I was relieved that he was gone. As I tried to fall back to sleep there was a knock on the door; it was the police. My ex-husband was coming down the street where he told the police that I started the fight and he showed them a cut on his hand. I was taken to jail.

There, [I] talked to a resident psychologist and she told me unless "I had a death wish," I had no reason for being there. "He's bad news and there are things that you don't know about him," she said. "You seem to be a responsible woman, someone that cares for themselves." I answered her by saying yes, "I work every day of the week and sometimes on the weekend and when I get paid I take care of my children and my home." Then she asked, why do you think? You're going around in the same circle. I said "because I don't know how to stop the cycle." She handed me a pink pamphlet with phone numbers of where I could get the help that I needed to stop the domestic abuse. I didn't ask any more questions, I took the pink pamphlet and I knew that I wouldn't be going back to my home. I stayed in jail for twelve hours, then they let me go and the charges against [me] were dropped. My ex-husband was picked up and he went to jail for two weeks. "Today is the first day of the rest of my life" I thought to myself. I'm enrolled in college and my future looks bright and I'm proud to be a mother and a grandmother. I thank God for the people he has put on my path because there's always a helping hand.

WYOMING

Because I was in an abusive [and] controlling relationship, I am getting divorced. Because of my decision to leave my husband and better my kids lives, and me I had to move out of my nice home and into a significantly smaller house. I have had to spend every last penny to hire an attorney, and he fights [with] me on everything I've ask for in the divorce, even after I've told him to take the kids and everything else and leave me with nothing. Because he is still living with me (the police can't force him out and the kids want to see him) I cannot receive any assistance until he does leave. I have called the police on several occasions. We [have] tried couples counseling but during every session he accused me of sleeping around and I've found myself defending myself not only to him but to my counselor. Throughout this horrific process of getting divorced I have come up against every obstacle, including being ostracized by my church, family and friends, coworkers, and community members. They ask me things like "why did I get married so young?" and "why can't I love him for who he is?" Throughout my journey I have learned that there is a much larger burden for the victim to carry than anybody knows. Because we aren't technically divorced and Wyoming doesn't have benefits for mere separation, I struggle monthly to pay rent, daycare, and bills. He gives me \$500 at the beginning of the month, [but] only if I ask and beg him for this money. My kids and I don't have the luxury of cable or the Internet. Because of him, my credit is ruined. I am working to get that [back] on track and it is getting better. Because I have to work, my kids must learn to be strong and get on the bus after school or be consoled by daycare providers when they are sick because I can't pick them up from school or stay home with them. If I have the opportunity to cash out any sick leave so I can have extra money, I will. My estranged husband wants me to fail so I don't have any choice but to drop the divorce, and the system is backing him up. There are two ironies to my story. First, my husband and I are both educated and have graduate degrees. Second, I work at a safe house and am a

domestic violence victim's advocate. If leaving a violent man is so hard for me, imagine how hard it is for anyone else.

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"My husband left me for another woman leaving me with four small children - 6, 4, 2, and [a new born]. I had spent several months struggling financially and emotionally. Even though there was no screaming in the house, no unwarranted accusations, no staying awake half the night wondering if he was okay or dead on the side of the road from drinking - I just didn't think I could make it alone. One night when he returned the children [after a visitation], I begged him to come back to us. That we would put the infidelities behind us and I would never mention them again, if he would just come home. The rage that came into his eyes was terrifying. He just exploded, started destroying my house, breaking furniture, and then he saw me. He kicked me so many times I lost count. I never saw the punches coming. The only thing I did see was the look of terror in my children's eyes as they watched their father beating their mother and destroying their home. I literally saw love fly out the window that night. It was the night I decided I could make it on my own."

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There were so many more events of abuse. It suffices to say that most of this marriage I was on welfare so that my children could live. I was married to a man who kept me isolated and was abusive. I could not have raised my children with out the help I got from these agencies. Many times he attempted to sabotage by being an ass in the welfare office. After he had quit the job he had kept the longest (two years). I took my last beating. I was working five jobs at the time and most of the time he didn't like it that I worked, but I refused not to work.

This is a very condensed version of my story, but to say that I was financially successful because I was married is "horse hockey." Welfare helped me, but he had such low self esteem that he could not get out of his abusive, unemployed, slouched state. So my children would be overjoyed when they came home and the fridge was full. The new food stamps came that day. I usually always worked, but there was always some public assistance or another. Marriage did not make my life better. My mate was not a provider for his family. I had to work twice as hard to provide because I had to give my children some sort of role model.

Finally, when I found out that I did have a brain and I could learn, I got an education. I am a social worker now. I have a good life, a great husband, great children, [and] wonderful grandchildren; three [of which,] belong to my [first] son who I reunited with after I finally left [my] abuser.