

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 6, 2025

The Honorable John Thune  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-230, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Thune:

As organizations dedicated to strengthening families, upholding faith, and reinforcing the cultural foundations of our nation, we write to urge that the upcoming budget reconciliation package address one of the most pressing social and economic challenges facing America today: the marriage penalties embedded in federal welfare programs.

Marriage is at the heart of strong families. Decades of research show that children do better when raised in married households, and that strong families reduce poverty, improve economic outcomes, and foster the social stability necessary for a thriving nation. Yet too many federal means-tested programs actively discourage marriage, penalizing the very values our country should be encouraging. In certain cases, these penalties can amount to as much as \$27,727, making marriage financially irrational for many families.<sup>1</sup>

In 2021, you and 35 of your Senate colleagues wrote a letter regarding marriage penalties stating that “Federal policy should be designed to foster strong marriages, which are the foundation of strong families and strong communities.”<sup>2</sup> You went on to affirm that “We believe that marriage is a vital social good. It is misguided and unfair for the government to build bigger barriers for couples to marry.”<sup>3</sup> We share this conviction and believe the time has come to align reconciliation policy with those principles.

The reconciliation process provides a rare opportunity to enact meaningful reforms. We urge you to ensure that this package includes provisions to:

- Review and adjust eligibility and benefit phase-outs to reward work and support marriage.
- Streamline duplicative programs and eliminate counterproductive spending.
- Increase transparency and accountability to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Rector, “Understanding Marriage Penalties in Welfare and Their Impact on Society,” (Feb. 11, 2025). <https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Rector-Written-Testimony.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> “GOP Senators: Reconciliation Bill Would Cause Marriage Penalties” (Sep. 30, 2021). <https://www.taxnotes.com/research/federal/legislative-documents/congressional-tax-correspondence/gop-senators-reconciliation-bill-would-cause-marriage-penalties/79h2b>

<sup>3</sup> Id.

- Advance reforms that restore marriage, self-reliance, and family stability as guiding principles of federal social policy.

Polling shows that this issue has broad support across the country as 82 percent of Americans agree the welfare system should not penalize parents for marrying.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, marriage penalties drive up long-term welfare costs by discouraging self-sufficiency and trapping families in dependency, undermining both fiscal responsibility and family stability.

For decades, federal policy has eroded the very institutions of faith and family that sustain our culture and our republic. We believe reconciliation should not only meet fiscal objectives but also serve as a vehicle to restore these enduring principles. To make America great again, we must also make families great again.

We appreciate your leadership and respectfully request that you prioritize addressing marriage penalties in any forthcoming reconciliation package. Doing so will strengthen families, rebuild our workforce, and ensure that our nation’s policies reflect the values that have long defined the American way of life.

Sincerely,

Terry Schilling  
President  
American Principles Project

Tiffany Justice  
Executive Vice President  
Heritage Action

Donald T. Eason  
President  
Center for Urban Renewal and Education  
(CURE)

Advancing American Freedom

AdvanceUSA

Faith and Liberty in the Nation's Capital

Melissa Ortiz  
Founder  
Capability Consulting

Penny Nance  
CEO & President  
Concerned Women for America Legislative  
Action Committee

Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of  
the Southern Baptist Convention

Coalition for Jewish Values

Eagle Forum

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Rector, “Understanding Marriage Penalties in Welfare and Their Impact on Society,” (Feb. 11, 2025). <https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Rector-Written-Testimony.pdf>

Family Policy Alliance

Students for Life Action

Faith and Freedom Coalition

Independent Women's Forum

Family Watch International

Brad Wilcox

Jamie Bryan Hall