

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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Testimony COMMENTING on SB279
RELATING TO MARRIAGE OF MINORS.

SENATOR JARRETT KEOHOKALOOLE, CHAIR
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

Hearing Date: February 12, 2021 Room Number: N/A

1 **Department Testimony:** The Department of Health provides the following data to the
2 Legislature in consideration of this measure, which were derived from marriage license data. In
3 general, marriage with persons under the age of 18 is an uncommon occurrence, but there are a
4 small number of outlier cases that prompt closer scrutiny and a public policy discussion.

5 Hawaii-Based Couples

6 From 1/1/2010 to 9/30/2020, out of 237,163 marriages there were 216 people under the age of 18
7 (153 brides and 63 grooms), or 0.09% where both partners claims Hawaii residency. A further
8 breakdown reveals:

9 • Brides:

10 ○ 16 years old = 30

11 ○ 17 years old = 108

12 • Grooms:

13 ○ 16 years old = 8

14 ○ 17 years old = 48

1 The vast majority of couples are within a few years of each other, i.e., teens marrying teens, but
2 there are a small number of outliers ranging from 10 to 21 years age difference for both bride and
3 groom, e.g. thirty-plus year old man/woman marrying teen girl/boy.

4 The vast majority are between Hawaii residents, the rest are mainland/Hawaii or foreign/Hawaii
5 in that order. Ranked by county in descending order, partners were from the City and County of
6 Honolulu, followed by Maui, Hawaii, and Kauai

7 Couples with Hawaii Resident and Mainland/Other Partner

8 In the same time frame, 19 marriages involved a person under 18 and a non-resident. Similar to
9 Hawaii-only couples, most participants were within a few years of each other though there were
10 two clear outliers where the groom was older by many years. Also, one state of origin for both
11 bride and groom is over-represented, with the rest mostly from the West Coast but not
12 exclusively.

13 • Brides:

14 ○ 16 years old = 6

15 ○ 17 years old = 9

16 • Grooms:

17 ○ 16 years old = 2

18 ○ 17 years old = 5

19 Trends in State Laws

20 The Tahirih Justice Center (TJC) released a brief in August 2020 on state laws regarding
21 minimum marriage age:

- 22 • 25 states have strengthened their minimum marriage age laws since 2016
- 23 • Hawaii is one of the remaining 25 states that has not passed any marriage age reforms

- 1 • 11 of the 25 states ended child marriage by either setting minimum marriage age at 18
2 without exception or require court-emancipation of the minor, similar to this measure

3 Of course, there are pros and cons of posed by child/teen marriages, regarding family resilience,
4 socioeconomic potential, etc., including cultural perspectives which should be considered.

5 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

6 **Offered Amendments:** N/A.

7

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB279: RELATING TO MARRIAGE OF MINORS**SUBMITTED TO SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH ON FEBRUARY 12, 2021**

Chairman Keohokalole and Distinguished Committee Members:

AHA Foundation wishes to be recorded in strong support for Hawai'i Senate Bill 279. AHA Foundation thanks Senator Rhoads for his leadership on this bill, and the Committee for prioritizing a hearing on this important legislation.

SB279 eliminates exceptions to the marriage age, and reserves marriage, a serious legal contract, for those who have reached the age of majority.

While the current minimum marriage age in Hawai'i is 18, the state allows a major exception: children ages 16 and 17 can marry with parental consent and those who are 15 can marry with parental consent and judicial approval. Alarming, within the current legal framework, there are no criteria that a marriage involving a minor aged 15 must meet to be eligible for judicial approval.

In cases in which minors 15 and above request a marriage license, there is no mechanism in place to ensure that the required parental consent is not in fact parental coercion. Children who have not yet reached the age of majority can easily be forced or coerced into marriage or trapped in an abusive marriage. Minors being coerced into marriage may fear familial violence should they refuse to comply, or they may be physically or emotionally manipulated into accepting an unwanted marriage. They face significant legal and practical barriers if they try to leave home, enter a domestic violence shelter, retain an attorney, file a legal action such as a divorce, etc. Furthermore, in Hawai'i, minors who are married are automatically emancipated which often leaves them without necessary resources and support.

AHA Foundation has worked with potential victims of forced and child marriage from across the U.S. and knows full well that these barriers are grounded in reality. In one case, Mena¹, a U.S.-born minor, reached out to AHA Foundation due to her fear of being forced into an unwanted marriage. In spite of the fact that she could not yet legally vote, and was only just learning how to drive, her parents were planning her wedding to an older man whom she had never met. Due to state laws, all the courts needed was her parents' permission for the marriage to move forward. While AHA Foundation was ultimately able to help Mena escape the situation, the reality is that it should not have been legally possible for Mena's parents to coerce her as a minor to marry. Those at risk must be protected by a comprehensive legal framework that guarantees their human rights.

Individual stories like Mena's are also supported by data collected by Unchained At Last and the Hawai'i Department of Health. Between 2000 and 2020, 811 children as young as 15 were married, with 82 percent of them being girls wed to adult men.

Child marriage severely limits opportunities to health, education and economic freedom. It also increases risk of domestic violence. Given these factors, one case of forced or child marriage is one too many. If mechanisms are in place that allow for potentially thousands of cases to slip through the cracks, the commonsense solution is to enact the necessary laws to close these gaps.

¹ Name changed to protect survivor's identity



BREAKING THE SILENCE
PROTECTING LIBERTY
CELEBRATING DIGNITY

About AHA Foundation

AHA Foundation is a 501(c)3 non-profit founded by women's rights activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and is the leading organization working to end honor violence that shames, hurts or kills thousands of women and girls in the U.S. each year, and puts millions more at risk. We ensure that women and girls of all races, cultures, religions, beliefs and backgrounds who are facing honor violence have a way out, and that survivors get the help they need to thrive.

Since 2010, the focus of the Foundation's programs includes: 1) compiling data on these crimes, which are not currently tracked by U.S. law enforcement or government agencies, 2) publishing reports and articles and organizing conferences about the continued oppression of women and girls in the U.S., 3) lobbying and outreach to expand and strengthen state and national legislation for the protection of women and girls, 4) training of law enforcement and service providers, and 5) connecting women and girls in crisis to appropriate services. AHA Foundation has trained over 2,700 frontline service providers on responding to cases of honor violence and forced marriage, and partnered with Crisis Text Line to create America's first honor violence and forced marriage helpline.

SB-279

Submitted on: 2/10/2021 11:49:07 AM

Testimony for HTH on 2/12/2021 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Joreida Torres	Testifying for Small Business Association Leadership Council	Support	No

Comments:

I testify today as an individual citizen, disabled Veteran, mother of a Down Syndrome child and as a Small Business Association Leadership Council Representative. My testimony is simple - Washington politics are finally aligning with social justice and I implore Hawaii state legislature to integrate those same alignments with the implementation of SB279.

I am from the Washington D.C. area and work tirelessly and passionately to advocate on behalf of special needs children, a forgotten niche within the most vulnerable population. SB279 does not just protect underage children, but also protects minors who might otherwise be incapable of distinguishing subpar adult motives.

