

## Colorado ballot measure proposes education classes to marry

By Kate Gibbons *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

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As if getting married wasn't complicated enough, a proposed ballot initiative would require mandatory pre-wedding education before couples could say "I do."

Lumped onto the hours spent debating centerpieces, picking a photographer, finding the perfect dress and corralling future in-laws, the proposed Colorado Marriage Education Act calls for 10 hours of pre-wedding marriage education.

If either the bride- or groom-to-be is marrying for the second time, the requirement kicks up to a minimum of 20 hours. It goes up to 30 hours for a third- time's-the-charm.

A re-marrying widow would be held to the same standard as a first-timer. The law would not apply to civil unions.

"I don't think it is necessary to mandate in my private life," said Margie Rodgers, who will walk down the aisle June 7 in Boulder.

Rodgers and her fiancé completed premarital counseling through their church.

Proponents David Schel and Sharon Tekolian of California-based Kids Against Divorce say the intended purpose of the act is to "better prepare individuals going into marriage to fulfill their new roles as spouse and potentially as parent, to furthermore protect children given that marriage is the foundation of a family unit."

While the organization plans to propose similar bills across the country, Colorado was selected as the first state.

"Education is the key to success in every aspect of life. This will have a positive impact on marriage," Tekolian said.

The advocates need 86,105 valid signatures by the Aug. 4 deadline to put the initiative on the November ballot.

"This is the stupidest thing I have ever heard," said Alyx Reese-Giles, who was married for the third time in November. "The government has no business deciding what education people should or should not get before entering into marriage. Marriage is about communication and being ready to commit, and no class is going to teach you that."

Reese-Giles "did everything right" leading up to her second marriage in the late 1990s.

"We did six months of counseling through our church, and it lasted one month and 25 days," she said.

The initiative also includes a tax cut for couples who voluntarily complete continuing marriage education each year to "reduce the billions of dollars taxpayers spend annually on divorce."

The organization quotes a 2008 study by Benjamin Scafidi on behalf of several institutes that estimated \$112 billion of taxpayer money is spent on divorce and unwed child-bearing each year.

As proposed, the prenuptial curriculum would be created and overseen by the Colorado State Board of Marriage and Family Therapist Examiners. The board would then validate completion and issue a "Marriage Course Completion Certificate." The couple would pay the cost associated with the education.

"It's another attempt to say who can and can't be married," said Reese-Giles, "so if you are poor and you can't afford the class, then you can't get married."

The increase to wedding budgets wasn't the only thing firing up brides.

"Right now I am kind of mad I have to take off work just to get a license," said Rodgers, of the limited hours of the Office of the Clerk and Recorder, which issues marriage licenses. "People work and have jobs. When would they do this (the education)?"

"Marriage is a big-time commitment," Tekolian said of the proposed hourly mandate.

*Kate Gibbons: 303-954-1016, [kgibbons@denverpost.com](mailto:kgibbons@denverpost.com)*