

Written evidence from Mr Derek Richardson [HAB0326]

As a man who has been married for virtually 54 years, I want to express my strong opposition to giving the same legal rights to cohabiting couples as to married couples since this will devalue marriage even further and encourage cohabitation even more.

Parliament should be encouraging people to marry since marriage is the bedrock of a stable society. Recent research confirms the benefits that marriage confers on the individuals, their children and on society. Cohabitation, by its very nature, is inherently unstable. Children experiencing the separation of their parents are damaged for life. As a retired teacher of 34 years experience I have seen this in the classroom.

Edward Davies, policy director of the Centre for Social Justice wrote recently in the Spectator, "The disparity in marriage between rich and poor white families in the UK is very, very stark. In the wealthiest fifth of white families by income, 84% are married and reaping the benefits of that stability, with a further 12% cohabiting. In the poorest fifth just 19% are married with a further 9% cohabiting." So children of the wealthiest families have a 96% chance of living with two parents, whereas for children of the poorest families it's just 28%.

Since it is self-evident that marital breakdowns causes all sorts of social problems that the government has to spend billions of pounds each year trying to address, I cannot understand why it wants to encourage cohabitation which will further undermine marriage. The government will be shooting itself in the foot!

If it is true that cohabiting couples are under the impression that they have similar rights to married couples, then the government can address this with an advertising campaign. If they want to have all the legal protections of marriage then they should get married! If they are afraid of making a life-long commitment then they have the option of a civil partnership. These options are freely available to cohabitees who wish to have legal protection. There is no need whatsoever for the government to further devalue and undermine marriage.

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