

COMMENTARY

Time to reform divorce laws

By Beverly Willett

No-fault divorce has been a disaster. Touted as the antidote to the animosity and high cost of family court litigation, it's been anything but. Divorce rates remain at nearly twice their pre-no-fault levels, while marriage rates have plummeted to a record low. Family court litigation is still contentious, and divorce mills line the pockets of family law practitioners. This trend has produced a bumper crop of American families worse off economically, physically, and emotionally than their predecessors.

In short, we need divorce reform. The goal of reform is to reduce unnecessary divorce among those with minor children. By slowing the process, educating couples about the harmful effects of divorce, and providing skills to help them improve their relationships, reform could save marriages and ensure that more children grow up in two-parent families. Even if couples don't reconcile, reform could defuse tempers. It would also restore some balance to the process. No-fault sides with the party who wants out. Reform would give some support to the party who wants to stay married.

I'm a liberal Democrat from New York who, several years ago, co-founded the bipartisan Coalition for Divorce Reform (CDR). The scholars, married citizens, lawyers, and concerned citizens involved span the spectrum from left to right. Our supporters are divided on many social issues, but what unites us is our deep concern about the well-being of our nation's families.

After 4½ decades of no-fault divorce, the research is solid: Most divorces involve low-conflict marriages, and waiting periods generally correlate to lower divorce rates. Children of divorce, including those

of so-called "good divorces," generally fare worse than children of parents from intact families, including those in mediocres or unhappy low-conflict marriages. Children of divorce are more likely to experience poverty, struggle with drug and alcohol abuse, suffer depression and diminished educational attainments, become teen mothers, commit suicide, and die earlier than their peers from intact families. Marriage, however, protects the health and well-being of children on every important indicator.

Acceptance of these facts may not feel good, but it's time to stop letting what feels good dictate our laws and policies.

No return to grounds-based divorce (even a reformed grounds-based divorce) would ban divorce. The majority of the proposals are modest in scope, retain no-fault divorce, and merely extend the waiting period and require couples to attend counseling or other marriage education classes before rushing to sever their families.

With so much at stake, is a little patience and a four-hour class such an indignity?

Can anyone predict with certainty that one child or the next will commit suicide or that the culprit if they do is traceable directly to divorce? Of course not. So it is with social science research upon which our laws and policies are enacted daily. But can we afford to keep gambling with our children's futures?

Divorce reform does not seek to roll back the clock. To the contrary, advocates take protection for spouses and children seriously; it's why the CDR specifically calls for retaining protection for domestic-violence victims. Moreover, two-thirds of all divorces involve low-conflict marriages. And research demonstrates that women are far more likely to be abused by their cohabitating boy-

friends than their husbands.

Granted, more than a purely legal fix is required. During the last four decades, there have been fundamental shifts in society, some good, some not so good. Cultural tentacles, too, have contributed to the demise of marriage — the stigmatization of unwed childbearing and adultery, the advancement of "soulmate philosophy" as the best foundation for relationships, and the growth of hyper-individualism, and our happiness-obsessed society, the trend toward disposability in our personal dealings and exchanges, the elevation of form (political correctness) over substance, and so on.

Any conversation about marriage must include the cultural influences that can best shore it up. In short, law and culture must work hand in hand. But one function of law is to remind us of what we value in a culture, and our current divorce laws remind us that marriage is not very high on the list.

We can't let fear stop the conversation. The columnist Megan McArdle contends, "When you make it harder to exit, you also make people reluctant to enter." Really? Is that why, before no-fault divorce, 72 percent of adults were married, while that rate is just shy of 50 percent today?

Happy, healthy marriages and families should be on everyone's agenda, and that means we need to talk about divorce reform. One of America's leading politicians has wisely stated: "Divorce has become too easy because of our permissive laws and attitudes. ... Divorce should be much harder [because] children are involved [because] we know that children bear the brunt of failed marriages."

Who said that? Hillary Clinton.

