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Isabel Sawhill [00:00:23] Good morning, everyone. I am Isabel Sawhill, I'm a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. And it's my honor today to kick off this event on single parents and public policy. I am particularly glad that we are having the opportunity to release a new volume today or to tell you about the release of a new volume today on this topic of single parents and public policy and in our discussions today, we're going to give special attention to the policy questions that this issue raises. But I want to emphasize that the volume is full of good research and new data done from a cross-national perspective with a group of very distinguished authors from around the globe to discuss and provide new data and new research on this issue. And the new volume, which is the, the volume of the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science is now online, and you can access it through Sage Publications. And I'm told that it should be open access for about a month now. So get in there while there, while the getting is good. Today, we will only be able to cover just some of the highlights. So, so do read the volume.

Now the editors who organized this volume and put all of this wonderful research together are all with us today. They are Janet Gornick from the City University of New York, Amanda Sheely from the London School of Economics, and Laurie Maldonado, who teaches at Molloy University and also at Columbia. You're going to hear shortly an overview of the volume from Janet. And then also you're going to hear from some of the authors about the research. And then we're going to end with a panel on policy that includes experts from, from just about everywhere who have an interest in this issue. So let me first say, before we get to the volume itself, that the volume was dedicated to the memory of Sarah McLanahan. Sarah, as most of you know, was a professor at Princeton with a long-term, distinguished career working on these issues. And I'm so happy to announce that today we have two people with us that are particularly appropriate in this context.

The first is her husband, Irv Garfinkel, also an expert in this whole area that we'll be discussing, and he will be on the last panel. And Irv, we're so glad you could come today. And

secondly, I'm equally happy and honored to tell you that Cecilia Rouse, the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors and a former colleague and friend of Sarah's at Princeton is also joining us. And she will be talking about her recollections of, of Sarah and, and Sarah's work. So without further ado, let me turn this over now to, to Cecilia Rouse. So I'm hoping she was able to join us, I haven't seen her on the zoom here, but CeCe, are you there?

Janet Gornick [00:04:36] Belle, I'm getting a signal to just jump in and CeCe can come in after me. This is Janet. All right.

Isabel Sawhill [00:04:40] So Janet Gornick is, CeCe is having some problems joining us. So we will now hear from one of the editors of the volume, Janet Gornick.

Janet Gornick [00:04:52] Thank you so much. Let me just make sure that I'm, my sound is on as it should be. And I think so. Everyone can hear me. Am I correct? Yes. Okay. Thank you so much. Thank you, Belle, for those introductions. And I'll thank Cecilia, who I know is going to come on in just a few minutes after I do. I'm really pleased to be here today to launch this ANNALS volume that we worked on for well over a year. And by we, I mean my coeditors Laurie Maldonado and Amanda Sheely, both of whom you'll see today. And also, of course, I want to acknowledge the thirty contributing authors, five of whom are also joining us today. In my time today, that would be 15 minutes, I'm going to offer three sets of remarks.

First, I'll present the framework with the volume, noting some of our starting premises and assumptions. And second, I'll offer a brief overview of the collection, which includes 11 original empirical articles divided into five sections sandwiched between an introduction and two concluding commentaries. And third, I'll turn to some conclusions reached by our editorial team. I do want to mention, as Belle just said, that we have dedicated this volume to Sarah McLanahan. I know that Cecilia Rouse, when she comes on, will say some more about Sarah's enormous impact in this field of study. I want to add that honoring Sarah had particular resonance for us, and that's because, in addition to her voluminous body of work focused on the U.S., she was one of the first scholars to study single parenting and cross-national perspective. She coauthored a pathbreaking study exactly 30 years ago, one that was based on data from the Luxembourg Income Study Database, a data source that many of us in this volume rely on for our research.

Now. Why do we care? Why should we care? To us, and I'm sure to many of you, the question hardly needs asking. Nevertheless, it's worth pausing to consider. As most of you know,

single parent families face a heightened risk of economic insufficiency. In the U.S. today, about one in three single parent families, most of which are headed by women, lives in income poverty. And for many, that income poverty is compounded by food insecurity and precarious housing. In our view, child poverty in rich countries is especially compelling because it's rooted not in scarce aggregate resources, but in distributional failures.

We began this volume with three overarching premises, all of which we have the opportunity to discuss with our contributing authors during the development of their volume. First, cross-national research extends knowledge and offers invaluable opportunities for policy lesson drawing. Although some of the articles are focused on a single country— three on the U.S. and one in the UK— seven include multiple countries with a strong focus on Europe. In our view, policy analysis in the U.S. and in other countries as well has much to gain from cross-national research, especially for U.S. analysts, one key benefit is that cross-country studies allow us to observe on the ground policy instruments and designs that don't exist in the U.S., at least not at the national level, for example, in the case of this volume, specific income transfer and taxation designs, comprehensive maternity, parental leave policies, extensive public investments in child care, approaches to guaranteed child support, as well as more extensive reliance on minimum wage settings and instruments of collective bargaining.

A second key benefit of cross-national research is that policy variation when paired with data on outcomes constitutes a sort of natural experiment, offering powerful methodological options for isolating, modeling and estimating policy effects, as evidenced by several of the studies included in the volume. Third, and importantly, historians of U.S. social policy have long argued that Americans' tendency to emphasize individual causes of economic hardship has limited our collective understanding of the potential for policies and institutions to improve outcomes. Based on our reading of this literature, we're persuaded that this stubborn focus in the U.S. on individual level drivers has deterred the development of policies and institutions that could mitigate economic hardship among families. Looking abroad turns our attention squarely to structural factors.

Second, policy details matter, and they matter a lot. It's often said about public policy that the devil is in the details, and we surely agree. The authors in this volume have overall prioritized describing, measuring and assessing policy specifics. These articles provide a goldmine of information about policy design. Several assess in detail, for example, benefit levels, payment duration, coverage, eligibility, targeting, financing and the like.

Third, our third premise, single parent families in the U.S. and abroad, are remarkably heterogeneous. It's true that in all high-income countries, the vast majority of single parents are women. The gendered nature of single parenting has long been established, and that many are in positions of economic disadvantage. Otherwise, both across and within countries, single parents and their families are remarkably diverse, as are the ways in which their family structures influence their outcomes. Single parents are in fact, heterogeneous with regard to race, ethnicity, migration status, educational attainment, partnership history, sexuality, age, family size, and labor market attachment. Single parent families are especially diverse with respect to the nature and dynamics of relationships with both non-custodial parents and extended families of all sorts. While some children do have only a single adult involved in their care throughout their childhoods, many others are raised by complex, ever changing configurations of caregiving adults. Understanding and embracing these forms of heterogeneity is, in our view, and that of many of our authors, crucial for effective policymaking; many of the articles in this collection demonstrate that claim.

Before I move on to highlight the contents, I also want to add that we deliberately focus the entire collection on high income countries. It's surely not the case that we're not interested in policies and outcomes in middle- and lower-income countries. We are. That said, relying on the academic literature on policy lesson drawing especially Richard Rose's classic book *Lesson Drawing in Public Policy: A Guide to Learning Across Time and Space*, we decided to focus the entire collection on countries at levels of economic development more or less comparable to the United States. Okay.

Let me now tell you about the volume. We three coeditors contributed an introduction and a concluding commentary, and Belle Sawhill, I'm happy to say, contributed a closing commentary. In between, our five sections with original empirical research. The first section in the collection focuses on income, income poverty, and income support policies. One focuses on ethno-racial variation within the US, vis-a-vis both the prevalence of single parent poverty and the extent to which single parenting raises the risk of poverty. The second uses a cross-national design to tackle an age-old question: are generous income transfers a disincentive to employment? The third article examines minimum income protections for employed and non-employed single parent households across Europe and the U.S. And I won't say more about these three articles because in a few minutes you're going to hear from authors of all three. The next section assesses supports that single mothers receive from nonresident fathers through channels both private and public. The first of these articles focuses on the

U.S. case, while the second, which you'll hear about today, reports a cross-country study. Together, they illuminate the complexities of child support policy design. Both find that in the U.S., payment levels are often unrealistically high, that forms of support other than cash might be more effective, and that governments could better ensure that single parent families receive child support when the nonresident parent, usually the father, is unable to provide it.