You are not alone in standing up for basic human rights! The good news is that here, in Washington, underage marriage and the general plight against pedophilia, is no longer unnoticed or taboo. I have seen the great bi-partisan strides being made to end these atrocities, including support from the private sector. America's Small Business Association Leadership Council is meeting this week and next to address these same sensitive issues that are applicable in our background investigations.

We need courage on both sides of the aisle, and to listen when the people speak up about issues that matter, like preventing underage marriage. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Health | February 12, 2021
In STRONG SUPPORT of SB279: Relating to Marriage of Minors

Chair Keohokalole and distinguished committee members: Unchained At Last is the only organization dedicated to ending forced and child marriage in Hawai'i and across the U.S. through direct services and advocacy. **Unchained urges you to vote "YES" on SB279.**

Child Marriage Is a Serious Problem: The marriage age is 18, but dangerous loopholes allow 16- and 17-year-olds to marry with parental "consent" and 15-year-olds to marry with parental consent and judicial approval.¹

Dangers in the Current Law

- When a child is forced to marry, the perpetrators are typically the parents. Parental "consent" is often "coercion."
- Judges have wide discretion to approve even the marriage of a child who is too young to consent to sex.
- Even more robust judicial review process still would put the onus on a child who is being forced to marry to choose whether to be honest with the court and face the repercussions at home, or to lie to the court.
- Children are effectively disempowered through the process, entered into marriages by parents and/or a judge.
- A child is automatically emancipated upon marriage,² which likely ends their parents' financial obligation to them, regardless of the child's level of financial or emotional independence.
- Typically, an adult age 20 or older who has sex with a 15-year-old can be charged with sexual assault – but not if they are married to each other.³ Between 2000 and 2019, at least one and possibly two adults age 20 or older married 15-year-olds⁴ and received a "get out of jail free" card.

Devastating Consequences of Child Marriage

- Teens can easily be forced into marriage or forced to stay in a marriage before they turn 18.⁵ Even at 15, 16 or 17, they cannot easily leave home,⁶ enter a domestic violence shelter,⁷ retain an attorney⁸ or bring a legal action including seeking a protective order.⁹
- Child marriage destroys girls' health, education and economic opportunities, and increases their risk of experiencing violence.¹⁰ **The U.S. State Department has called marriage before 18 a "human rights abuse."**¹¹
- Those who marry before 18 have a 70-80% chance of divorcing – and teen mothers who marry and then divorce are more likely to suffer economic deprivation and instability than teen mothers who stay single.¹²

Alarming Statistics

- 811 children age 15 to 17 were married in Hawai'i between 2000 and mid-2020. 82% were girls wed to adult men.¹³

Simple Legislative Solution: SB279 costs nothing, harms no one and saves girls from a human rights abuse: It keeps the marriage age at 18 and eliminates the dangerous loopholes that allow marriage before that age. Other states are passing the same legislation. **More information is at unchainedatlast.org.**

¹ Haw. Rev. Stat. §§ 572-1, 572-2, 572-9, 572-10.

² Haw. Rev. Stat. § 577-25.

³ Haw. Rev. Stat. §§ 707-730, 707-732.

⁴ Based on marriage license data from Hawai'i Department of Health, retrieved by Unchained and analyzed by Dr. Alissa Koski and her graduate students at McGill University in Montreal (expected to be published soon).

⁵ Haw. Rev. Stat. § 577-1: The age of adulthood is 18.

⁶ Leaving home before 18 is a status offense. See Haw. Rev. Stat. §§ 571-2, 571-11(2)(B). See also Hawai'i State Judiciary, *Juvenile Proceedings*, available at https://www.courts.state.hi.us/self-help/juvenile/juvenile_proceedings.

⁷ Unchained has found domestic violence shelters across the U.S. typically do not accept minors who are unaccompanied by a parent or guardian because of the potential legal liability minors bring.

⁸ Contracts with minors, including retainer agreements with attorneys, are generally voidable. See Haw. Rev. Stat. § 577-1. See also *Jellings v. Pioneer Mill Co.*, 30 Haw. 184, 186-87 (Haw. 1927).

⁹ Haw. Rev. Stat. §§ 551-2, § 587A-16(a). Note that children are automatically emancipated upon marriage and should get the rights listed here, but those rights arrive too late for a child facing a forced marriage.

¹⁰ Fraidy Reiss, *Why Can 12-Year-Olds Still Get Married in the United States*, Washington Post (10 February 2017).

¹¹ <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/254904.pdf>.

¹² <http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2467&context=facpubs>.

¹³ Based on marriage-license data Unchained retrieved from the Hawai'i Department of Health.

SB-279

Submitted on: 2/11/2021 12:41:29 PM

Testimony for HTH on 2/12/2021 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Sarah Wright	Testifying for Unchained at Last	Support	No

Comments:

(My comments will be part of Unchained at Last's testimony, and will highlight aspects of child marriage that are tantamount to statutory rape.)



STUDENTS AGAINST CHILD MARRIAGE

Testimony to Senate Committee on Health | February 12, 2021 in **STRONG SUPPORT** of **SB279: Relating to Marriage of Minors**

Chair Keohokalole and distinguished committee members: Students Against Child Marriage is the nation's only 501(c)(3) nonprofit devoted to ending American child marriage through student activism. We lead the youth and grassroots arm of the advocacy movement fighting this abuse. To protect childhood and society's most vulnerable, we implore you to vote "YES" on SB279.

- **Child marriages are not innocent teen love stories.** They are composed of young girls coerced by their parents into marrying adult men many times their age.

→ 13-years-old and pregnant, Dawn Tyree was forced into marrying the 32-year-old man who had been assaulting her. The marriage was used to protect her parents and the abuser from criminal prosecution. And she is not the only one (studentsagainst.org/Dawn).

- **Child marriages puts girls' health at risk:** Agencies working with girls facing or fleeing forced marriages report that nearly all have contemplated or attempted suicide (Tahirih Justice Center).
- **Child marriage is child abuse:** girls married before age 15 are 50% more likely to be sexually abused by their partners (Tahirih Justice Center).
- **Child marriage perpetuates educational inequities:** girls who marry under age 19 are 50% more likely to drop out of high school and 4x less likely to graduate college (Tahirih Justice Center).
- **Child marriage is a system designed to entrap:** once married, guardianship is frequently transferred over to the spouse, and girls who flee are classified as runaways and forced to return to the very abuser they were trying to escape.

THIS ABUSE IS HAPPENING RIGHT HERE IN HAWAI'I

- **811 children** aged 15 to 17 were married in Hawai'i between 2000 and mid-2020. 82% were girls wed to adult men. (Unchained At Last & Hawai'i Department of Health)

THERE IS A SIMPLE LEGISLATIVE SOLUTION THAT SAVES LIVES

- **SB279** currently sits before your committee. Your vote on this zero-cost bill would harm no one and have an immeasurable impact on the countless girls you will be saving from this human rights abuse.

Students Against Child Marriage has mobilized the nation's youth against child marriage. We have launched nearly 40 chapters with more than 450 members throughout the United States. To date, nearly 10,000 supporters have taken action with us, resulting in more than 34,000 emails and phone calls directed to lawmakers in support of life-saving legislation like SB279.