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Team up with schools for arts education

By Joe Neubauer and Deirdre Connelly

Painting involves chemistry. Sculpture requires an understanding of geometry, gravity, and — in the case of the human form as subject — anatomy. Music is math brought to life. Why then, do we sometimes view arts education as less than essential to developing well-rounded students?

A solid education in the arts helps children learn how to debate, exchange ideas of seeing, thinking, and perceiving the world around them. We need more inquisitive and creative minds in the workforce. We want multidimensional thinkers pursuing careers in public service. That's why investing in arts education is more than a "nice to have" — it is critical.

Research indicates that learning through the arts has positive effects on learning in other areas. For example, multiple years of enrollment in arts courses are positively correlated with higher SAT verbal and math scores. Kids who are more inspired to learn through the arts are more likely to stay in school. These same children are more likely to grow up to be suc-



DARRYL W. MORAN

cessful in companies like ours and to be leaders in our communities.

Now that the Barnes Foundation is on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, it can welcome students and teachers at every grade level into its extraordinary new space. Since 2012, the Barnes has engaged in robust local outreach that includes onsite student programs and visits to schools, all tied to a STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) curriculum. With arts funding at risk across our city, and indeed the nation, the Barnes Foundation smART Fund for Education, established by GlaxoSmith-Kline, will help endow support for these efforts going forward.

GSK's mission is to help people

do more, feel better, and live longer. To achieve this, the company must go beyond the business of medicines. Health begins where we live, learn, work, and play, and our schools play a key role in health. In fact, the more educated a person has, the healthier he is likely to be. For children, the more engaging the educational experience, the more they will want to learn, and continue to learn across a lifetime.

That's why GSK has established this endowment to support K-8 arts education for economically disadvantaged youths in Philadelphia. And we hope other like-minded individuals, foundations, and corporations will help.

There are few things more gratifying than to see a child experience beauty and complexity, and to watch her learn and grow from the experience. This endowment will help ensure that many more children will have that chance. Let's paint brighter futures for those most in need.

Joe Neubauer is chairman of the board of trustees of the Barnes Foundation. Deirdre Connelly is director of North America pharmaceuticals, GSK. For more information, visit <http://www.barnes-foundation.org/education/k-12/outreach>.

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Lower speeds aren't high-tech

Of all the ways Roosevelt Boulevard could be made safer, a cynic might guess that officials would fixate on the one that promises substantial government revenues and contracts. Hence the push for legislation to allow the state's first speed-enforcement cameras on the deadly dozen thoroughfares. The cameras, which automatically photograph speeders so they can be cited by mail, could well help tame the boulevard if their implementation avoids a host of potential pitfalls. But so could a number of low-tech, low-cost, and already-legal safety improvements.



A memorial to a woman who was killed on Roosevelt Boulevard last summer. DAVID MAIALETTI / Staff

EDITORIAL
Cameras could help make Roosevelt Boulevard safer, but so could many simpler improvements.

Roosevelt Boulevard has drawn renewed attention since a suspected drag racer killed 28-year-old Samara Banks and three of her sons as they tried to cross its broad swaths of asphalt last summer. The family's fate was only a particularly horrific example of the street's dangers. More than 20 pedestrians have been killed on the boulevard over the past five years, and more than 130 have been struck.

But speed cameras could "dramatically change the driving culture" on the boulevard, Philadelphia Police Com-

missioner Charles Ramsey told a state Senate committee this week. Sen. Mike Stack (D., Phila.) is backing legislation to allow the cameras there and possibly elsewhere in the city and state.

Speed cameras have been widely used in Britain and Australia, as well as in U.S. cities such as Washington. Research shows they can indeed reduce average speeds, and therefore prevent injuries and deaths, if they're deployed with the proper emphasis on safety rather than revenue generation.

However, New York officials have managed to dramatically reduce the pedestrian death toll on Queens Boulevard, a similarly dangerous super-streeter traversing dense urban neighborhoods, with improvements such as fencing and signs to discourage jaywalking, highly visible crosswalks, retimed traffic lights, and reduced traffic distances. Philadelphia officials haven't begun to exhaust the simpler safety measures that are well within their existing powers.