The next section includes a trio of articles. One demonstrates that single parents' economic circumstances are shaped not only by their own income, but by the income distribution in which their families are situated. And it concludes that policy interventions, including supports for childcare, can mitigate disparities across family types. The second takes a deep dive into parental leave designs and finds that policies that are designed to be generous and inclusive can facilitate single parents' employment. The third brings a particular intersectional perspective, illuminating that single parenting combined with migration status can bring a multitude of risks, risks that could be, but often are not mitigated by public policy. The fourth section presents a pair of papers, the first ultimately arguing against the importance of individual characteristics and shaping outcomes, finds that even if single mothers were similar to partnered mothers on many characteristics, they would still have lower incomes, a reality that policy designs should take into account. The second examines the crucial and understudied role that wealth plays in buffering economic shocks and in transmitting advantages and disadvantages across generations. The authors draw out the policy implications of their study, especially with respect to supports that could help to overcome barriers to wealth accumulation.

The last empirical contribution in the collection brings research on single parent families in the US into the present. The authors, one of whom you'll hear from today, examine the economic precarity of American single parent families throughout the COVID 19 epidemic. Our editorial team closed the volume with a concluding article in which we turned to the task of lesson drawing based on this rich set of articles. In our concluding commentary, we reflected on two related but distinct questions. One was: what does social science research, specifically this collection, tell us about what's most effective in helping single parent families? This is precisely the question that the first panel will address, aided by the participation of five of the volume's contributing authors and Laurie will moderate. The other question we reflected on is what are the prospects for policy reform in the U.S.? That is, reforms consistent with some of the key lessons that emerged in this volume, and this is the question that the second panel will take up, moderated by Amanda.

It's important to emphasize that the articles in this volume address only the first of these two questions. Although, of course, many of us here today are especially interested in prospects for policy reform in the U.S., we actually think it's advantageous to have separated these two questions. We've long been inspired by the late sociologist Erik Olin Wright, who, in his multiyear project aimed at assessing effective policy designs, urged colleagues to separate these questions so as perhaps obviously to enable analyses of policy effectiveness unshackled by assessments of political feasibility. So what works? Extracting a few concise lessons about policy effectiveness from 11 rich and nuanced studies is, of course, a major challenge. And nevertheless, we did our best. We draw, we drew four overarching lessons.

First, the provision of work family reconciliation policy is crucial for securing single parents' employment and their earned income. Second, shoring up earned income is necessary but not sufficient to ensure economic security for many single parent families. Third, strengthening income among single parent families is crucial, but other goals matter as well, especially enabling the accumulation of various forms of wealth throughout the life cycle. And fourth, policies can and must be designed to include and protect those single parents and their children, who are especially at risk. In even more concrete terms, these studies suggest that in the U.S., several lines of policy reform would markedly increase and stabilize the economic well-being of single parents and their children. These include especially new and expanded options for childcare and paid leave, labor market protections that effectively raise the floor under the bottom of the labor market, income transfers designed to balance inclusivity with targeting on the most vulnerable families and designed so as not to discourage employment. And finally, policies that enable wealth accumulation for all types of families.

What are the prospects for policy reform in the U.S.? Finally, our editorial team closed the volume with brief comments about prospects for enacting policy reforms along these lines in the U.S. We do note that these remarks are essentially speculative. We three have not carried out empirical research directly addressing U.S. political culture or public opinion about social policy. Nevertheless, we offer a few reflections, drawing on our many years of observing and engaging with U.S. debates about social policy, especially those focused on vulnerable families. So here's what we think.

First, some of the effective designs featured in this volume are consistent with Americans' widely reported orientation towards individual responsibility and self-reliance. Many accounts of U.S.

political culture emphasize two prevailing views: working age Americans should work for pay, and parents should be responsible for their own children. As documented in this volume, effective child care and leave policies helped to secure parents' attachment to paid work, and in addition, strategies for improving the U.S. child support system have the potential to enable nonresident parents to make more effective contributions to their own children's lives.

Second, dramatic developments during the COVID 19 era seem to have shifted the ground in the U.S., potentially opening new opportunities for policy reform in the future. On a less optimistic note, many of these COVID 19 area, era public supports were enacted on a temporary basis, and the prospects for making them permanent any time soon are not right. Still, the pandemic exposed many Americans for the first time to a range of effective policy provisions, including, for example, forms of paid leave and generous public income supports targeted on children. It's not unrealistic to conclude that these policy exposures, even a short term, have left some enduring residue.

And third, the federalist structure of the U.S. offers opportunities for state level social policy expansion, where national level gains are or seem to be unachievable. That said, enacting policy supports mainly at the state level, no matter how specific and no matter how successful in specific states brings a crucial and consequential downside: the potential for dramatic cross-state inequality and access to social protection. And that concerns us. All that said, this is how we close the volume. We remain cautiously optimistic that we might see substantial policy expansion when political and economic conditions coincide, mainly democratic legislative control and increased budgetary capacity under when the next major crisis strikes American families of all types.

And with that, I'm going to close, and I thank our many partners at Brookings, at the ANNALS and at the London School of Economics. And I want to thank again our many contributing authors, the five who have joined us today, and the 25 others. Laurie and Amanda and I surely agree that we completed this volume with far more knowledge than when we began. I turn the program over to Laurie.

Laurie Maldonado [00:19:52] Thank you, Janet. That was amazing. It was an absolute pleasure to co-edit this volume with Janet and Amanda. And it's a volume on single parents and public policy. We're so grateful for the extraordinary work of our authors. We have about 30, and many of them are joining this webinar from Sweden, Germany, Finland, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Luxembourg and Italy. So thank you for your excellent work. I'm so very proud of this body of work

and how it contributes to our knowledge on social policy and improving the lives of single parents and their children. Policy is about people, and what we know about single parents is, although it's a heterogeneity, heterogeneous population and not all single parents are the same, we also note that the large majority are single mothers, they're women, and there is a great economic vulnerability, especially in the United States.

One of my takeaways from the volume is that there's tremendous to learn about other countries and what cross-national research brings to us, that it's not only that single parents do well in one country, so people tend to say the U.S. is not Sweden, it's not Denmark. But in fact, you can examine effective policy design across many countries. And with that, there are many gems that can improve single parents' resources, their employment and their policy. So I hope for those that are in the audience that we kind of entice you with this great panel of our authors and that you will read this outstanding publication. We will highlight five presentations. Two are comparative pieces and two are focused on the US. Our first panel will discuss what the research tells us about what's most effective in helping single parent families. I have asked that each scholar highlight their main findings in about 5 minutes. Once the presentations are finished, we'll have some time for question and answers. So thanks again for some of the audience members who have already shared your questions. And I will now turn the program over to our first speaker. We're going to go and we'll start with Thomas Biegert from London School of Economics.

Thomas Biegert [00:22:26] Thank you, Laurie, for the introduction, I'm going to share my slides and get right to it, I hope you can see them. So thanks again for the introduction in the contribution that my coauthors, David Brady and Lena Hipp, wrote together with me, we engaged with the received wisdom that lowering support for, for single mothers by the welfare state will incentivize them to seek employment and does eventually help them out of poverty and welfare dependency traps. And this perspective has its root in the discourse in the US. And there have been many studies on the impact of the 1996 welfare reform in the U.S. that intended to do just that, cut benefits to get single mothers into employment. And these studies often seem to confirm that received wisdom. And the US has researched and also formed the basis of a lot of policy changes that drove discourse around the world. But for variety of reasons, we question whether this relationship, this purportive relationship between generous benefits and single mothers' employment holds in different economic and welfare contexts.

So what we did is we analyzed whether this relationship between benefits and single mother employment varies across countries and we used data from the US and 22 European countries for a 20 plus year time span. So I will show you a couple of results. The first thing is, just as an overview, here you can see the development of employment rates since the early 1990s in all of these countries, and the black solid line is single mothers whereas the dotted lines are partnered mothers and single childless women. And what you can see here when we're focusing in on the U.S. is that indeed, after 1996, there's a marked uptick in single mother employment. All right. So it seems like there is something going on with those, with those benefits. But then on the other hand, if we compare the U.S. to other countries, there is many other countries, where are single mother employment also went up. And so the question remains, was that due to them cutting benefits as well?