Chair Keohokalole and distinguished committee members: the nation's youth and our allies of all ages urge you to immediately vote "YES" in support of this legislation.



CALIFORNIA
COALITION
TO END CHILD
MARRIAGE

Testimony of Rima Nashashibi, Founder and President of Global Hope 365 in support of HB60.

Chair Rice, Vice Chair DiSimone, and other distinguished Members of the Hawai'i Senate Health Committee. Global Hope 365 is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls, locally and nationally, by advocating for their safety through raising awareness, education, and empowerment. Our focus is on ending harmful practices towards women and girls such as Child Marriage, Human Trafficking and other forms of domestic violence.

Child marriage remains a serious problem in present-day America. Since 2000, well over 248,000 minors were married, most of them girls married to adult men. Children lack the rights and resources of adults and are more vulnerable to coercion and predation. As a result, many child marriages are forced marriages, and/or are cover-ups for other abuse and exploitation and crimes such as statutory rape.

A number of Child Marriage Survivors indicated Parental Consent is Parental Coersion. The office on United Nations office on Drugs and Crime issued a report recently on the interlinkages between Forced Child Marriage and Human Trafficking which we all know involves Fraud, force and Coersion and benefiting commercial from.

Minors under 18 years of age, who would like to get married for various reasons have the luxury of waiting unlike victims of forced marriage where CHOICE has

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MARRIAGE**

been taking away from them and where **STATUTORY RAPE** is the norm on wedding night and every other night.

As you will hear, **Marriage** under the age of 18 has devastating, lifelong consequences, including greater vulnerability to sexual and domestic violence, increased medical and mental health problems, higher drop-out rates from high school and college, greater risk of poverty, and up to 80% divorce rates.

Forty six states allow for marriage under the age of 18, with parental and/or judicial consent.

The American Medical Association has called for an end to Child Marriage stating “Child marriage is associated with higher rates of sexually transmitted infections, early pregnancies, divorce, and intimate partner violence than women married at age 21.” In addition to a higher rate of Infant and maternal mortality.

Statistics Regarding Child Marriage

- **Young women and girls ages 16-19 face intimate partner violence victimization rates almost three times the national average.**
- **The majority (70%-80%) of Child Marriages end in divorce.**
- **Minors who marry early are more likely to “discontinue their formal education prematurely, earn low wages, and live in poverty.” Girls who marry early are fifty percent more likely to drop out of high school and four times less likely to graduate from college.**

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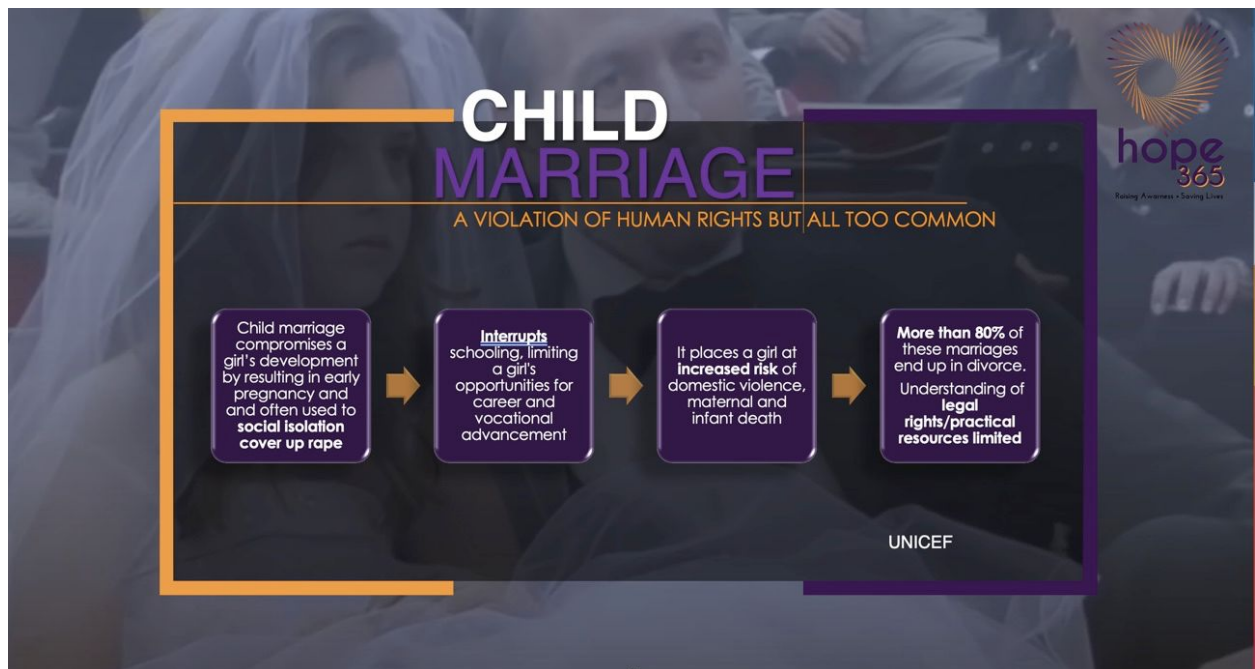
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MARRIAGE

Child Marriage is a Violation of Human Rights

- UNICEF:** Child Marriage before the age of 18 is a fundamental violation of human rights.
- Child Marriage is a violation of article 16(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**
- U.S. Department of State:** The United States has denounced child marriage as a Human Rights Abuse in other countries that contributes to economic hardship” in the words of a State Department document published in 2016.



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SB-279

Submitted on: 2/10/2021 9:18:34 AM

Testimony for HTH on 2/12/2021 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Dawn Tyree	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

My name is Dawn Tyree.

My marriage took place in the United States. I was forced to marry when I was 13-years-old to the man that had been sexually abusing me for two years. When I became pregnant, my parents, along with this man (a family friend) decided that the best thing they could do was to have us get married. The marriage protected my abuser from being prosecuted for child sexual abuse and rape while saving my parents from child abandonment and neglect charges.

Getting married was a decision that was made for me, not by me. The adults in my life were handling "damage control." The marriage lasted 3 years. I was fortunate to get out, but not before having two children by the age of 15.

I was 16 years old when I summoned the strength to get out. I had no place to go and shelters turned me away. The local Adult Family Services told me to go back home, to my parents, because they were the ones responsible for me. I couldn't go to school, secure a job, or find someone to help me with childcare.

The only life I knew was one of being owned by a man; depending on a man. As a result, I went straight into another abusive relationship. I had no self-value, why would I after being a throw-away child to early marriage? I didn't know the early warning signs of domestic violence. As a matter of fact, those red flags likely comforted me at the time. The feeling of being "owned" felt like home to me.

As a single parent with my two children, I lived in fear. My greatest fear was that my children would be taken away from me because I was too young to raise them (yet I was old enough to marry years before).

We often went without necessities such as toilet paper or shampoo. At times, we lived without electricity. I feared that social services would find out I washed our clothes in the bathtub as if it were some kind of a crime.

