

Senate Bill 172  
(Covenant Marriage)

Talking Points



S.B. 172 will not:

- Replace current marriage law.
- Undue no-fault divorce.
- Force couples to prove fault in order to get divorced.

S.B. 172 will:

- Create a strictly optional, separate marriage option that will be available to couples seeking to get married and couples currently married.
- Require pre-marital counseling before a couple may seek a Covenant Marriage.
- Require couples, who choose Covenant Marriage, to commit to take all reasonable efforts to preserve their marriage, including marital counseling, if marital difficulties arise.
- Give the option to a judge of requiring parties to a divorce to complete counseling.

Need for S.B. 172:

- Though Indiana does not report annual divorce numbers, if we are near the national average, approximately 25,000 divorces will occur within Indiana in 2006.
- Research indicates each divorce costs Hoosier families and government just under \$50,000, so the 25,000 divorces annually robs our economy of approximately \$1.25 billion.<sup>1</sup>
- Research has consistently shown that divorce increases the economic vulnerability of both children and mothers.
- In addition to the physical, emotional, psychological, and financial toll of divorce on families, it also costs the taxpayers dearly through the increased need for government programs such as: child support enforcement, Medicaid, food stamps, foster care, criminal justice programs, drug abuse, drop-out prevention, etc.
- Research has shown that marriage counseling increases the chances that couples will create and maintain lasting marriages.

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<sup>1</sup> David Schramm, *Individual and Social Costs of Divorce in Utah*, 27 J. FAM. ECON. ISSUES 133, 146 (2006)

## Questions and Answers

**Q: Even in the states that have Covenant Marriage, it isn't being utilized. Why pass it if it won't be used?**

A:

1. Covenant Marriage is optional. It will take time to educate citizens on what it is and why they should choose it. However, there are organizations and communities of faith in Indiana who are ready and waiting to spread the word.
2. Even if only a few hundred marriages are saved each year due to Covenant Marriage, it will save the state millions due to increased services and related costs that occur as a result of the breakdown of the family. This does not even include the economic, emotional, mental and physical ill effects divorce has on each family unit.
3. The States that have Covenant Marriage are not yet accurately measuring the number of couples choosing this option or promoting it properly. Polling shows that a majority of Louisiana citizens did not even know what Covenant Marriage was. However, of those who did, a majority believe Covenant Marriage would “strengthen family life, be better for children and make marriages last longer.”<sup>2</sup>

**Q: Isn't Covenant Marriage really for people who would get pre-marital counseling anyway?**

A:

Steven Nock (Professor at the University of Virginia) found this in his study of Covenant Marriage couples in Louisiana:

“Our work also identified some marriages in which the husband or wife was interested in a standard marriage (or indifferent about the type) who acceded to the wishes of the other for a covenant marriage. In such cases, it is possible, even likely, that premarital counseling was obtained when it might not have been otherwise. Given our findings about the positive effect of such counseling, these marriages were probably strengthened by the legal requirement.”<sup>3</sup>

**Q: How do we know this is the right approach to saving marriages?**

A:

Linda Waite, a professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago, surveyed 3,500 couples whose marriages were in trouble. Of people who rated their

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<sup>2</sup> Nock, Stephen L., Laura Ann Sanchez, and James D. Wright; (in press) *Covenant Marriage and the Marriage Movement: Religion, Divorce, and Public Policy* (Rutgers University Press) 56.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 168.

marriages in 1987 as very unhappy, but did not divorce, 70 percent said five years later that their marriages were either “very” or “quite” happy.

**Q: Does marriage education really affect the likelihood of divorce?**

A:

Though more research is need to find out exactly how positive the long-term results are, given the research, the mainstream position is that marriage education strengthens marriage and reduces divorce.

Here are but a few examples of the research:

1. *Marriage in Utah: 2003 Baseline Statewide Survey on Marriage and Divorce*. (2003).
2. Jason S. Carroll & William J. Doherty. (2003). Evaluating the effectiveness of premarital prevention programs: A meta-analytic review of outcome research. *Family Relations*, 52, 105-118.
3. M. Robin Dion & Alan J. Hawkins. Federal policy efforts to improve outcomes among disadvantaged families by supporting marriage and family stability. In D. R. Crane (Ed.), *Handbook of Families and Poverty*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
4. Nock, Stephen L., Laura Ann Sanchez, and James D. Wright; *Covenant Marriage and the Marriage Movement: Religion, Divorce, and Public Policy* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2007).
5. Paul James Birch, Stan E. Weed, & Joseph Olsen. (2004). Assessing the impact of community marriage policies on county divorce rates. *Family Relations*, 53, 495–503.
6. Benjamin R. Karney, Cynthia Wilson Garvan, & Michael S. Thomas. (2003). *Family formation in Florida: 2003 baseline survey of attitudes, beliefs, and demographics relating to marriage and family formation*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida. Table 44.
7. Scott M. Stanley, Paul R. Amato, Christine A. Johnson, & Howard J. Markman. Premarital education, marital quality, and marital stability: Findings from a large, random household survey. *Journal of Family Psychology*.

Research is showing that when couples are given time to think and seek counseling, marriages can be strengthened and divorce averted.