So what we do is then basically we run multiple regression models to test this relationship between changes in benefits and changes in employment of single mothers. But the complex models that we run basically yield the same findings as these, the relatively simple descriptive graphs. What you can see here is basically the correlation between an overall change in minimum income benefits for single mothers in those 23 countries and the change in single mother employment over this time span that I'm observing. Right. So calculate the change between 92 and 2013 in the US, for instance, on on minimum income protection and then, you know, correlate the change in employment rates and then you can see where did it develop overall. And on the left-hand side, you can see how that looked for employment and on a sort of extensive margin. And on the right-hand side, you can see how it looks for work hours, so the intensive margin.

And so there's basically three main points that we can take away from this here. Overall, this dark black line shows us that there is no real relationship between benefit generosity and single mother employment outcomes on average between in all of these countries. A second insight is that the US is a relatively special case, as here indeed, there is a relationship between a lowering of benefits in the observation period and higher single mother employment during that same time. Note here though, that it did not lead to larger work hours, so work hours did not increase over the same time. A third insight, I think, is that on the other hand, if you are looking into the upper right corner in both of the figures, there are several countries that actually raised benefits over this time and that also saw higher employment and work hours. If you look at the Netherlands here or Ireland, for instance.

So basically the takeaway of our study, I think, is that there is great variation in this relationship between a generous welfare state and generous welfare benefits for single mothers and single mothers' employment outcomes. And we should thus be very careful when we apply insights from one specific context in this case the US to others, and then turn, flipping this around, maybe the US can learn something from other context, because maybe there are contexts in which it is possible to increase welfare support by that reduced poverty and at the same time keep employment high. So our kind of outlook is that there should be further research and what are these kind of supporting policies that can make that possible, that we have generous support for people out of work but still kind of don't disincentivize them to work. That's it for me. I'll stop sharing and pass on the baton.

Laurie Maldonado [00:27:19] Thanks so much for that, Thomas, that welfare generosity is not a disincentive to employment. Right. So I think that's part of our findings, too, is just that employment matters, but also income support and other things matter too. And I've Marx will take the next presentation and we'll, which is a nice follow up to Thomas Biegert, from the University of Antwerp.

Ive Marx [00:27:45] So. Thank you, Laurie. Good morning, everybody. Thanks to Brookings for having me. And congratulations to the editors for a great, great volume. So my brief talk is simply about this. Well, how can we protect single parents against poverty? And my talk builds on my ANNALS paper with Elise Aerts with Zach Parolin, here present. And in that paper, we examine using, I think, fairly rich empirical data, minimum income protection policies in a host of European countries and in the United States. And the very simple but I think powerful message coming from that paper is that adequate protection against poverty can be provided. It can be provided because it's being done. There are countries where single parents are insured minimum incomes above or close to the poverty thresholds. And some of these are countries— strengthening Thomas's message— some of these countries have dynamic economies, have perfectly well-functioning labor markets, including high employment rates, higher even than the US. So there's no simple tradeoff there between protection and a well-functioning economy. So the main message is it can be done. The US still has a long way to go. And so here are some key takeaways, I think, on how or what should be done or what could be done.

So first we know that single parents make up the core of what we call the working poor. One obvious challenge they face is realizing the earnings potential they have, combining work and care.

And so, of course, services like affordable childcare, public transport and so on are crucial. But these are not enough. Second, we need to make sure that work pays it off. And of course, minimum wages are a crucial policy lever to ensure decent minimum incomes to working parents. But again, minimum wages or decent minimum wages are not enough.

So here's a slide from our paper. And in this graph, you see the minimum wage richest represented by the red bar in this graph in a number of European countries and also in the United States relative to the poverty threshold for a single parent with two kids. And of course, the level of that poverty threshold differs from country to country. So it's normalized against the poverty threshold in each country. And you'll see that there are very few countries where the minimum wage is high enough to keep a full-time working parent— and remember, working full time hard enough as that is— out of poverty. So direct income support to transfers is essential if we care about poverty. And so our analysis, we look at the various income transfers, is that a strategy of what we call targeting within universalism that that works best. That is to say that the countries with the most adequate minimum incomes tend to have universal or quasi almost universal child benefits as a first layer of support. And that is important because universal benefits are simple, they are unconditional, they bring the money fast, reliable, they don't distort work incentives. So they are very important as a first layer of support.

But again, as you can see in the graph, and those universal benefits are represented by the gray bar, there's almost no, nowhere high enough that, to ensure or to make sure that that single parents are not exposed to poverty. And so basically only, the only in the countries with also targeted supplements to those benefits is this the case, and these targeted supplements can take various forms. They can take the form of housing allowances, rent subsidies, childcare subsidies, tax credits and so on. And these are then represented by the various other colors in this in this graph. So very simply put, at the most, the best, the most generous system, they look like a lasagna. They have various layers of support. Typically, typically, universal layers supplemented by targeted extras in cash and in-kind.

And the final result of all those supports, minus taxes, of course, are the diamond shaped markers that you can see in the graph, those white markers, and those show the level of minimum income support in this case for a single parent with two kids in each country relative to the poverty line. And if you look at the U.S., which is marked by the American flag, you can see that the U.S. is at the lower end and the child tax credit expansion by President Biden and you can also see him in the

graph, has pushed up the U.S. a bit. And I think there's a very compelling argument for making that expansion permanent. And I'm sure we will hear more about that in the discussion.

So summing up, this is what policy needs to do, strengthening again, what Janet Gornick has told us. First, support work, quality childcare, good public transport, other services, parental leave. Two, ensure decent minimum wages, through legislation or through collective bargaining. Three, keep taxes and other contributions on low earnings to a minimum. Tax the rich. Four, have Universal Child Benefits as a first and essential layer of income support. Five, have low-income targeted supplements of various kinds for the most vulnerable. Thank you.

Laurie Maldonado [00:34:14] Thank you, I've Marx. So the social policy, optimal social policy looks like layers in a lasagna. We'll move to the next presentation, which is by Laura Cuesta from the University of Rutgers, and she will be presenting a paper with Mia Hakovirta, Mari Haapanen, Daniel Meyers. Thank you, Laura.

Laura Cuesta [00:34:38] Thank you for inviting me to join this conversation. I'm going to talk about the main findings of the article, 'Child support policy across High-Income Countries: Similar Problems, Different Approaches.' This is joint work with Mia Hakovirta, Mari Haapanen, and Dan Meyer. So I'm going to tell you very quickly what we did, i this, in our contribution to this volume. We study, our study included some European countries, Australia, Canada, of course, the US and some countries in South America. Our focus was to look at how countries differ in terms of four main aspects of child support policy. Institutional arrangements, so how countries organize their child support policy, the amount of child support that nonresident parents are expected to pay, the amount of child support that parents, single parents actually receive, and how countries approach nonpayment of child support.

Our work is based primarily on a systematic literature review. And for the analysis of amounts owed, we relied on interviews with country level experts. Another important piece of information here is that because some of the countries in our sample differ across some national units, in some cases, we in those cases, we focus on one specific unit. So for the US, the results reflect the state of Wisconsin. So this is a very quick preview of our findings. Countries do different things to arrange how the child support policy system works, and some countries rely on core-based approaches. Some other countries use agencies, and other countries, including the US, have what we call in this literature a hybrid system where both courts and, and child support government agencies play a role

into the determination of child support obligations. The US is similar to Iceland, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden in this approach.

In terms of how child support obligations are determined, we did not see a universal calculation method in the countries included in our study. And one thing that countries do different, use different methods, some countries have specific formulas, some other countries rely on more like discretionary approaches depending on the cases. But one finding from our study that we wanted to highlight, and Janet mentioned in her presentation, is that in the U.S., we expect nonresident parents to pay relatively higher amounts of child support. This is why you seen this figure here, the U.S. is definitely an outlier in terms of what is expected from nonresident parents to pay child support. So of course, we believe that this high expectation has implications on issues like nonpayment of child support.

Another common finding across countries included our study is that in many of these countries, the share of single parents, single mothers in most cases, who don't receive child support is quite high. And so countries approach nonpayment of child support in different ways. We want to put a plug to an approach that we believe will be important to consider in the US. We're not the first to suggest that for sure. And but this is definitely adding to the evidence of the importance of thinking about a publicly funded guarantee of minimum of child support to support single parent families. So I'm going to move to conclusion and implications just to say that in our study we found that many of the policy dilemmas that we face here in the US are common across high income countries, which I think suggests that we could learn a lot from cross-national research. This is also a theme of, of this volume, but the US is an outlier in terms of, of this issue of expecting too much from, from nonresident parents.

