

1. Your name and district number:

Marci Blaze, State House District 23

2. The overall goals of welfare reform are to move people from welfare to work, reduce the incidence of teen pregnancy and encourage healthy marriages and family formation. TANF allows funds to be spent for marriage and couple relationship education, responsible fatherhood programs, financial education, and parenting programs. What benefits do you see for allocating 1-2% of the TANF budget in New Mexico for services to strengthen families?

This may already be happening. In FY 2011, New Mexico spent \$7 million out of \$216 million in TANF funds on “Two-Parent Family Formation and Maintenance.” New Mexico has also provided training on parenting skills. I believe strengthening families can increase relationship skills for parents and the well-being of their children.

3. Research has consistently shown that the social, educational, health and economic outcomes of children in healthy, two-parent families are better than those living in single-parent households. New Mexico has among the highest rates in the nation for teen pregnancies, school drop-outs, juvenile crimes and women and children living in poverty. New Mexico spends \$225 million every year dealing with the outcomes of families in crisis. If you are elected, what would you do to strengthen families?

Shaping family policy in New Mexico will require bipartisan solutions. Families are suffering from economic strains and need more support, such as paid parental leave after childbirth, affordable child care for working parents, universal early childhood education, and education and job skills training. Government also needs to incentivize the formation and maintenance of two-parent families, through fiscal tools such as earned income tax credits and wage subsidies.

4. The percentage of children in poverty in New Mexico is 26% higher than the national average. There are many factors contributing to this phenomenon including the fact that 45% of infants in New Mexico are born to teen parents. If you are elected, how would you reduce the number of teen pregnancies in New Mexico?

We need to facilitate better education for young people and their parents. Contraceptives need to be accessible, affordable, and effective for teens. Our culture of personal responsibility needs to be strengthened. All of our efforts must be evidence-based, based on accurate information, and attuned to the developmental needs of teens.

5. Studies show that couple relationship education (e.g., conflict resolution, communication skills, understanding of gender differences, etc.) results in happier and healthier marriages. What programs and services are available to couples and families in your district?

In Bernalillo and Sandoval Counties, we have psychologists, counselors, educators, social workers, therapists, psychiatrists, clergy, policy makers, social scientists, attorneys, judges, and lay persons providing relationship education. For the last several years, the HHS “Healthy Marriage Initiative” has funded relationship education at the community level for individuals who are low income, seeking job training and placement, or are receiving cash, food, or health benefits.

6. How can the NM Coalition for Healthy Families help you strengthen families in New Mexico?

After I am elected, I would like NMCHF to brief me on key indicators and policy proposals. They can conduct research and marshal evidence to demonstrate which family policies been successful in other states with similar populations and are therefore most likely to strengthen families in New Mexico. I can then work on securing passage of the best proposals as legislation.

7. Do you have any additional ideas or comments regarding New Mexico's families?

You and I likely agree on the challenges facing New Mexico's families, especially when we rank so poorly in the nation in terms of child well-being. I would like to see new ideas for communicating the urgency of this situation to our citizens and policy makers.