Court-mandated investigations are harmful. A minor will not tell a Judge, a caseworker, or anyone else for that matter that they are being pressured into marriage. It's terrifying, and likely (just as I did) she will do what she's told to do and try to keep the peace. I urge you to change the minimum age for marriage to 18 years old, with no exceptions.

Allowing 16 and 17 year-olds to continue to marry is discounting the testimony of myself and other survivors. Child marriage is nothing less than a disgrace to our nation.

If we are to evolve as a community and nation our laws must reflect our principles.

Marriage is a decision that two consenting adults make together. The guidelines for marriage should reflect the same guidelines that we have in place for things such as voting, entering contracts, serving our country, or being "of age" to consent. We are doing a grave disservice to minors by allowing them to enter into marriage. We know now the damage that child marriage causes. This is a human rights abuse issue and together we can put an end to it.

Thank you,

Dawn Tyree Child marriage survivor/Activist

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Health | February 12, 2021
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- Judges have wide discretion to approve even the marriage of a child who is too young to consent to sex.
- Even more robust judicial review process still would put the onus on a child who is being forced to marry to choose whether to be honest with the court and face the repercussions at home, or to lie to the court.
- Children are effectively disempowered through the process, entered into marriages by parents and/or a judge.
- A child is automatically emancipated upon marriage,² which likely ends their parents' financial obligation to them, regardless of the child's level of financial or emotional independence.
- Typically, an adult age 20 or older who has sex with a 15-year-old can be charged with sexual assault – but not if they are married to each other.³ Between 2000 and 2019, at least one and possibly two adults age 20 or older married 15-year-olds⁴ and received a "get out of jail free" card.

Devastating Consequences of Child Marriage

- Teens can easily be forced into marriage or forced to stay in a marriage before they turn 18.⁵ Even at 15, 16 or 17, they cannot easily leave home,⁶ enter a domestic violence shelter,⁷ retain an attorney⁸ or bring a legal action including seeking a protective order.⁹
- Child marriage destroys girls' health, education and economic opportunities, and increases their risk of experiencing violence.¹⁰ **The U.S. State Department has called marriage before 18 a "human rights abuse."**¹¹
- Those who marry before 18 have a 70-80% chance of divorcing – and teen mothers who marry and then divorce are more likely to suffer economic deprivation and instability than teen mothers who stay single.¹²

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¹² <http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2467&context=facpubs>.

¹³ Based on marriage-license data Unchained retrieved from the Hawai'i Department of Health.

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Health, February 12, 2021
In support of SB279: Relating to Marriage of Minors

Distinguished committee members:

My name is Sara Tasneem, and I am a survivor of forced child marriage. I am a vocal national advocate to end forced child marriage in the United States because of the horrors that I had to endure as a child with absolutely no escape, legal or otherwise. I hope that no other child must go through what I did and that is why I support SB279.

At the age of fifteen, during a summer visit to see my dad, I was forced into a marriage I did not want. My father introduced me to my husband-to-be one morning and I was told I would marry him that night. That man was thirteen years my senior, he 28 years old. My mother did not even know that this was taking place. After a spiritual wedding ceremony that evening, I was handed over to my new husband and left in his care. He became my guardian, husband, and the father to my children. I lost my childhood, my freedom, and myself that night. I would never be the same person again. I was not allowed to go back to school. Instead I was taken out of the country raped daily and impregnated almost immediately. My opportunities were taken from me like so many other victims of child marriage. Marriage before the age of eighteen makes children much more likely to be pulled out of school than their adult counterparts.

Six months after our spiritual ceremony I was **legally** married at the age of 16 and pregnant in Reno, N.V. My pregnant belly should have alerted authorities to a rape instead of a rubber stamp on a marriage certificate. I was not advised of my rights, or even asked if I wanted the marriage. None of it felt like a real marriage to me. It began to feel more and more like a prison after our legal marriage.

It took me eight long years of surviving my abusive relationship and overcoming enormous obstacles to file for divorce. It then took three years to finalize my divorce. As a minor I faced extreme and numerous barriers to being able to leave my abusive marriage. I am not the exception. In fact, minors who marry are three times more likely to be abused within their marriages. It has taken me years to recognize and address the severe impacts child marriage has had on me, including PTSD from the prolonged abuse, recovering from the financial abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and physical abuse, the educational impacts of being taken out of school as a fifteen year led directly to extreme poverty. It has taken me years to recover. Even though I am in therapy, will likely suffer from PTSD and anxiety most of my life.

There are **so many** reasons why child marriage is harmful to minors. I cannot think of one good reason why Hawaii would want to continue these harms and expose minors to a human rights abuse.

Respectfully,

Sara Tasneem

707-217-8925 cell

Survivor / Advocate

<https://tasneemsfadvocacy.home.blog/>

208 N Rancho Place, El Sobrante, CA 94803

Testimony in STRONG Support of SB279: Relating to Marriage of Minors

Presented to the Hawai'i Senate Health Committee | 2/12/2021

Chair Keohokalole and Distinguished Committee Members:

My name is Aliya Abbas. I am a child marriage survivor and activist. **As a child marriage survivor, I request you to vote "YES" on Bill SB279 because it simply will put end child marriage.** Voting "Yes" would mean eliminating the abuse of placing children in the most vulnerable, hopeless, and abusive situations. Even though the marriage age is 18 in Hawai'i, the law permits 16 and 17-year-olds to marry with parental consent and 15 year olds with parental consent & judiciary approval. It is a fact that parental consent is most often parental coercion. The U.S. State Department has called marriage below 18 a "human rights abuse," and a human rights abuse is never in the best interest of a child. Even a more robust judicial review process would be dangerous: It would put the child being forced to marry in the most terrifying position of choosing between being honest with the court and facing the repercussions at home, or lying to the court. Why would we want to put children in that dangerous position anyway? Child marriage destroys girls' health, education and economic opportunities, and increases their risk of experiencing further violence & trauma.

- What does life look like for children who are forced into this abuse? To start off with, children who are forced to endure the trauma of the forced marriage are also likely be pulled out of school as I was. We know how important education is for children, especially girls. Child brides are physically, mentally, & emotionally abused, manipulated, and raped; ALL before they could even gain the rights (legally) they need to escape at 18. Child marriage puts the health, well being, & safety of children into jeopardy.
- 70 to 80 percent of marriages before 18 ends in failure which does put children in such situations at risk of homelessness because they lack financial independence and support. So, what would we be really doing here other than putting the lives of these children at risk to all sorts of danger?

I whole heartedly support this bill because it hits home. It's extremely personal. I am a product of child marriage and who better than a child bride to know the reality of this injustice. At 17 years old, in January of 2003, I was taken out of school in Maryland, my home state and was flown to a foreign country where I was forcefully married off to a complete stranger without my consent. That one instance changed my life forever. I was raped and became a teenage mother again without my consent. Being a mother is one of the most fulfilling jobs I have, but I won't lie, it took every ounce of my being to get to where I am today and it still takes a toll. It's actually a miracle that I am still here and standing strong. No child should ever have to endure that unimaginable heavy load of abuse that child marriage results in. The years I spent in the marriage if you can even call it that were the most painful years of my life where I endured mental, emotional, and physical torture. I was bullied. I was beaten. I was raped. I would like to stop here and just say one thing; I've never defined myself as a victim even though I have been brutally victimized. I am a survivor who had the courage to finally stand up for myself, most importantly for the sake of my children at any cost even when that cost was death as per my uncle.