And I think this is an important conclusion that led us to, to again say that a guaranteed child support program, we can discuss it how that would look like perhaps of modest generosity would likely have beneficial effects. And then the final thing is we don't see a dichotomy between encouraging nonresident parents' involvement with their children in terms of the time they spend and the contribution of child support. There is another piece in this volume that I also want to invite everyone to read that also touches on this issue of nonresident parent involvement as well. So thank you.

Laurie Maldonado [00:39:54] Thank you for that, Laura. The fact that the United States, when you do look at other countries, that the threshold is too high for people to pay in terms of child support, and that's an outlier, I think it contributes so much. And I also appreciated, there's a, there's another child support article, that we also welcome you to, because the two speak really well together and it focuses on the U.S. So thank you for that. And next up, we have Zachary Parolin. So we kind of went from these are our three comparative cross-national pieces, and now we're going to spotlight on the U.S. and look at single parents and COVID. Thanks, Zach.

Zachary Parolin [00:40:32] Thanks a lot, Laurie. I hope you can see my screen right now because I no longer see you. But I assume that it's okay.

Laurie Maldonado [00:40:39] Yes.

Zachary Parolin [00:40:40] Thanks. This is a paper with Emma Lee, who's currently at Harvard University. And our focus in this paper was understanding economic precarity among single parents in the U.S. during the COVID 19 pandemic. As you can see on our second slide here, just to briefly summarize the paper, the challenges and its focus, we were trying to understand what do we know about the social and economic well-being of single parent families in the U.S. during the COVID-19 pandemic, at least during 2020 and 2021? And the challenge that we faced and that many of us face is the lack of high-quality, real-time data on important social and economic issues like childcare closures or poverty rates or so on.

So our objective in this paper to use a variety of data sets and information to document trends in the economic and social conditions for single parents compared to two families throughout COVID 19. In the full paper, we have data on exposure to school closures, exposure to childcare closures, employment trends. But for this short presentation, I'm just going to highlight two figures that show results for poverty rates throughout the pandemic, and also levels of material—.

Laurie Maldonado [00:41:47] Sorry, Zach, just to interrupt you, we're not able to follow the slides. If you can just put the presentation mode on so we can see them change.

Zachary Parolin [00:41:54] Thanks, Laurie. I think it was sharing the wrong version. Is it any better now?

Laurie Maldonado [00:42:01] And then enable, enable editing.

Zachary Parolin [00:42:07] Thanks, guys. I think it's there's two versions, there's something, one moment. Can you see the full slide? I hope so. So I'm going to keep talking as I figure out these

screen problems. So we focused on two different outcomes in the, the presentation here. The first is on poverty rates and the second is on, on food hardship. I honestly can't tell if you're seeing this or not. So I'm just going to talk through and highlight a couple important facts. First, focusing on monthly poverty rates, I want to emphasize a couple of things. We're able to track poverty rates on a monthly basis throughout the U.S. for single parents versus two parent families. I'm just going to summarize to you since the slides aren't here, the three key findings that we observed from these monthly poverty rates. The first is no surprise that poverty rates for single parents were consistently higher than two parent families throughout the pandemic. That was true before the pandemic. That only exacerbated at particular parts of the pandemic, but not all, as I'll come to.

The second thing I want you to take away is that there was a lot of month-to-month volatility in poverty rates throughout the pandemic for single parents, especially if we look at before taxes and transfers are included— thanks a lot, Laurie— if you look in, say, January, February 2020, you see the dark gray line at the very top. That is a line representing the poverty rate for single parents on a monthly basis before taxes and transfers are taken into account. And you see, particularly in April 2020, when unemployment in the U.S. climbed towards 50%, a massive spike in that 42.5 poverty rate number and ebbs and flows then throughout the year.

Now, there's one final thing I want to highlight here. If you look at the screen, you see the gray lines. There's two of them, one is solid, that's before taking COVID relief into account. The dashed gray lines are when you take COVID relief into account. So if you look at the difference between the solid gray line and the dashed gray line, that's the impact of COVID era transfers on the poverty rate for single parents. Stimulus checks play a role. Employment, unemployment benefits played a role. But what's highlighted in the blue box are those monthly child tax credit payments that contributed to massive declines in poverty rates for single parents, also for children in two parent homes, but relatively strong increases in poverty rates for children of single, for single parent homes.

On the next slide, you'll see one final figure, and that's focused on food hardship, so we can switch focus from an income-based measure of poverty to food hardship. In here, we see again the gray line is single parents, the black line is two parents, no surprise, single parents before the pandemic and in the pandemic face higher rates of food hardship. But again, you see a lot of volatility throughout the year. And I want to highlight again what's going on in this blue box, that's July through December 2021, when those monthly child tax credit payments were distributed. And there we see

massive decreases for single parent families and two parent families alike, relatively stronger for single parent families in food hardship again, as prior work has shown directly attributable to the distribution of those monthly child tax credit benefits.

And on the final side, I'll briefly conclude with some takeaways from our work that the COVID 19 pandemic exacerbated challenges that single parents in the U.S. already faced with respect to childcare, employment, health, poverty and hardship. But we see lots of volatility throughout the year and we see the incredible impact that policy interventions can have, specifically, the 2021 child tax credit expansion, which we have solid evidence on now, strongly reduced poverty and food hardship contributed, the Census Bureau shows, to the lowest record of child poverty rates for single parents in U.S. history, and at least in the short term— could be different in the long term— no strong evidence of negative employment effects. So I'll conclude there and thanks for your time.

Laurie Maldonado [00:46:19] Wow. A powerful study to look at all the single parents across the United States and to look at the impact of the pandemic and to see the child tax credit really buffered a lot of those things and kept a lot of families out of poverty. So I'm sure there'll be lots to discuss about that paper. So thank you, Zach. And moving to our final panelist, Regina Baker from University of Penn State, Penn State. We're so grateful to have you here on 'Ethno-Racial Variation and Single Motherhood Prevalences and Penalties for Child Poverty in the United States 1995 to 2018.' Go ahead, Regina. Thank you.

Regina Baker [00:46:56] All right, you're good, you can see me. All right. Thank you, Laurie and Amanda and Janet for inviting me to be part of this awesome special issue and alongside a great group of scholars. So that's really exciting. All right. Both American poverty scholarship and policy debates have emphasized the role of family structure, specifically high child poverty and racial inequality and poverty have been linked to the higher prevalence of single motherhood, particularly among Black and Latino mothers. Yet a growing literature casts doubt on the explanatory power of family structure, demonstrating the impact of family structure varies across groups. For example, Black and Latino mothers experience greater likelihood of poverty from poverty risk regardless of family structure. And there is also evidence that Black children experience smaller single motherhood penalties for some outcomes, such as education. So such disparities in these outcomes raise the question of whether the poverty penalties that accrue to children as a result of living in a single mother household differ across ethno-racial groups.

And so this is the focus of my study. Specifically, I draw on Brady and colleagues' prevalence, 'Prevalences and Penalties' framework, which examines the risk of poverty in terms of prevalence, which is the share of the population with the risk, and penalties, which are the increased probability of poverty associated with the risk to assess historical ethno-variation and the levels and trends of the prevalence of the penalties of single motherhood among white, Black and Latino children from 1995 to 2018. So in this figure, we see that Black children are more likely to live with a single mother, followed by Latino and white children. And during 1995 to 2018, the single mother average prevalence for black children was 45%, which was double that of Latino 22% and over three times that of white children, about 14%. This pattern still holds in 2018, reflecting remarkable stability in ethno-racial gaps in single mother prevalences, as well as an overall stable pattern in single motherhood prevalences, particularly among white children.

In contrast to rather, to the rather stable differences in single motherhood prevalences, ethno-racial gaps and child poverty among Black and Latino children relative to white children have actually narrowed over time. Although all groups experienced declines in child poverty from 1995 to 2018, the largest declines were seen among Latino children, a 10.5 percentage points, followed by Black children, about seven percentage points, and white children about one percentage point. Still, in 2018, poverty rates among Black and Latino children were about triple the poverty rate of white children. There is also ethno-variation and single motherhood penalties for child poverty over time. Overall, Black and Latino children have experienced larger ebbs and flows in the penalty of single motherhood than white children, the latter of whom have experienced the most stable penalties during this time period.

