



AMERICAN PRINCIPLES PROJECT

January 6, 2026

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson:

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.¹

During your tenure as Chairman of the Republican Study Committee, you called for the elimination of marriage penalties, stating that “these policies encourage broken families, exacerbating the cycle of poverty.”² You also rightly observed that “marriage penalties represent another instance where the tax code has been distorted to treat similar individuals disparately in order to extract more revenue from the American people.”³ We are encouraged by your recognition of this harm and believe that now is the time to act on it.

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.

¹ 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>

² Republican Study Committee, “Preserving American Freedom: Liberty. Opportunity. Security.,” (May 1, 2019), https://mikejohnson.house.gov/uploadedfiles/preserving_american_freedom.pdf.

³ Id.

- Streamline duplicative programs and eliminate counterproductive spending.
- Increase transparency and accountability to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse.
- 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.⁴ 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

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

⁴ 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>

Faith and Liberty in the Nation's Capital

Family Policy Alliance

Faith and Freedom Coalition

Family Watch International

Jamie Bryan Hall

Eagle Forum

Students for Life Action

Independent Women's Forum

Brad Wilcox