Even though I didn't know how to swim in an ocean of uncertainty, I took a huge risk towards our freedom and jumped. I taught myself how to swim within that uncertainty. I don't know where I got all that strength from, perhaps, God, but what I do know is that I don't wish this experience upon anyone! Unfortunately, most child brides aren't as lucky and they end up experiencing a lifetime of abuse in all forms, dehumanization, torture, and sadly even death in some case.

SB279 will simply end child marriage and that is what we need to do. We need to step up and protect our children.

Thank You,

Aliya Abbas

SB-279

Submitted on: 2/11/2021 6:59:03 AM

Testimony for HTH on 2/12/2021 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
stephanie markle	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

I testify today as an individual citizen, Veteran, Educator, and mother to please vote “YES” on SB279. This bill will end all child marriages in Hawai'i, protecting children from a horrific human rights abuse.

I teach U.S.and World history to children in Colorado and yet, most of my students who are of the ages 14-17 cannot vote or have sexual relations with someone 18 or older, but can legally marry. My students are not yet seen as adults by our nation, but because of dangerous loopholes in many states, the practice of minors being allowed to marry continues. It must be pointed out that most minors are forced or manipulated into this union since the prefrontal cortex of the brain is not developed enough to understand the lasting implications marriage has.

I urge you to please say yes to SB279



WILLIAM & MARY
LAW SCHOOL
CENTER FOR RACIAL & SOCIAL JUSTICE

Vivian Hamilton
Professor of Law
Law School
P.O. Box 8795
Williamsburg, VA 23187-8795

Telephone: (757) 221-3839
Fax: (757)-221-3261
Email: vhamilton@wm.edu

February 11, 2021

Re: Support for SB279 to Raise Marriage Age to 18

Dear Chair Keohokalole and Distinguished Committee Members:

I teach courses in Family Law, Education Law, and Constitution & the Family, and I research how legal measures affect adolescents. I analyzed the effects of early marriage on well-being in a 2012 article, *The Age of Marital Capacity: Reconsidering Civil Recognition of Adolescent Marriage*, published in the B.U. LAW REV. (abstract attached). I write to express my support for the above bill and urge you to consider the arguments in its favor, each of which is supported by extensive interdisciplinary research.

Age at marriage has for decades been the strongest and most unequivocal predictor of divorce.

- For youths and teens who marry in mid-adolescence, the likelihood of *divorce* *nears 80%*.
- For older teens who marry closer to age 18, the likelihood of divorce *nears 70 percent*. It then drops steadily and begins to level off around age 22.

Early marriage imposes significant costs on families.

Compared with those who delay marriage, adolescents who marry:

- Are less likely to complete high school, and significantly less likely to complete college.
- Are more likely to earn low wages.
- Are more likely to live in poverty.

The costs of early marriage—and divorce—are especially high for women and children.

- When teen mothers marry and later divorce, they (and their children) tend to suffer greater economic deprivation and instability than do teen mothers who did not marry.
- Women who marry early develop more mental and physical health problems than those who marry later.

Hawaii's marriage laws currently permit minors to marry with parental (for 16- and 17-year-olds) or parental and judicial consent (for 15-year-olds; but research demonstrates that neither parental nor judicial consent has any observable effect on marital stability. Only delay, along with a number of factors integrally associated with it (such as more years of education), reliably increases marital stability. Indeed, as I write in my article cited above, a better policy measure would set the marriage age at 21. Passing SB279, however, to set the marriage age at 18 without exception would represent significant progress and will alleviate the problems above.

I urge you to support SB279 and thank you for your consideration.

Vivian E. Hamilton
Professor of Law
Founding Director, William & Mary Center for Racial & Social Justice
William & Mary School of Law

SB-279

Submitted on: 2/11/2021 9:59:24 AM

Testimony for HTH on 2/12/2021 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Patricia Bilyk	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

I stand in strong SUPPORT of SB279 Relating to Marriage of Minors

Patricia L Bilyk, RN, MPH, MSN

NESHA ABIRAJ
International Human Rights Lawyer
UNICEF USA UNITE Council, Advocacy Lead; Schuette Fellow Global Health and Human Rights
Tel: (843)-940-5278 E-mail: nesh.abiraj@gmail.com

**Written Testimony in Support of HB279: Ending Child Marriage
Presented to the Senate Committee on Health | February 12th, 2021**

Honorable Speaker, Chairs and Honorable Legislators, my name is Nesha Abiraj. I am an International Human Rights Lawyer, working on ending harmful practices against women and girls both internationally and at home in the US. I submit this testimony in full support of **HB279** a Bill which will ban child marriage in Hawaii.

When you think about child marriage perhaps instinctively you think of two young teenagers but the data paints a very different and dark picture of what child marriage actually looks like in the United States.

[UNICEF](#) calls child marriage a harmful practice and violation of child rights and believes that marriage under the age of 18 should be prohibited in all circumstances. Child marriage has immediate and long term and life altering impacts on a young girl's life, family and community. Based on my work on this issue, the risks associated with child marriage are just as real for child marriages here in the US as it is in developing countries.

A child bride's [odds of finishing school decrease by 50%](#) and she is [4 times less likely to graduate college](#), while her odds of being abused by her husband and suffering complications during pregnancy increase. Teenage girls are [more likely to die in childbirth](#) than women in their twenties. Childhood pregnancy also [increases nutritional risks](#) for both mother and baby with permanent consequences.

Child marriage also breeds societal consequences including intergenerational cycles of [poverty](#) and [mental illness](#) which can often lead to substance abuse based on child marriage survivor accounts in the US. Studies show child marriages places girls at a severe risk of developing [mental health disorders](#), such as depression which is one of the single [largest sources of disabilities](#) in the United States.

Additionally, shocking as it sounds our own immigration laws have been used to perpetuate child marriage which can easily lead to [exploitation and human trafficking](#). A [Senate Homeland Security Committee Report](#) released in January 2019 showed the federal government approved thousands of requests by men to bring child brides or fiancées into the U.S. Between 2007 and 2017, United States Customs and Immigration Services (“USCIS”) approved more than [5,500 petitions and 95%](#) of these petitions involved minor girls. In one case a **68-year-old citizen successfully petitioned for a 16-year-old foreign spouse**. In another, a **71-year-old citizen petitioned for a 17-year-old foreign spouse**.

I've also seen child marriage up close and the grave harm child marriage causes. You have already heard the statistics, but I can introduce you to some of the victims. Among them were both of my grandmothers. They were both child brides, and their lives illustrate how child marriage robs

children—especially girls—of their childhood and their rights. However that was in the 1930s and my grandmothers are the reasons why I can testify before you today as an International Human Rights Lawyer. The cycle stopped a long time ago with them. The question is when will Hawaii finally say enough is enough and end this human rights abuse?