Despite having the highest poverty rates and levels of single motherhood, Black children on average experienced the lowest penalties for single motherhood, and although Latino children have similar poverty rates to Black children, Latino, Latino children tend to have higher, higher penalties. And this is in contrast with white children who have penalties that are on average slightly higher than Black children and lower than Latino children, but whose poverty rates are substantially lower and the most stable. And notably in the most recent time point 2018, we see penalties start to converge for Black and white children yet remain the highest for Latino children. And so these findings really show that there is ethno-racial, ethno-racial variation in U.S. child poverty and that poverty penalties that accrue if children live in households headed by single mothers.

This is this is consistent with findings that demonstrate there is racial variation and impact of family structure and in the single motherhood penalties for other child outcomes. Also the levels and trends of child poverty across white, Black and Latino children do not correspond directly with the single motherhood prevalences and penalties experienced across these groups.

Further research is necessary to explore what's driving these ethno-racial differences and penalties. For example, the lower penalties for Black children could be a result of the greater heterogeneity among Black single mothers due to the growing number of degreed Black women experiencing non-marital childbearing. Whereas the higher penalties for Latino children could be due to Latino mothers experiencing greater barriers accessing resources such as the U.S. social safety net. In conclusion, this study adds to the growing empirical evidence demonstrating family structure can operate differently across ethno-racial lines, and this has implications for policy. Thank you.

Laurie Maldonado [00:52:24] Thank you so much for that, Regina. And I apologize with your affiliation, the University of Pennsylvania. And just thank you so much for highlighting the ethno-racial variation. We're going to move to this part of the panel as a question-and-answer period. And Regina, while I have you up here and we just heard your presentation, I wanted to ask you the question about policy implications. So we see this ethno-racial variation across countries. And when I think of the U.S. and the U.S. narrative, I think of a lot of the, the, a solution that people want to say is marriage promotion. Right. You know, get these single parents married. And I look at your findings and I know that they say something different when you look deeper at them. And I would love to hear more about the implications of your study.

Regina Baker [00:53:16] Yeah, yeah. Exactly what you said. You know, there's been so much emphasis on marriage and marriage promotion. But I think that one key finding here is that, you know, that we see there's huge differences across racial groups. Right. And in terms of not only poverty rates, but also the penalties. And I think that really underscores that these one size policy solutions, one size all policy solutions, for example, will not be all that effective if we are seeing these differences. And speaking to the point about, you know, marriage promotion, well, the trends show that single motherhood levels have remained fairly stable, while child poverty gap have narrowed, and even the more recent, you know, recent census reports show that we've seen an even larger decrease in child poverty. Right. But yet we don't see the same equal decrease in single motherhood.

And this coupled with findings from recent studies, you know, indicating that poverty rates are highest among Black and Latino mothers regardless of family structure, I think it really suggests that this focus on marriage as a solution is not as effective. Right. And thus policies aimed at addressing more broader mechanisms, you know, these mechanisms that contribute to the substantially higher levels of poverty, particularly among Black and Latino children, you know, the issues that matter, like our past speakers have talked about thinking about childcare and labor market, and that's what works. And I think that's where policy should be directed toward. You're still on mute, Laurie.

Laurie Maldonado [00:54:48] Thanks, Regina. I was just thinking of how wonderful you are. Thanks so much for that, Regina. Another question that's popped up and it's related to the child tax credit. But I'm wondering if I could kind of spin this question to Ive Marx and Zach, Zachary Parolin in terms of looking at the child tax credit, you know, and thinking about, you know, what does that mean for single parents and the fact that we took it away? So that's sort of a Zach part question.

And then the other question that came up with Ive Marx was this idea of targeting with universalism and how does that relate to the child tax credit? So if you have a child tax credit, say a monthly tax credit where, you know, families get 200, but then a family like a single parent might get \$300 a month. You know, everybody gets this universal benefit. But the family that needs it the most gets a little bit more. If you can kind of talk about the balance of that. So our question to Zach and Ive is talk a little bit more about that, the tax credit, what, child tax credit, what that means for single parents and this balance of universal and targeting, targetism.

Zachary Parolin [00:55:58] Thanks, Laurie. I'll jump in first then and just say a couple of notes on what the data and evidence say about the initial impacts or the short run impacts of the 2021 child tax credit expansion on outcomes of interest. So we have pretty clear evidence on 3 to 4 outcomes now, that the monthly child tax credit payments and the lump sum payment that went out at tax time this year led to strong declines in poverty rates. We were showing this and the monthly poverty information I showed you before. But you can also just look at the latest census poverty report, where census finds that child poverty rates reached the lowest level in U.S. history when using the SPM, which actually counts these transfers into it. That's pretty impressive. If we look at food hardship, we have evidence from, from several studies now that show that these payment has strong effects on reductions in food hardship.

If we look at the short run employment effects, which could be different from the long run employment effects if this were made permanent, we don't have strong evidence of employment declines. Now there's debates about what those employment declines might look like if those were made permanent. It's a separate debate. At least in the short run we don't have strong evidence of that. We do have some evidence that the CTC didn't do much for mental health or subjective well-being. So the program is not doing everything, but it's unequivocal at this point that it had strong effects on child poverty and food hardship. And if we're interested in reducing those in the future, this seems to be a pretty good policy for achieving that end.

Laurie Maldonado [00:57:18] Thank you Zach, and I've, do you want to add?

Ive Marx [00:57:22] Back to the question of targeting within universalism. As I said, universal benefits or almost universal benefits have, I think, great advantages for one, once people qualify, they get the money fast and without much fuss. And that's, that's of course, very important. But the reality is that they are also mighty expensive, even if you cut out the rich or the, the more affluent, targeting, targeted benefits, at least on paper, deliver a much bigger, as it were, bang for the buck. But the reality is also that they work better on paper than in reality. They involve a lot of bureaucracy, evasion into people's finances and how they live. And that creates non-take up, that creates delayed payments. And of course, there's the whole issue of work incentives. Once you target benefits to the, to a very small group, these people will have a, say that this is disincentive to work or to seek promotion.

So I would say that universal benefits are, are very important, that they are a especially very important layer against an extreme deprivation and that you have additional except of course, for those who don't work, layers of, of, of support providing the necessary extras. But we know, the very big lesson from all that welfare research that we've done is that adequate poverty relief does not come cheaply. It costs money, and there are limits to targeting, that is something we know. So I think that the expanded child tax credit is a good thing. It is an important, it is an expensive measure. We have to acknowledge that, that's the fact.

Laurie Maldonado [00:59:30] Thanks for that, I've. The next question that came up has a lot, we, in this panel, we talked about income supports, you know, the child tax credit and these things and what Biegert, what Thomas's paper really does is look at, you know, this idea of income supports not being necessarily dissentive to employment. And so we focus a lot on income supports. And so

my question to Thomas and others can answer, what besides income supports are not a disincentive to employment.

Thomas Biegert [01:00:04] Yeah. I guess that's the million-dollar question. Right. And I think also at the heart of it, because it goes out of the scope of our, of our particular paper to look at what, what actually makes the difference, why is it that in some cases it seems like there is a disincentive with generous benefits and in some other cases it doesn't, was out of the scope of our research. But I guess we can, we can glean some, some provisional answers from the existing research, which would be that, you know, if you want child, if you want benefits not to be a disincentive, then you have to provide ways for how single mothers could even go into employment.

So, for instance, providing public childcare because if childcare is unaffordable, it's quite understandable, I'd say that you'd rather stay home and receive some support. Right. But as soon as as single mothers can actually go to work because there is public childcare, then I think the implication would be that, you know, even generous benefits will not be disincentive enough to keep you at home.

