

# Study: Divorce costs U.S. \$112 billion a year

By Nisa Islam Muhammad  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing have become so commonplace in the Black community that when you ask someone what the real cost of family fragmentation is the answer is a mother lode of emotions from pain and frustration to bravado, "I can do bad by myself."

The Institute of American Values says the economics of divorce cost taxpayers a staggering \$112 billion annually. The group released a study, "The Taxpayer Costs of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing: First Ever Estimates for the Nation and All 50 States," April 15 at the National Press Club.

"This study documents for the first time, that divorce and unwed childbearing—

besides being bad for children—are also costing taxpayers a ton of money," said David Blackenhorn, president of the Institute of American Values. "Even a small improvement in the health of marriage in America would result in enormous savings to taxpayers," he continued.

"For example, a one percent reduction of family fragmentation would save taxpayers \$1.1 billion."

What about the children? Ask 14-year-old Michael Thomas what he wants for Christmas, his birthday, for getting good grades or just because and the answer is always the same. "I want my parents back together," he told the *Final Call*.

"I didn't ask for this divorce but I'm the one who has to suffer. Here, then go to my dad's house then back at my mom's. They fuss and

argue about me. I don't like it."

Those words are symbolic of countless children who live a divided life when their parents divorce or never marry at all.

"The cost of my divorce is my child's sanity. He wants an end to the madness. I want one thing for him, his mother wants another. Instead of working with me for our child's betterment, she works against me for his detriment," said Michael's dad, Chuck Thomas.

"His education has suffered. He's not doing well in school. He's at the age where he needs a man, not just any man, but his father to give him the guidance of how to be a Black man in this world. The cost of divorce is too high to measure, not that many zeros."

According to the report,

more than a third of all U.S. children are born outside of wedlock, including 25 percent of non-Hispanic White babies, 46 percent of Hispanic babies and 69 percent of Black babies.

The report explains that the potential risks to children raised in fragmented families include poverty, mental illness, physical illness, infant mortality, lower educational attainment, juvenile delinquency, conduct disorders, adult criminality and early unwed parenthood.

These risks lead to increased government spending, according to researchers.

"These costs are due to increased taxpayer expenditures for anti-poverty, criminal justice and education programs, and through lower levels of taxes paid by individuals whose adult productivity has been negatively affected by increased childhood poverty caused by family fragmentation," said principal investigator Ben Scafidi, Ph.D., economics professor at Georgia College & State University.

"Prior research shows that marriage lifts single mothers

out of poverty and, therefore, reduces the need for costly social benefits," said Dr. Scafidi. "This new report shows that public concern about the decline of marriage need not be based only on 'moral' concerns, but that reducing high taxpayer costs of family fragmentation is a legitimate concern of government, policymakers and legislators, as well as community reformers and faith communities."

Some economists are not totally convinced that more marriages are the answer.

"I have nothing against marriage—relationship-building is great," Tim Smeeding, an economics professor at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University told Associated Press.

"But alone it's not going to do the job. A full employment economy would probably be the best thing—decent, stable jobs. A high number of African-American men have been in prison—that limits their future earning potential and makes them bad marriage partners, regardless of what kind of person they are."

Dr. Rozario Slack, director of Marriage, Fathering and Family Initiatives at First Things First, a non-profit organization in Chattanooga, Tenn., dedicated to strengthening families, sees more than dollar figures in the study.

"These are the economic costs, but they don't come close to the immeasurable costs that people experience daily. The study puts into numbers what businesses and policy makers need to know. However, the cost of human capital is beyond a dollar figure," he told the *Final Call*.

"Do we really need another report? Don't we have enough now to start doing something about this problem?" asks Dr. Slack, who is also pastor of Temple of Faith Deliverance Church of God in Christ.

"We keep figuring more ways to say the same things. I understand this is necessary, but how many more fatherless children do we have to sacrifice before we alleviate unwed and uncommitted parenting?"

Nisa Islam Muhammad writes for the *Final Call*.

## Philly

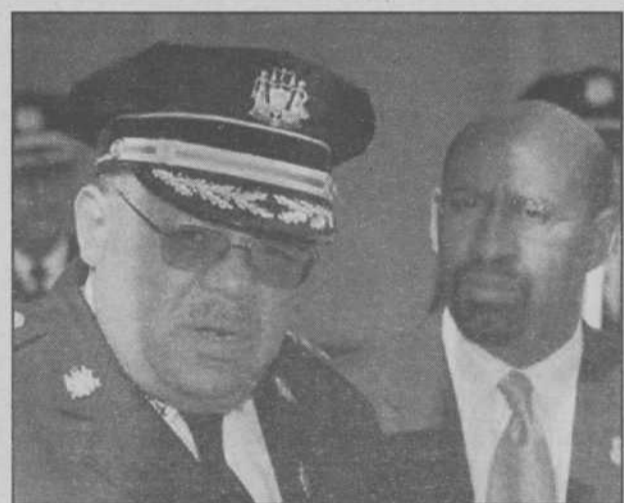
(Continued from Page 3)  
tent of any injuries on the other two men.

Perrine also said he did not know what preceded the traffic stop but called the actions seen on the tape unjustified.

"It clearly shows a lack of any reasonable investigation before these police yank these individuals out of the car and take turns delivering blows," he said.

"This is a time for a thorough investigation to see what it is that happened here."

A court official said late Tuesday that the men had been charged with criminal conspiracy, aggravated assault, simple



Philadelphia Police Commissioner Charles H. Ramsey, left, and Mayor Michael Nutter, right, answer questions at a news briefing Wednesday in Philadelphia regarding the allegations of police brutality during the controversial arrest of three shooting suspects that was videotaped by a local news helicopter two days prior.

assault and reckless endangering. Bail was set for two of the men, while the third was awaiting arraignment.

## Saggin'

(Continued from Page 4)  
in the rap community.

Dewayne Brown a rapper also known as Dooney Da' Priest, is part of the campaign urging young people to improve their appearance.

Dooney created a song telling those young men to stop the saggin' and appropriately entitled the piece, "Pull Your Pants Up."

Along with the song, the rapper can also be seen on a billboard in that area pointing his finger with the backdrop of the city behind him.

In reference to the law being passed, Caraway explains that he believes that other cities and states alike should follow suit after the Dallas and Forts Worth Metroplex area and organize their own PR campaign rather than trying to pass laws.

He doesn't believe that this should be a legal issue but rather a moral one pertaining

to indecent exposure.

Maryland Resident, DeVon Baker feels strongly that the way people wear their clothing is a First Amendment right. Therefore he opposes laws against it.

He said, "I feel that it is so wrong. It's freedom of expression. If you can't express yourself, then what can you do?"

The 27 year old explains that sometimes it feels more comfortable for him to wear his pants low.

He explained, "My pants sag down some because my belt messes with my hip sometimes."

Either morally or otherwise, DeVon doesn't understand why his fashion should be of anyone's concern.

"Why should someone care how you wear your pants?" He continues, "I would tell them [spectators] to mind their business and stop looking at my underwear."

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