For the sake of protecting the children of Hawaii from this abuse and protecting their future, I urge you take a stand for children. Child marriage comes at a cost which society can no longer afford and I ask of you today, to pass **HB279** not for you or me, but for every child's right to a childhood.

Thank you.

**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Health
In SUPPORT of SB279: Relating to Marriage of Minors
February 12, 2021**

Chair Keohokalole and distinguished committee members:

Hello, my name is Reid Maki and I represent the National Consumers League (NCL)—the Nation’s oldest consumer advocacy group, based in Washington, D.C. I am also the coordinator of the Child Labor Coalition (CLC)—38 groups committed to reducing abusive child labor here in the U.S. and abroad. NCL founded the CLC three decades ago and continues as one of its two co-chairs. Our members include six of the largest unions in America, as well as child rights, human rights, and faith-based groups. I am here representing millions of Americans concerned about the safety, education, and welfare of children in the US. I am also a former resident of Maui.

The National Consumers League and the Child Labor Coalition urges you to vote “YES” on SB279.

Child Marriage in Hawaii is a Serious Problem: In Hawaii, the marriage age is 18, but dangerous loopholes allow 16- and 17-year-olds to marry with parental “consent” and 15-year-olds to marry with parental consent and judicial approval. According to data obtained by *Unchained at Last* from the Hawaii Department of Health, 811 children aged 15 to 17 were married in Hawaii between 2000 and mid-2020. 82% were girls married to adult men.

The Dangers of Child Marriage: We share the concern that in many cases parental consent really means parental coercion. We also fear that the pregnancy exemption means that many girls will be pressured into marrying adult men who are technically their rapist. A child bride often finds it impossible to leave an abusive marriage and becomes trapped with their abuser. A child bride is 50 percent more likely to drop out of high school and four times more likely to not graduate college. The chances of their ultimately divorcing is estimated at 70 to 80% (data provided by *Unchained at Last*).

It’s well-recognized that child marriage has very negative health impacts and economic impacts on girls. As *Unchained at Last* notes, women who marry before 18 have significantly higher risks for heart attacks, diabetes, cancer, and stroke, as well as having higher risk of mental health issues.

Human Rights: The U.S. State Department in 2016 declared marriage before 18 to be a “human rights abuse” that “produces devastating repercussions for a girl’s life, effectively ending her childhood” and forcing her into “adulthood before she is physically and mentally mature.” The International Labour Organization and the anti-slavery group Walk Free define the 15.4 million individuals who are in forced marriages globally as being victims of slavery; 84% of these victims are women and girls. Six in 10 victims of forced marriage internationally are children.

Legislative Solution: SB279 saves girls from a human rights abuse and eliminates the dangerous loopholes that allow marriage before 18. A 16-year-old in America cannot vote. They cannot go to war. They cannot obtain a credit card. We believe that by reserving marriage for adults, the likelihood of exploitation in that marriage, whether sexual, labor-related, or financial decreases significantly. New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota have enacted complete bans on child marriage and we urge Hawaii to join them.

TO: Hawaii Committee on Health, Chair Jarrett Keohokalole, Vice Chair Rosalyn H. Baker, and Distinguished Committee Members

FROM: Marci Hamilton, Esq. & Kathryn Robb, Esq.

RE: Testimony in Support of SB279: Relating to Marriage of Minors

DATE: February 11, 2021



Dear Chairman Keohokalole, Vice Chairman Baker, and members of the Senate Committee on Health,

Thank you for allowing us, Professor Marci Hamilton of CHILD USA and Kathryn Robb of CHILD USAAdvocacy, to submit testimony regarding SB 279, which will raise the minimum age to enter into marriage from 16 to 18 years of age and remove exceptions to the minimum age requirement. This legislation, if passed, would place Hawaii in the top three states for protecting children from the trauma of underage marriage.

By way of introduction, I am Professor Marci Hamilton, the Founder, CEO, and Academic Director of CHILD USA, a national, interdisciplinary think tank dedicated to the prevention of child abuse and neglect at the University of Pennsylvania, where I am the Robert A. Fox Professor of Practice. I am the author of *Justice Denied: What America Must Do to Protect Its Children* (Cambridge University Press 2008, 2012), which makes the case for statute of limitations (SOL) reform in the child sex abuse arena, and the leading expert on the history and constitutionality of SOL reform. CHILD USA provides an analytical overview of SOL reform for child sex abuse, as well as other cutting-edge issues related to child protection, like child marriage, at www.childusa.org/law.

Kathryn Robb is the Executive Director of CHILD USAAdvocacy, a 501(c)(4) advocacy organization dedicated to protecting children’s civil liberties and keeping children safe from abuse and neglect. CHILD USAAdvocacy draws on the combined expertise of the nation’s leading experts and child advocates, specifically its sister organization, CHILD USA.

Child marriage is a global problem. It is defined as marriage of a child under age 18, and is a far more common practice than many believe. Worldwide estimates suggest that at least 650,000,000 million girls and women alive today had been married as children.¹ This equates to roughly 15 million girls being married each year— before they are 18.

Child marriage is a gendered practice, negatively affecting women far more than men. It is most common in religious, impoverished, or otherwise marginalized communities. The practice is often

¹ Sarah Ferguson, *What You Need to Know About Child Marriage in the U.S.*, available at <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/what-you-need-know-about-child-marriage-us/35059> (2018); <https://assets.prb.org/pdf06/WorldsYouth2006DataSheet.pdf>



used to aid in the cover up statutory rape or assault. **At least half of the states have laws permitting marriage as a defense to statutory rape. In Hawaii, statutory rape laws do not apply to married couples, allowing marriage to act as an affirmative defense to rape of a child.** In order to protect children and secure their futures, the practice of child marriage must be outlawed.

There is a common misconception that child marriage is not a problem in developed countries like the United States, but at least 200,000 children were married here between 2000-15.² The practice is gendered; 87% of the 200,000 were female. Nearly every state permits child marriage in some form.³ In fact, only two states have banned child marriage outright. They are New Jersey (June 2018), and Delaware (May 2018), the first state to ban the practice. More than half of the states permit child marriage with either parental or judicial consent. Other states have religious or pregnancy exceptions, permitting the practice to continue.

Women and girls who are married before reaching adulthood are far more likely to experience physical or sexual violence than those who marry as adults and are far more likely to believe that domestic violence is justified.⁴ and are at a higher risk for sexually transmitted diseases and infections, more general health issues, and nutritional deficiencies.⁵ The negative consequences extend beyond simply the children forced into marriage—the “infant mortality rate is 60% higher” for mothers under 18.⁶ When young girls are married, they tend to have children earlier, leading to increase of complications during pregnancy and childbirth for the mother, as well as increased risks for the child.⁷

Child marriage leads to unhealthy isolation for children as well as both educational disadvantage and higher rates of poverty. While child marriage is most common in conservative religious communities and poor rural areas, men and women married as children remain a hidden population. As such, there is insufficient data available to show the true breadth and scope of the problem. More research must be done to better protect children.