Laurie Maldonado [01:01:12] Thanks for that, Thomas. So it's more than just income supports, but it's also all these childcare family leave that facilitates single parents into the employment because we think employment's a really positive thing. But we're also saying that there needs to be more. Right. These layers of income, these layers of policies. I think you really highlighted that well. And the next question is for Laura. So we're now turning kind of our, our eyes to fathers, right, and looking at non, nonresident parents. And so, you know, and that's kind of, you know, sometimes that that debate is often left out. And in the United States, it's a bit of an exceptional system where many of the families, it's not necessarily, you know, the child support doesn't actually go to the family, but kind of goes to recoup the state funds if it's a public case. So it's, it's, it's more about, you know, trying to get money back from, from, from these other things as opposed to actually going to the child. And that's a bit exceptional in terms of that story and that sort of the narrative of the child support in the United States.

And I think, Laura, what surprise, what is remarkable about your paper with, with colleagues is that you're showing that the child support is too high for people to even pay. So that's an issue. But you're also talking about these other models. And I wanted to hear about sort of these other models of child support.

Laura Cuesta [01:02:35] Thank you, Laurie. So I think one, a strong call for a public guaranteed child support program, which is one approach to the nonpayment, it's also an acknowledgment that the job market is increasingly precarious and relying, or expecting parents, nonresident parents, to consistently be able to provide for children is not realistic. Right. And that that precariousness is impacting both single mothers who are expected to be working as well. And also, it's affecting the ability of non-resident parents to pay child support. So I think that when we acknowledge that and we can see some models in some of the countries that we included that we could learn from.

I will say that there are two things that perhaps we need to think in the US about these child support guarantee programs in other high-income countries. One is that we need to think about what is the goal that we want to achieve if our goal is to make sure that payments are provided on a regular basis, so try to address the regularity of child support, that will look very different or slightly different from what we will do if we wanted to address poverty, if the purpose of that child support guarantee program was to improve the economic well-being of parents. So I would say that that's important to think about for us in the US. What is what we're trying to, if we were going to implement this, what would be the main goal of that approach.

And the second thing is we believe that this is like a little bit of a different perspective from what I've been saying before about, about universalism versus targeting. We believe that for this specific, guarantee child support program, perhaps broader programs, programs that are more universal in nature might be actually more effective and will reduce the complexity of a system that is already quite complex and might be more effective. So perhaps we want to think about things like providing guaranteed child support for families who are already in the child support system, who already have child support orders. And then think about how do we want to help those parents who have maybe low orders and receive low benefits? And that can really help them to, a small amount of child support can really help them to, to be economically secure.

Laurie Maldonado [01:05:14] So thank you, Laura. That's about all our time. But we do have a minute, if somebody wanted to add something from our panel. Well, thank you all for your excellent research and for sharing it with us today. It's just, it's wonderful to work with you all. And you brought so much to the table. We will, before we go to the next panel, I just wanted to share that, and we really were excited to hear from Cecilia Rouse, and she tried to get on the audio, but there were some

technical difficulties. So we know you're watching and supporting and thank you so much. So we had to make that change to, to our program today. And now I will move the program to Amanda Sheely, and that will really talk about this question of political feasibility. Thank you, everyone.

Amanda Sheely [01:06:12] So thank you for that. I am so pleased to be the moderator for this second panel. So in the last session, again, panelists shared their research about policies that could be effective in improving the economic well-being of single parent families. However, as stated by Janet in her opening remarks, just because research suggests that policies may work doesn't mean that they will be adopted in the US. So in the second session, we asked panelists to tackle the second question, what are the prospects for policy reform in the U.S.? So we have a stellar panel today, which I'll introduce now. This will also be the order that they'll present some initial comments.

So Doug Besharov is a professor in the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland. His main areas of expertise include welfare reform, child abuse and neglect, as well as family policy. Irv Garfinkel is professor emeritus at the Columbia School of Social Work, and he was the first Mitchell I. Ginsberg professor of contemporary urban problems. Along with Sarah McLanahan, he initiated the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study, which has provided a treasure trove of data for researchers interested in studying single parents in the United States. Melissa Kearney is the Neil Moskowitz Professor of Economics at the University of Maryland, the director of the Aspen Economic Strategy Group and a nonresident fellow, senior fellow sorry, at the Brookings Institution. Her academic research focuses on issues related to social policy, poverty and inequality. We have Eric Rodriguez, who is senior vice president of Unidos US, where he oversees their Office of Policy and Advocacy that directs the organization's legislative affairs, public policy research, policy analysis and field advocacy works, he seems very busy, and this has made him an expert also on a wide range of issues, including tax policy, housing, welfare reform and workforce development, and specifically their impact on the Latino community. And last but not least, of course, and you've heard from her already, is Belle Sawhill, and she is a senior fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institution. So her research also focuses on a wide range of economic and social issues, including fiscal policy, economic growth, poverty and social mobility and inequality. She also wrote one of the concluding chapters for the ANNAL's special issue on single parents. And we want to thank her for that.

So I have asked each panelist to share some initial thoughts lasting no longer than 4 minutes each. So I have kept this short, but I wanted to do that because that will leave us some time for

reactions as well as to answer some questions that were posed by the public. So with that, I am going to turn it over to Doug, who was our first speaker.

Doug Besharov [01:08:53] Well, thank you very much, Amanda. And this has been a great panel. Let me apologize. You may be able to hear it in my voice, but I'm a bit under the weather. I tested myself. I seem to be negative. And unless Zoom has a new feature, you're safe anyway. But I may not be quite as clear as I like to think I am. First, commendations to the editors and the contributors for this fine volume. I'm a series editor at Oxford University Press, and I know what this process is like. What comes to mind is herding cats, if you get my drift, so I know how good you're feeling about how this came out. Let me get directly to the point. We've been asked to talk about the prospects for policy reform, and that's a tricky thing. A number of the panelists have already talked a little bit about this as the, Janet, first of all, we came within a couple of votes of doing many of the things that this book calls for last year, including making some of them semi-permanent. So the first thing you have to say is hanging in the ether here is a great deal of support for the ideas in this book, and that's usually the first thing you need to get political action.

Now, as somebody else mentioned, the crisis atmosphere of COVID has passed. We're entering what may be a time of economic turmoil. So it's not that clear that there's a slam dunk coming, even if the Democrats take control of the House next time around. But let us remember, things got pretty close to, on many of the chapters. I think I'm here, I think to be a curmudgeon. So you get what you pay for. If I can share my screen. Yeah. Is it up? Yeah. So the question you have to ask is if so many people, so many voters think childcare sort of be universal, that the parents need childcare, why hasn't it happened? Now, there's a conspiracy theory that you could have as well, but I don't think that's what's going on here. So let me make a couple of points.

This is, of course, Harold Laswell, politics is who gets what, when and how. In other words, you need people, voters or people who care about voters making these changes. And I just don't think the sale has been made for many of these programs. And the question is why? And we have, for example, on the child tax credit, which I think every speaker so far has said, was really very valuable, very wonderful and so forth. I mean, the fact of the matter is, public opinion polls, including of recipients, were at best modestly supportive of recipients of low-income recipients. So why is that? And I'm hoping I can get there. Yeah, I messed it up, but I'm moving quickly, so I'm just going to do it this way. And I think the reason is, besides all the things that we talk about, number one. And despite

the fact that the book is very careful to talk about how single parent families are not heterogeneous, Regina did a, Regina did a very nice presentation about that, it goes much further than that.

If you look at the poll data, there are many single mothers who just don't feel part of this problem. And this is just one of many magazines that address single motherhood in a very different picture than we think about it as we do our work. So I think as we talk about this, it's important to say, why don't these policies have more traction in the US? And then look to see whether adjustments can be made either in the PR around the programs or in the contents of the program, programs to make them more attractive. Well, that's my time. I made it through, and I plan to make it through the rest of the panel. So I'm looking forward to learning from the other panelists. Thank you very much.

Amanda Sheely [01:13:34] Thank you. Doug, you were actually, you were under time, so very impressive. Very impressive. Irv, you are next, please.

Irwin Garfinkel [01:13:42] So I want to thank the editors for dedicating the book to Sarah. Before discussing political feasibility, I just want to briefly plug the book, and the plug is narrowed to four chapters and two policies. Nonresident fathers and the precarity of children and child support policy across high income countries, similar problems, different solutions are must reading for anyone interested in child support policy. Income support policies in Europe and the United States, what works best, and the COVID paper, the first one analyzes a wide variety of policies that provide aid to single parent families, finding that a mixture of universal and targeted benefits is the optimal policy mix and the importance of universal child allowances stands out both in their paper and in the COVID paper.

