



Louisiana Commission on Marriage and Family
MINUTES OF MEETING
February 5, 2013
State Capitol, Senate Committee Room A

I. CALL TO ORDER

Senator Broome called the meeting to order at 10:39AM

II. ROLL CALL

The roll was called with the following results:

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Broome
Neil Bernard
Deanne Bingham
Heather Doss
Cordelia Heaney
Rep. Frank Hoffman
Juan Huertas
Audrey Pugh
Linda Ruffin (John White)
Tiffany Simpson
Lydia Scales (Lisa Andry)

MEMBERS ABSENT

Gordon Atwell
A. G. Crowe
Penny Dastugue
Wayne DuBose
David Helveston
Fred Lowery
Gene Mills
Sue Morrill
Tony Perkins
Fred Selby
Katherine Spaht
Dorothy Wallis

OTHERS PRESENT

Jenny Valois of LWC

III. NEW BUSINESS

Sen. Sharon Broome opened the meeting at 10:39. She introduced speaker, Mike McManus of Marriage Savers, a nationally recognized author and columnist on marriage, ethics and religion. He worked with Gene Mills in Louisiana in three cities years ago and the divorce rate dropped by 30% in Shreveport, Bossier City and 6% in Baton Rouge.

He is trying to get the divorce law changed in Louisiana.

When No Fault Divorce came into law the divorce rate increased.

The state needs to deal with cohabitation. According to Mr. McManus, cohabitation is government subsidized. 53.65 of births in Louisiana are to unwed couples, most of whom are cohabitating.

The mother and child receive government assistance until the child reaches the age of 18.

We should subsidize marriage instead said Mr. McManus.

He would like to teach America how to do marriage better.

Louisiana has a covenant marriage law.

The divorce law requires couples to live apart a whole year.

Most states don't have a waiting period for divorce. In France or Britain, if the wife does not want a divorce, the couple can't divorce.

Mr. McManus helps couples prepare for marriage, strengthen marriages and provides help for troubled marriages. There is a need for cohabitation reform.

In recent years, the number of divorces has tripled. It varies by state. Louisiana's marriage rate is coming down. The children of divorced couples are more likely to have a child out of wedlock.

Mr. McManus predicts the cost per divorce is \$25,000 - costing the state millions of dollars. 19,000 were divorced in 2009.

To reverse these trends, Mr. McManus suggests that the Marriage Commission consider getting involved with new strategies. One is Community Marriage Policies to make marriage a priority. Pastors in his home state of Maryland are involved with intervention and churches providing premarital mentoring. A list of 150 questions has been compiled for couples. As an example, the couple is not to spend over \$100 without consulting each other. Where these groups have adopted his Community Marriage Policies, there has been a drop in the divorce rate by 17.5% in the last few years. It is working in Detroit, Michigan and El Paso, TX. The crime rate has also dropped in El Paso. Mr. McManus credits it to the fact that families are kept intact. The organizations have a track record. Volunteers in churches are doing the work. There is a 1/3 lower divorce rate than cities without Community Marriage Policies.

The marriage rate has plunged and the divorce rate has more than doubled. Ronald Reagan was governor in California in 1969 and signed No Fault Divorce into Law. New York, New Jersey and other states quickly signed it into law around the country. Mr. McManus believes no fault divorce is unjust and immoral. Divorced women live four years less, a divorced man lives 10 years less and a child of divorced parents lives five years less.

Chief Justice John Marshall questioned if an annulled marriage was constitutional. In Louisiana, if a couple has a covenant marriage, they need to wait 18 months before divorcing and must seek counseling. Only 2% of marriages have a covenant marriage.

Mr. McManus proposes divorce reform. He suggests a delay of a year for the divorce to go through if there are children and add an educational component. Divorce has an impact on children.

Twenty-five states require no waiting time. Twenty states only require 90 to 180 days for a divorce to be final. There is fault based divorce where adultery or physical abuse takes place. Unilateral divorce is where one spouse doesn't want a divorce.

Mr. McManus suggests couples should be required to take classes on communication and conflict resolution to encourage reconciliation. The couple should remain under the same roof. If they separate, they date others.

Parental Divorce Reduction Act is proposed legislation.

If the couple divorces, they get 50% of family assets usually leaving the children in poverty. The state of Missouri is proposing to name a Responsible Spouse. If a wife's partner is guilty of adultery and she files for divorce, she is the responsible spouse. The wife would get benefits by receiving 70% of the family assets.

It should reduce the divorce rate by motivating the couple to work out the details.

State legislators need to be convinced and it taken to the governors of states.

There is a cohabitation crisis.

Louisiana should not just cut off benefits for two years but taper them off.

Invite church leaders to help.

It is a fact that married people earn more. Marriage is a wealth builder. Gov. Jindal started this commission. As we move forward, we will include him.

Tiffany Simpson stated that the number of divorces dropped in the last 2 years – from 57% to 43%. Mr. McManus says that Louisiana is moving in the right direction.

How do we save those marriages that are salvageable?

Mr. McManus says, "We can do better."

There are differences in other cultures. There are comparisons and a complexity of legal requirements. What can we learn from them? We need to give education.

Can we prove fault for divorce?

We need to try and preserve marriage. Instead of forcing couple to separate, allow them to stay in the household.

Louisiana does have a high domestic violence rate. If there is evidence such as pictures. Wife could file for divorce to get 70% of family assets and get custody.

Now the person who opposes the divorce has no voice.

We need to get the governor's office involved.

Missouri is starting from zero. Louisiana requires a year for a divorce.

Louisiana is poised to do something nationally historic.

Churches are marriage factories. We need to lead pastors.

A strategy is to invite churches in 2013. Then to have a legislative agenda where there is a state message by the governor with the support of a legislator.

Senator Broome adjourned the meeting at 11:30AM.