² This is according to a Forbes study of 41 states; the remaining 9 states did not provide data; the number is likely higher.

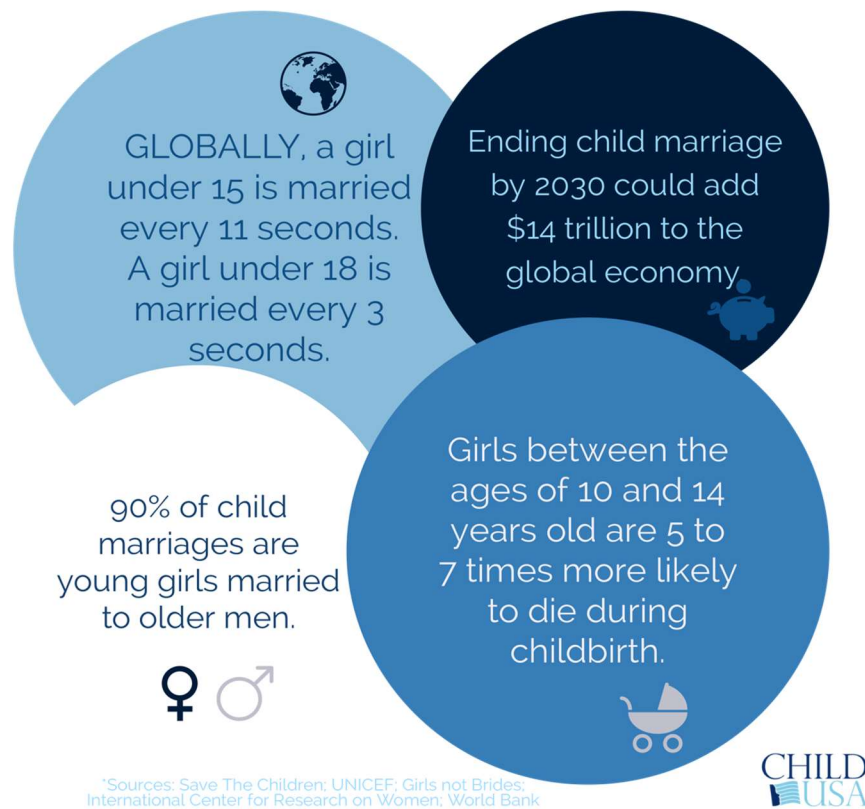
³ Marci A. Hamilton, “2020 Report on Child Marriage in the United States: A National Overview of Child Marriage Data and Law,” available at <https://childusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2020-Report-on-Child-Marriage-in-the-US.pdf>.

⁴ Negar Omidakhsh & Jody Heymann, “Improved Child Marriage laws and its Association with Changing Attitudes and Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence: A Comparative Multi-National Study,” 10 J GLOB. HEALTH (2020), available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7101085/>.

⁵ Nour NM, Child marriage: a silent health and human rights issue, 2(1) REV. OBSTET. GYNECOL. 51–56 (2009).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Jensen & Thornton. “Early Female Marriage in the Developing World.” GENDER & DEV. 11 (2):9–19 (2003); Ending Child Marriage: Progress and Prospects, UNICEF DIV. OF POL’Y & RES. (Nov. 21, 2014), available at http://www.unicef.org/media/files/Child_Marriage_Report_7_17_LR.pdf.



Early marriage increases an adolescent’s likelihood of descending into poverty when compared to an individual married in adulthood, as well as the likelihood of separation or divorce.⁸ Recognizing these dangers, which are just as real in the U.S. as they are internationally, there is a growing national and international trend to limit or completely ban the practice of child marriage.⁹

For those who believe that child marriage is not a problem in the United States, countless and horrifying tales regarding the practice prove otherwise. In Utah, two men in their mid-thirties married one another’s seven- and eight-year-old daughters. The marriages were only discovered when an ex-wife of one of the men contacted law enforcement with allegations of kidnapping. The young girls were discovered freezing and stuffed into water barrels, where they had been placed to avoid law enforcement.¹⁰ According to Frontline data, in Alabama, a 14-year-old girl was married to a 74-year-old man, a sixty-year age gap.¹¹ Young children are frequently brought across state lines to help facilitate child marriage. A well-known example is that of an Idahoan father

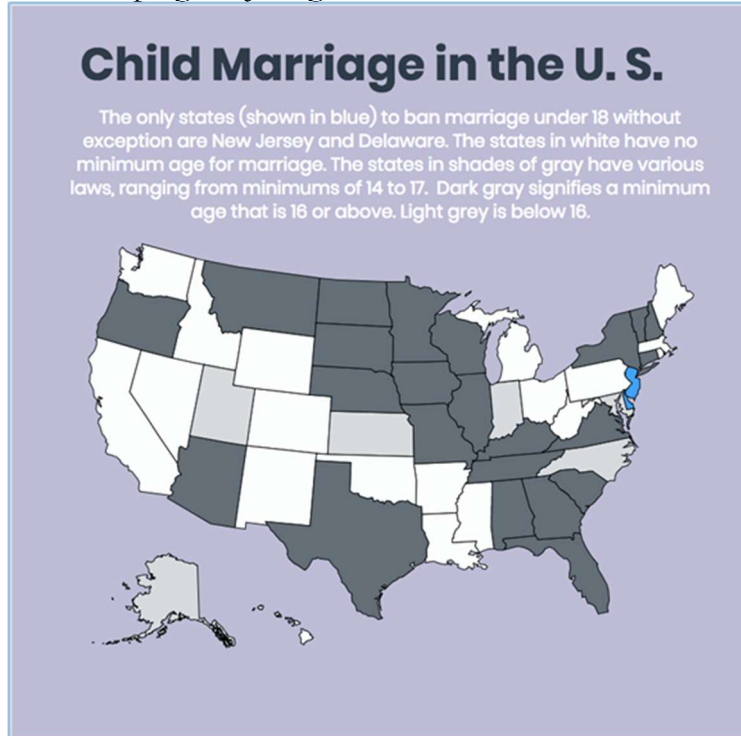
⁸ Aditi Wahi et al, The Lived Experience of Child Marriage in the United States, SOC. WORK IN PUB. HEALTH (2019).

⁹ Hamilton *supra* note 3.

¹⁰ Bryn Lovitt, “Third Man Accused of Child Marriage in Utah Sex Cult,” ROLLING STONE, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/third-man-accused-of-child-marriage-in-utah-sex-cult-630073/> (June 11, 2018).

¹¹ Anjali Tsui, et al., “Child Marriage in America by the Numbers,” FRONTLINE.ORG, <http://apps.frontline.org/child-marriage-by-the-numbers/> (July 6, 2017).

who brought his 14-year-old daughter to Missouri to be married to a man 10 years her senior; the man was later convicted of raping his young wife.



The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (“CRC”) is an international human rights treaty covering child-specific rights. Specifically, the CRC requires that adults act in the best interests of children when making decisions that may affect children. The CRC recommends setting a mandatory minimum age for marriage at 18, applicable to both genders.