My comments on political feasibility are limited to one policy, converting the tax credit for children in the federal income tax to a universal or near universal child allowance. The proposal has three parts: one increasing the per child benefit from 2000 per child to 3000 per child, ages 6 to 17, and 3600 per child, age zero to five. Two, making the credit fully refundable for the poorest one third of families who earn too little to qualify for the full benefit, and three, paying the benefits on a monthly basis. As Doug pointed out, the fact that this policy was enacted for one year and fell only two short, two votes short of being enacted on a permanent basis, it's difficult to ascertain how that it is politically feasible, but 20 years ago a universal child allowance was politically infeasible. For the policy analysts, political feasibility is the second order question, is this proposal good policy is the first order

question. A child allowance substantially reduce disparity and food hardship and its economic benefits far exceed cost.

Our research builds on the natural experiments research, which shows that cash and near cash benefits in childhood, increased child health, education and adult earnings and longevity, and decreases low birth weight, infant mortality, child welfare use, crime and health care costs. We find that the productivity of this cash investment is in the same league as free public elementary and secondary education and health insurance coverage for low-income families. Like education and health, a universal child allowance is akin to what the pre-Civil War Whig Party called internal improvements. They had in mind roads, bridges, tunnels and canals. But education, health and cash benefits for children are the ultimate internal improvement. Whether or not a child allowance is politically feasible in the lame duck Congress or in the next six or ten years, I am confident that it will become politically feasible at some point because it's good policy. Thank you.

Amanda Sheely [01:17:49] Thank you so much, Irv. That was great. Melissa, you are next, please.

Melissa Kearney [01:17:54] Great. Thanks. So I'll start by adding my voice to the chorus and saying that this is really an excellent volume and must read for anyone interested in these topics. And I also want to say that I find the prospects for making progress on this challenge, I'm encouraged by the simple fact that this volume is published and circulating. And the reason I say that is because this volume very directly documents and takes up the fact that single parent families across high income countries, not in the U.S., are disadvantaged on average relative to two parent families. And Doug's point about not all single mothers being disadvantaged notwithstanding, this is a family structure that tends to be associated with lower levels of resources for children and associated consequences. And I think that's a really important conversation that we have to have. But often that conversation in public gets mired in culture war type arguments, and this entire volume avoids that. Nobody can accuse any author of any chapter in this volume of sounding like they're blaming people for their economic disadvantage or glibly suggesting that people should get married. And so the fact that this volume is, is generating this conversation, I think, alone is very encouraging.

So with that, I'll make three observations related to the question of prospects for a US policy response. The first, I'll raise the issue that this volume is framed around single parent families. But in the US, I think it's more productive to really talk about the needs of all low-income families with

children. And so I don't see us ever going back to a situation like we had with the AFDC program or Medicaid in the seventies and eighties where receipt of transfer program benefits are conditioned on a parent's marital status. I think sort of separating the eligibility for benefits— and I would add tax credits— should be completely separated from parental marital status in either direction, and I would continue to encourage policymakers to push in that direction. You know, on the question of whether the US is prepared to increase income assistance to low-income families. Right. Regardless of marital status.

You know, one thing that I've been very optimistic, why I've been very optimistic about this is where Irv left off, the evidence in favor of the economic benefits, the long run economic benefits to low-income children who receive additional income assistance is so overwhelming that nobody in their right mind could deny it is in this country's interest to provide more material assistance to low-income children in this country. And so the case is really incredibly strong. And so if the moral imperative weren't strong enough ten years ago, the economic case now is extremely obvious. Now, that said, I thought we were about to do this last year and then, you know, Congress didn't move to continue with the expanded CTC. And so that gives me at least an hour ago, that was my main reason for being pessimistic. But having listened to Irv, maybe I'll resume my optimism that now the policy case is so strong, we'll do this in the near future.

The second, the second observation I want to make is that with regard to single parent families in particular, I think this volume does a really excellent job about high, a highlighting two particular issues, which is the limited collection of child support payments from non-custodial parents and the non-financial engagement of nonresident parents. And again, I think this helps us move the policy conversation forward. You know, the, the cross-national perspective that in the U.S., our awards are generally too high, which is why we have such a low payment rate among non-custodial payments, that corroborates other evidence I've seen from the US and it really underscores the need for us to reevaluate the way this country and states goes about setting up child support awards. I also think it underscores the need to supplement the economic security of low wage workers in this country, even those who don't have children living in their home. Right. Because many of them do have children to whom they could contribute in their lives in positive ways. And so, you know, highlighting the need for more economic security for all low wage workers needs to be part of this conversation.

And again, secondly, I think this emphasis in the second chapter on this topic, in the volume about the other ways nonresident parents, fathers in particular, can productively contribute to their children's development beyond financial contributions is really important. And I'm encouraged by the move in social policy in the US of the past 20 years from a narrow focus of looking at nonresident Dads merely as a, you know, a source for a potential check and really moving towards programs. We even see this in the title of programs, to strengthening families and engaging parents and co-parenting, again, whether or not they're married, and thinking about other ways to bring fathers positively into their children's lives. Okay.

Third, you know, in part for the sake of saying something that not everybody on the webinar will agree with, I'm going to point out that the volume is conspicuously silent about the question of whether policy can and should encourage the formation of two parent families. And given all of the evidence we have, that again, on average, two parent family structure is beneficial to children, I think it's a mistake for us to simply accept the prevalence, the high prevalence of one parent families among low income, less educated people in this country. And so what we see is that increasingly, you know, it's having a two-parent family and all the associated advantages is something associated with the college educated class. And I think it's a mistake to accept that as a reality.

Now, in full disclosure of this, I say this explicitly in a forthcoming book I have titled *The Two Parent Advantage*, and I think that this is a really important question. In many ways, it's much more complicated and challenging than the question of how to support single parent families. As Regina rightly pointed out on the first panel, simply promoting marriage is going to have a very limited, if any, effectiveness. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't be grappling with the underlying problem of why this family structure is becoming increasingly prevalent in a way that divides, that exacerbates class inequality in the US. I'll stop there.

Amanda Sheely [01:24:49] Thank you so much, Melissa. Eric, you are next.

Eric Rodriguez [01:24:52] Well, thank you. Well, well, let me say thanks to everyone. I am humbled to be a part of this conversation. Always appreciate Belle reaching out, and in particular just a couple of overarching things, and then I'll try to get very, very quickly to, to what to expect from, from the Congress going forward and from a policy perspective. But from an overall overarching perspective, you know, I super appreciate the focus on single parents. I'm a child of a single parent father that was surrounded and raised by women who were single parents as well. And I understand

intimately many of the issues and things that we're raising here and why they're so important. And also understand how, you know, being on the public policy side, how some of these issues are so difficult and challenging for us to address in the right kinds of ways. So I appreciate, again, this kind of focus.

The second thing is to understand and to underscore just how demographics is changing our perspectives on the poor and our politics and our policy. Right. The one issue I always raise with comparative looks and there were tons of caveats in the book, which I appreciate, is the unique nature of race in this country and how it infiltrates our and affects our public policy, but also our politics around welfare policies. So those are things as we think about how the country is changing demographically that we increasingly have to consider going forward. And the authors that went the extra mile, I think, to showcase Black, Latino, Asian, other populations, the volume on immigrants and immigration policy that are just so unique in terms of the circumstances for those families, I thought was quite wonderful and I really appreciate the inclusion of that. On the latter point, there's that, there's that one area where public policy potentially increases the likelihood of family separation and single parenting, and that's our immigration policies. And that's why it's so important for us to be reminded, I guess, in some ways that 5 to 6 million U.S. kids right now live in families with one undocumented parent. And those are US kids, right? Those are the next generation of our kids that are affected by policies that could one day just take away one parent or two parents and leave them in the foster care system. So I encourage us to think about that as well in the context of how we're thinking about our public policy, about single parents. Okay.