Adoptees' rights

St. Paul wrote of adulthood as a time to "put away childish things," look in the mirror, and "know fully, even as I am fully known." But today many adult adoptees remain barred by outmoded rules from learning the most basic details of their own beginnings.

Fortunately, opening the door to such knowledge won't require divine inspiration. In New Jersey, a single signature will do. Indeed, Gov. Christie should sign an adoption records access bill before him now.

The measure strikes the right balance: It enables adoptees to explore their pasts but preserves birth parents' right to privacy, despite evidence that most won't insist on remaining anonymous.

The legislation has wide public support, and critics' claims that it will encourage abortion have not been substantiated. By signing the bill, Christie could further a fundamental conservative goal of minimizing government interference in the lives of families, both adoptive and natural.

YOUR LETTERS

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 150-word limit. Writers must include home address and day and evening phone number.



An investigator looks over the car driven by a pizza deliveryman shot and wounded by Philadelphia officers. JOSEPH KACZMAREK / For The Inquirer

Look, can't touch

While marketers "wallowed in luxury" at a Philadelphia University fashion business seminar last week, the security officers who keep students safe wallowed in grim poverty ("Looking at luxury," April 16). Those underpaid security officers will never own Gucci. In fact, they may not be able to put food on the table. As more people transition from middle class to working poor, it is becoming harder to afford any goods, luxury or not. The business world understands this and has shifted marketing from soccer moms to yacht enthusiasts. Sadly, on display at Philadelphia University — in addition to expensive Italian leather — was growing inequality.

Daisy Cruz, SEIU Local 32BJ, Philadelphia

when our public servants use 60 years worth of proven, effective engineering solutions on dangerous highways like Roosevelt Boulevard. The stealth tax of photo radar will make things worse. Drivers

need to let elected officials know in no uncertain terms that photo traffic enforcement must be banned.

Tom McCarey, Berwyn, tom_mccarey@yahoo.com

Higher standards

As for team owner Joshua Harris' claim of a successful 76ers season, fleeing fans to watch a 19-win team might be a success in New York. Here, not so much ("Sixers owner ties a nice bow on a 19-win season," April 19).

Roy Lehman, Woolwich Township

Lonegan's example

Republican congressional candidate Steve Lonegan just made his tax returns available, and his opponent, Tom MacArthur, should join Lonegan in setting a tone of openness, transparency, and honesty in this campaign.

Elaine Billmeyer, Shamong

Bookworms needed

Clark DeLeon should give his students assignments that would require them to visit a library ("Cultural divide between teacher/pupils," April 20). They would meet library professionals trained to teach them how to use electronic as well as print resources, and to distinguish good information from bad. Libraries have always served as education centers, and they appear to be needed now more than ever.

Bill Fanshel, Bryn Mawr, wfanshel@hotmail.com

Pro forma policing

As an attorney, I can save Inquirer reporters a lot of time on follow-up stories to the latest shooting of a civilian by Philadelphia police ("Questions in city police shooting of pizza driver," April 24). First, the officers will be cleared by the Police Department's Internal Affairs Bureau. Next, a federal civil rights lawsuit will be filed. Then the case will be thrown out based on the concept of qualified immunity — providing the officers are prepped to testify in their depositions that they "were in reasonable fear of sustaining bodily injury" as the reason for firing 14 shots at Philippe Holland. Save this for the next shooting, and reprint it then.

James Famiglio, Broomall, jamief639@comcast.net

Money traps

It's fitting that the proposed speed cameras were featured on the business pages, since the technology exists solely to make money for politicians, camera companies, and auto insurers ("Cameras urged for Roosevelt Boulevard," April 22). It's not for safety, because photo traffic enforcement makes highways more dangerous, causing crashes, injury, and death. The goal of safer roads will be met only



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