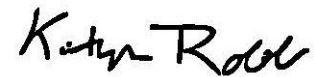
Notably, the United States is the **only country** that has not ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This means that countries like Bangladesh (child marriage rate of at least 52%); Argentina (nearly 350,000 children currently married or participating in conjugal cohabitation); and Zimbabwe (child marriage rate of roughly 33% for girls, with nearly 20% of the whole married before age 15), must work to limit the practice of child marriage. Because the U.S. is not a signatory to the CRC, it is up to individual states to ensure the safety of their children, following the example set by Delaware and New Jersey and banning child marriage. We commend you for recognizing this and taking up this charge on behalf of Hawaii’s children.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of assistance on this or any other child protection issues.

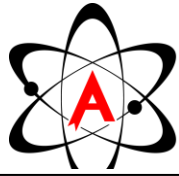
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marci A. Hamilton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Marci A. Hamilton, Esq.
Robert A. Fox Professor of Practice
Senior Resident Fellow, Program for Research on Religion
University of Pennsylvania
marcih@sas.upenn.edu
(215)353-8984

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathryn Robb". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Kathrynn Robb, Esq.
Executive Director
CHILD USA Advocacy
3508 Market St., Suite 201
Philadelphia, PA 19104



AMERICAN ATHEISTS

February 11, 2021

The Honorable Sen. Jarrett Keohokalole
Chairperson, Senate Health Committee
Hawaii State Senate
415 South Beretania St.
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

LATE

Re: SUPPORT for SB 279, Concerning Raising the Minimum Age for Marriage

Dear Chairperson Keohokalole and Members of the Senate Health Committee:

American Atheists, on behalf of its constituents in Hawaii, thanks you for considering SB 279, a bill to end child marriage in Hawaii. This bill would protect young people in Hawaii from being coerced into marriage against their will, a harmful and archaic practice that happens all-too-frequently across our nation. We urge you to swiftly pass this important legislation.

American Atheists is a national civil rights organization that works to achieve religious equality for all Americans by protecting what Thomas Jefferson called the “wall of separation” between government and religion created by the First Amendment. We strive to create an environment where atheism and atheists are accepted as members of our nation’s communities and where casual bigotry against our community is seen as abhorrent and unacceptable. We promote understanding of atheists through education, outreach, and community-building and work to end the stigma associated with being an atheist in America. American Atheists believes that children should never be coerced into marriage due to the religious beliefs of their parents or guardians.

The harm caused by child marriage is daunting. It destroys the child brides’ health, education, and economic opportunities, and it increases their risk of experiencing violence. Those who marry before 18 have a 70 to 80% chance of getting divorced—and teen mothers who marry and then divorce are much more likely to end up in poverty than teen mothers who stay single.¹ In fact, the U.S. State Department has called marriage before age 18 a “human rights abuse.”²

The minimum age for marriage in Hawaii is 18, but the current law allows dangerous exceptions: children starting at the age of 16 can marry with parental consent and 15-year-olds can marry with parental consent and judicial approval. SB 279 would set a uniform minimum age of 18 for marriage in Hawaii.

¹ Hamilton, Vivian E., "The Age of Marital Capacity: Reconsidering Civil Recognition of Adolescent Marriage" (2012). *William & Mary Law School Scholarship Repository, Faculty Publications*, 1430. Available at <http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2467&context=facpubs>.

² U.S. Department of State, et al., *United States Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* (March 2016), available at <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/254904.pdf>.

Unfortunately, children can easily be forced to marry before they turn 18 and become legal adults, because they face overwhelming legal and practical barriers if they try to leave home, enter a domestic-violence shelter, retain an attorney, or bring a legal action. Moreover, a requirement of parental "consent" hardly mitigates the danger of forced child marriage because when a child is forced to marry, the perpetrators are almost always the parents. There will always be parental "consent" when there is parental coercion in the first place. Therefore, because of these loopholes enabling parental consent for underage marriage, Hawaii law currently contains no effective procedural safeguard against the danger of forced child marriage.

An estimated 207,549 minors were married in the U.S. between 2000 and 2015, with 86% of those marriages being between a minor and an adult.³ In Hawaii, 811 marriage licenses for children were granted between 2000 and mid-2020, 82% were wed to adult men.⁴

By adopting SB 279, Hawaii would effectively eliminate these loopholes and join states such as New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota, which have taken proactive steps to end child marriage. If you should have any questions regarding American Atheists' support for SB 279, please contact me at 908.276.7300 x309 or by email at agill@atheists.org.

Very truly yours,



Alison Gill, Esq.
Vice President, Legal & Policy
American Atheists

³ Tsui A, Nolan S, and Amico C. Child Marriage in America: By the Numbers. (July 6, 2017). Available at <http://apps.frontline.org/child-marriage-by-the-numbers/>.

⁴ Based on an unpublished analysis done by Unchained at Last (<http://www.unchainedatlast.org/>).

LATE

SB-279

Submitted on: 2/12/2021 9:14:52 AM

Testimony for HTH on 2/12/2021 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
ANGELA	Testifying for Hawaii Zonta International	Support	No

Comments:

Child brides are often pulled out of school and are at a greater risk of violence, being trapped in poverty and serious health complications or even death due to early pregnancy.

Girls under 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth.

Children born of child brides are 60% more likely to die in the first year of life.

These are just some of the reasons I am in favor of SB279. Please help our citizens put an end to all marriage before 18, without exceptions.

LATE

SB-279

Submitted on: 2/11/2021 10:37:51 PM
Testimony for HTH on 2/12/2021 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Robbie Melton	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Dear Chair Keohokalole, Vice Chair Baker and members,

I am writing in support of SB279 raising the marriage age from 16 to 18 years of age. We have a duty to protect the lives of our young woment.

Mahalo for your consideration and allow me to submit this testimony.

LATE

SB-279

Submitted on: 2/11/2021 5:36:47 PM
Testimony for HTH on 2/12/2021 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Edie Ignacio Neumiller	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Aloha Honorable Senators,

I am in favor on SB279 in reducing the marriage age of minor girls to 18 (not 16) without consent. Below are some information from the Zonta Internatioal website against early child marriage whcih I also support their statement below:

How Can We Break the Cycle? Significant evidence links girls' empowerment to a reduction in child marriage. Specific interventions have focused on improving girls' access to services, education, information, and opportunities. But empowered girls alone are not enough to end child marriage. Governments, civil society, and private sector partners need to work with leaders in education and health to improve services and strengthen systems that assist girls. Social inclusion interventions, including cash transfer incentives, scholarships or stipends, can also help reduce a family's financial difficulties and empower girls to continue their education or seek health care. Attempts to end child marriage have usually used a combination of these approaches

- Empower girls with information, skills and support networks.
- Educate and engage family and community members to create an enabling environment for adolescent girls, and to promote gender equitable norms.
- Provide economic support to girls and their families.
- Ensure that quality education and health care are accessible for each and every adolescent girl.
- Foster legal and policy frameworks that protect adolescent girls.
- Collect robust data that allows for evidence-based programming and monitoring.

With respect,

Edie Ignacio Neumiller

Past President

Zonta Club of Kauai