Onto the Congress very quickly. Maybe Doug wasn't sufficiently curmudgeonly, maybe Melissa was, wasn't sufficiently optimistic. I think there are a lot of things and opportunities there. But but I do see in the short term, really a whole lot of nothing happening. So, so let me just say a couple of things. There is an opportunity in the lame duck certainly to try to make some advancements around the child tax credit. If there was a budget deal in the next few weeks, that is a possibility. And we all would want to see that for all the reasons that we've been talking about right now. There is a possibility of doing something on health care and Medicaid in particular, where we have some real concerns about the ending of the federal emergency. And as you heard earlier in some of the presentations, that many of those emergency benefits have been really super important to families

and they're starting to expire. Right. So what can we, what can we retain, I think is a real goal for many who are focused on families.

So so there may be some possibilities around health care and Medicaid that we can foresee. And for those who are tracking very closely this, this intersection between families and immigration, the possibility of something on DACA or for farmworkers is a real possibility and would make a difference in keeping families intact and gainfully employed in our system. So we hope we can make some progress on those things. If there is a budget deal to be had. After that, it kind of falls off a cliff a little bit, right? So we've got two years, we've got probably no money to work with from this Congress, given that they feel like they've given 2 trillion plus already. And we have a Republican-controlled House who is coming to Congress not to legislate, you know, not to create policies, but, but more than likely just to fight. And that's what we're going to see. And I think here and there's every indication from what we see in the platform that they'll be fighting things like kids from being exposed to too much liberal ideology in school or other things like that, rather than the kinds of policies that I think we're all talking about here that would be good for families.

So I'm not terribly optimistic that there's a lot of new resources that will put out there or a lot of good policy to be made in the next two years. That being said, the administration still has power and authority, and there are things that are still trickling through the federal agencies that could make some, some, some difference in the lives of single parents. We have early childhood education; we have money for mental health kids in schools. That's enormously important to parents and single parents. Those are things that if they have cultural competency and are able to flow through the schools, the families, can make a real big difference for those families. So, you know, we're looking at that. We have student debt cancelation possibility or relief that could be enormously helpful for, you know, the mothers that were mentioned earlier that are actually they're college grads, but they're single parents and they're struggling, too. So there may be something there for them, too.

So on the administration and federal side, there are great possibilities as well. Now, we also have the states, right. And the states are places where we're making progress with respect to leave, which has been an important focus of some of the research that we've seen. So can we set a high bar in what's happening in California or New Mexico or New York? I do think so. And will that influence things going forward? Absolutely. A final note on COVID very quickly. It is true that those things are temporary. It is absolutely true that we put out there very, very good policy in a lot of places that we

can come back to later on. But don't miss that we've changed the playbook around how we deal with pandemics and federal disaster to put families first. What the, next time we find ourselves in a federal emergency disaster, we'll do what policymakers did this time. What did we do the last time? Right. And they'll start looking at that. So fundamentally changing the playbook in how the government treats families during disasters is an important contribution and an achievement that many of us should, I think, applaud. So I'm going to stop there.

One last thing. I do think representation matters. So I just want to say, you know, we're seeing a rising number of women in Congress, record breaking numbers and also a rising number of women who are governors in states. And I think those things also make a difference when that kind of lived experience is brought to the fore for women making policy decisions and, and talking about these issues. So I'll stop there.

Amanda Sheely [01:31:58] Thank you, Eric. I appreciate how you started in a curmudgeon way and then ended maybe with a little bit more, more optimism. So I'm still going to hold on to that. And so last but not least, definitely is Belle Sawhill, please. Belle, you're still muted.

Isabel Sawhill [01:32:18] Thank you, Amanda. And it's hard to be the last person because everything has been said and I agree with so much of that. And like everyone else, I'm very impressed with the volume. But I'll make four quick points that I think I also made in my chapter for the volume. The first point is something similar to what Melissa raised, which I think is that most of the research we have suggests that children who grow up in two parent families do better on average than those who grow up with just one parent. And I want to make very clear that that doesn't mean we shouldn't support single parents once we have them in our midst. And they are a growing segment of the population. So I'm completely on board with giving them the support that they need. But I'm not on board with the idea that I might tell my teenage daughters, oh, become a single parent, that's just as viable a way of raising children as doing so with a committed partner. So it's not a moral statement, it's a, I think, an economic reality that when you have a second parent who has time and resources to commit to raising children, it's a lot easier.

Second point, we need a better safety net, and we need higher minimum wages. So like Melissa, I think the focus should be on poverty rather than on family structure. And as Doug pointed out, there are some high-income single parents. So I think what we're concerned about is the poverty and especially the needs of children in those families. And we all know that in the U.S., our safety net

is pretty stingy. I liked Doug's point that we came very close to making it a lot less stingy in the recent Congress, but we failed by just one or two votes. I think, by the way, that the data that you all have in the volume showing how far below other countries' minimum wages the U.S. federal minimum wage is is really an eye opener and really worth stressing.

Third point, in the wake of the Supreme Court's Dobbs decision, I want to remind everyone that an awful lot of women who are single parents became single parents, not because they wanted to be single parents, but because they had an accidental or unintended pregnancy. And we know how to reduce that, by the way, in my own work on this set of issues in my book *Generation Unbound*, I have data that I think is very strong data that shows a majority of single women under 30 in the United States did not choose their pregnancies. They had, according to the mothers themselves after the baby was born, that they tell the government survey group that the child was either unwanted or came much too early in their education and work career. So I think we need to keep that group in mind. And there was nothing in this volume, which is not a criticism of the volume, because you can't cover everything, on the need to provide young women with the ability to choose themselves if, when and in what circumstances they want to become mothers. And that's not the case right now that very many of them evidently have that choice, according to what they tell us.

Fourth point, I don't think that government assistance will ever be sufficient to bring most single parents up to the level that two parents are able to bring into the household in terms of earnings and income. Again, for the obvious reason that two earners is better than one. But and I think in the context of social policy then, we should recognize that that income from government is never going to be sufficient. So we do need to worry about the labor market. We do need to worry about minimum wages. And especially we need to worry about reconciling work and family life. And that does mean childcare. And in the U.S., childcare is now about as expensive as sending your kids to college. And it is, as other speakers have noted, a real barrier for single parents and for them working and being able to earn enough along with whatever benefits they get. So that would be really close to the top of my list of policy priorities. In fact, I'm kind of torn right now about whether I would prefer to see the child tax credit made of the sort we had during the pandemic, have that extended to be more generous or whether I would rather see the build back better proposal to make childcare virtually free for everybody who is less than solidly middle class. And I think that one can argue that people can spend their child tax credits on childcare if they want to. But I do worry that we're not

building the kind of early education and childcare infrastructure in the United States that's going to be needed going forward.

So we're getting close to the end of our time here. I do want to recognize that the audience has sent in some questions, and we haven't had time to get to very many of them, although I think we've basically covered quite a few of them. One that's come in that's a little bit unusual is, relates to what Irv Garfinkel said and to the chapters on child support. And that is what is the role of fathers in the lives of children growing up with single parents who are usually their mother? And this question, or really sad, isn't there a bigger role that can be encouraged, and isn't there research showing that that helps when we get fathers more involved? And one of the chapters in the volume did, of course, cover that. So I would recommend looking at that chapter. But I also will give a shout out to my colleague Richard Reeves's new book called *Boys and Men and How They're Struggling*. And in the book, he argues that we need to do a lot more to engage fathers in parenting and in their role as parents, even if they aren't married to the mother of their children.

Well, let me finally just thank everyone and maybe say just a word more about the policy questions that Eric raised. Like Eric, I'm quite pessimistic about what this new Congress will do. I love the way he talked about the fact that the House at least has come to Washington to fight and not to legislate. I also think that one of the things that Janet and the other editors have emphasized in being more optimistic about the future is the role of state and local governments. And Eric said that as well. And I too believe that we tend to forget, some of us who are policy types in Washington, that an awful lot of policy is made at the state level, and it often becomes the model for what happens at the federal level. And we have a lot of governors out there and more of them are women and therefore, more likely, perhaps to be sympathetic to the agenda that has been put forward in this volume. So let's not forget about that part of our policy work.

So to conclude, many, many thanks to all of you, to all of you on this panel, to all of the authors and all of the editors, to our staff at Brookings who did great work on organizing this. To my assistant Morgan Welsh and to Megan Waring in particular. And finally, thanks to the audience, we hope you enjoyed this and that you'll visit our website and visit the volume itself and read more. With that, I'm going to give you a couple of extra minutes of time to get to your next event or your next Zoom. And many thanks and goodbye to all.