

Limiting abortion, sex ed will increase state deficit

By Richard T. Hull
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Florida's new Legislature and the new governor are conservative on major social issues. Ironically, the positions they will take on issues such as sex education and a female's right to choose not to be pregnant clash with the factors that lead to the lowest pregnancy rate for teens since teenage pregnancy rates began to be recorded. From a high in 1957 of 96 births per thousand, the rate this year has tumbled to 39 per thousand.

Another striking statistic is that 16 years after Roe v. Wade, the U.S. Supreme Court's decision that legalized abortion through the second trimester, the crime rate plummeted, and has stayed comparatively low since. The conclusion seems clear: Wanted children make good citizens; unwanted ones don't.

The economic benefits for the reduction of unwanted children are enormous. A child placed in foster care in Florida costs the taxpayer between \$369 and \$455 per month. In Novem-

ber 2009, the number of Florida children in foster care was 19,229. At an average of \$412 per month, the state paid roughly \$95 million for each of the two years on average these children were in foster care.

Florida has an outstanding rate of placement for foster children with adoptive families, but while that success rate is beneficial to the children in the state's care, there are no significant cost reductions. The annual state contribution of about \$5,000 per adopted child continues through age 18, at which time they are entitled to college tuition and support payments until they are in their early 20s. Simply put, the state pays tens of millions of dollars a year to care for children whose parents are unable or unwilling to care for them.

Unwed teenage mothers are the most likely to have unwanted children, and the state's financial burden in caring for these children is great. On the one hand, the state will pay directly for the support of these children, especially if the mother is not working.

The data suggest that unwanted children, whether born in or out of wedlock, have an increased probability of entering the criminal justice system. The cost in Florida per prisoner per day is just under \$72, or \$26,280 per year.

The cost of the subsidy is nearly twice what it is for children in foster care (\$10,000 vs. \$5,000 per year). On the other hand, if the mother is working, the state is going to end up paying a day-care subsidy, which averages \$370 to \$455 per month. The unwed teenage mother, often not having completed her education, will toil at low paying jobs from which she will be barely able to support herself, let alone a child. So, the state must step in to take up the slack.

The data suggest that unwanted children, whether born in or out of wedlock, have an increased probability of entering the criminal justice system. The cost in Florida per prisoner per day is just under \$72, or \$26,280 per year. Since there are now about 100,000 individuals in Florida prisons and jails, the annual cost

is about \$2.6 trillion in tax dollars. With the cost of unwanted children so high, why would our legislators and the governor think of limiting a woman's reproductive freedom? What reasons are there for wanting to declare the fetus a person with a right to life?

Legislators use verses from various religious texts to justify the classification of the fetus as a person. They are using religion to justify limiting a woman's right to choose. This violates the Constitutional guarantees against laws that seek to establish official religions. Acknowledging fetal personhood should be based on secular medical science.

The "moment" of fertilization is a fiction. The fertilization process can take as much as a full day. Penetration of the egg by a sperm initiates changes in the chromo-

somes of the egg that must be completed before the genetic material from sperm and egg can unite. The complete process to create an individual can take up to 16 days.

While at this point we have what could be called an individual human being, many developmental steps must occur before regarding it as a person with rights defensible by law. Medical science has established that learning and preference conditioning begin around the end of the second trimester. Our capacity to learn and to form preferences and plans is ultimately what secures our rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Florida's legislators and governor need to embrace the great financial savings that come with children being wanted and born into loving families without fearing that respecting women's right to choose will result in the violation of fetuses' rights to life.

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