

Envisioning a Pro-Family Policy Agenda: *A Statement of Principles*

Strong families are the foundation of a healthy society. Especially at a time when cultural, political, and economic trends have pushed marriage and fertility rates to record lows, it is crucial for policymakers to have a clear vision of how public policy might better support family life. One of the primary aims of our politics should be empowering mothers and fathers to better live out their obligations to each other, to their children, and to their communities.

In its ideal form, the family is the social institution by which children are brought into existence, raised, and prepared to take on responsibilities as they grow into maturity. Though no family is perfect, they are small, cohesive communities that should be respected as having both a social and economic role and function. Parents bear the primary and ultimate responsibility to nurture, shape, and educate their children. As such, they should be afforded space, shielded from inappropriate state intrusion or undue market pressures, to fulfill their responsibilities and live out their irreplaceable function.

As scholars, writers, and legal experts, we offer the following eleven principles to advance an authentically pro-family approach to public policy. To safeguard and foster families' essential work, policymakers should:

- Seek to strengthen the bond of marriage and the enduring relationship between mothers, fathers, and their children that forms the core of family life.
- Ensure that unborn children are protected in law, and that mothers and their infants receive the care and social support they deserve to ensure a healthy start to life.
- Acknowledge the out-of-pocket and opportunity costs associated with becoming a parent, and advance policies that would make having children more affordable and achievable.
- Pursue approaches to paid leave that provide a baseline of protection for new parents from the demands of the workplace.
- Create an approach to early childhood that embraces parents' different values and needs, eschewing credentialization and over-regulation for authentic pluralism, while ensuring that families with a parent working part-time or at home are treated equitably.
- Develop labor policies that create flexibility for parents without jeopardizing their financial security, allowing more families to find the work-life balance that is right for them.
- Reinforce the dignity of work by expecting and empowering at least one parent to participate in the labor force, both to contribute to society and to model the virtues of consistency, conscientiousness, and self-sufficiency.
- Appreciate how increases in the cost of living burden parents, particularly those living on a single income, and seek to lower costs in sectors like housing, health care, and higher education by removing artificial barriers to entry and encouraging innovation.

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- Remediate imbalances in tax and safety net policies, recognizing the family as an economic institution and ensuring married families are, at the very least, not at a disadvantage compared to single or cohabiting parents.
- Recognize the unique challenges facing men and boys, and pursue workforce and education policies that better empower them to achieve their full potential as committed husbands, fathers, and role models.
- Respect parental authority and the fundamental right of families to raise their children according to their faith, values, and beliefs, and give parents more tools and opportunities to find environments that buttress, not undermine, that authority from classrooms to the digital sphere.

Translating these principles into specific policies will require creativity, humility, and prudence. Our vision recognizes the limitations of relying too heavily on policy alone to transform family life for the better, and the potential unintended consequences of even the best-intentioned state action. But the threats that leave too many families adrift and too many children at risk require an approach to politics that is proactive and responsive.

Families deserve protection from the growing economic and cultural forces that undermine their essential work. These principles would support the family as the basic unit of a healthy civilization, prioritize expanding choices for parents, and stress the importance of making it more achievable to have and raise children. We believe they can help guide policymakers towards a future in which more families are better able to fulfill their essential responsibilities, better insulated against potential governmental overreach and inordinate demands in a market economy.

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