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Opening Statement of Sen. Chuck Grassley
Finance Committee Hearing on Strong Families
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Today's hearing on family formation policies highlights issues that are just as important to welfare reform as the proposed new work requirements. The President deserves high praise for his proposal to promote child well-being and healthy marriages in the welfare re-authorization. I am pleased that this committee will consider the President's ideas in this area.

It would be naive to suggest that there is a simple solution to improving and strengthening families. That said, we know with certainty that strengthening families holds great promise for children. Today's hearing deserves our close attention. Discussions about family issues can become mere ideological arguments. But in my view, child well-being should not be a political issue. Our focus should be on helping children and families, and today's hearing can help our dialogue by highlighting our common ground in this area. There may be differences of opinion about approaches, but there is an enormous body of non-partisan research that informs us about the needs of children and families. For example: Children growing up without a married mother and father are more likely to fail at school, to struggle with emotional problems, and to abuse drugs. Children from homes without a married mother and father are about twice as likely to drop out of school. Over 50 percent of these children are more likely to have a child themselves as a teenager, and 50 percent are more likely to abuse controlled substances.

While a marriage license won't guarantee a child's success in life, it does give parents an insurance policy of sorts to provide stability and opportunity for their children. Take it from someone who helped raise five children. While I can't pretend to have done even half of the hard work that it takes to raise a child, my wife Barbara and I agree the job's made easier when two grown-ups are in charge of nurturing, disciplining and providing for a family.

From my experience as a parent, I would agree with President Bush that single moms have the toughest job in the world, especially young, unwed teen-age mothers. And if the government can help young mothers afford food, transportation and child care, I see no reason why the government shouldn't reach out and help couples who are struggling to stay together. Fostering strong family relationships and encouraging families to stay together are noble causes that ought to be included in America's welfare system.

Each of today's expert witnesses illustrates the importance of the home to the health and well-being of each child. I urge my colleagues to remain open to and interested in the recommendations of the witnesses. We can and must do better than the status quo. Teen pregnancy prevention is also a key component of the welfare debate this year. The economic disadvantages that single parents face, particularly teen parents, are passed on to their children. Nearly eight out of 10

young unwed mothers end up on welfare, and 65 percent of families started by a teen mother are poor. The ideas under discussion today are deeply relevant to the welfare debate. The 1996 reform law reflected the importance of strong families, as well as to the importance of reducing out-of-wedlock and teenage births. As we re-authorize the Act, let's work together to enhance state efforts in promoting healthy marriages and reducing teen pregnancy.