The family is the most basic of human institutions. Government should recognize and protect the family as an essential expression of its responsibility to uphold a just society.

The family has its own complex identity as a community of covenant love and trust, binding mother, father, and children. The family is not primarily a means to other ends, whether economic, political, or cultural.

The family bond holds for the lifetime of its members and reaches back to grandparents, ahead to grandchildren, and out to aunts, uncles, and cousins.

The family should be recognized in public law as an institution in its own right, for it is not reducible to the individual persons who make it up and should not be treated in law as an organization created by contracting individuals. While individual persons should also be recognized as having rights under the law, the civil rights of individuals are not the source of the family bond, and civil-rights law should not be used to trump the identity and rights of the family.

Government’s policies should aim to uphold the integrity and social viability of families, which do not exist in a social, economic, or political vacuum. Public policy should, therefore, take carefully into account the ways that other institutions and the dynamics of society impact families positively and negatively from the earliest stages of family formation on through to the last stages of elder care.

Government’s support of families may include programs to strengthen marriage both at the premarital stage and after entrance into marriage. For couples with children, this may entail enforcement of stricter conditions for, and settlements of, divorce.

Public support of families during childbearing and childrearing periods should be of particular concern. That support may include provisions such as income-tax deductions for dependents, access to adequate health care, opportunities for work leaves by mother and father, and financial support for children’s education even into the post-secondary phase.

While government’s protections and supports, such as those just mentioned, should be directed toward the well-being of families as such, it is also important to consider the extended fruits of healthy family life. Healthy families help nurture future citizens, prepare future employers and employees, decrease public costs resulting from fragmented families, and build up strong social and cultural capital.
Implications
1. Public support for education should involve serious consideration of support at the preschool level, given growing evidence of the benefits of early education. From the Center’s point of view, such a change should be built on fundamental reform of education policy, enabling parents to choose from among independent and government-run schools without financial discrimination. (See also the Center’s Guideline on Education.)

More implications to come.

For Further Reading


For more information, search on this topic at www.cpjustice.org.

Published by the Center for Public Justice, the Guidelines for Government and Citizenship are papers that:
- Address the nature of political community, the task of government, and the responsibility of citizens.
- Illustrate how the Center’s philosophy expresses itself when applied to a number of key policy areas.