



CALIFORNIA
COALITION
TO END CHILD
MARRIAGE

Virginia House of Delegates - Courts of Justice Committee

Bill Number: [HB 994](#) Marriage; establishes legal age to be 18 years.

The Honorable Chair Hope, Vice Chair Simon, and the Honorable Members Watts, Sullivan, Delaney, Maldonado, Hernandez, Cousins, Reaser, Thomas, Callsen, Keys-Gamarra, Kilgore, Leftwich, Ballard, Williams, Batten, Cordoza, Arnold, Davis, Obenshain, Earley:

I strongly support HB 994 (ends child marriage). I would like my position noted for the legislative record. I would like to Submit the Written Testimony below.

My name is [Rima Nashashibi](#), I am the founder and president of [Global Hope 365](#) Global Hope 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, prevention, and empowerment. Our focus is on ending harmful practices towards women and girls such as Child Marriage, Human Trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence.

Child marriage remains a serious problem in present-day America. Child Marriage is shockingly still legal in 40 states including CA. Not only is it legal in CA but there is no minimum age to marry. We understand that the **current law allows children to marry under 18 (floor of 16 with age gap limit) with just one parent's consent and clerk issuance of license (no judge involved).**

Between 2000-2018, approximately 300,000 minors were married, mostly young girls married to adult men. Children lack the rights and resources of adults which makes them vulnerable to coercion and predation. As a result, many child marriages are forced marriages, and/or are cover-ups for child abuse and exploitation and other sex [crimes such as statutory rape](#).

Several Child Marriage Survivors we work with indicated Parental Consent is Parental Coercion. They also emphasize that testifying in support of this bill makes them relive their trauma, they feel it

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is still important enough for them to be the voice of the voiceless to prevent this from happening to other children no matter the cost to them. They are NOT statistics. These are human beings and it is people's lives we are talking about here and kids at that.

Current law provides a process for 16 and 17-year-olds to “emancipate for the purposes of marriage” and be granted permission to seek a marriage license if approved. It has significantly reduced the number of minors married in VA since it passed but the number is still not zero and we know one child married it too many.

We all understand the reasons behind the laws of not voting until you are 18, no signing a contract until you are 18. We at Global Hope 365 strongly believe that the same rationale should apply to marriage under the age of 18. Girls lose control over their reproductive rights and are at a higher risk of early pregnancies, infant and maternal mortality, and domestic violence when they marry under the age of 18, and a rapist should not be provided with a get-out-of-jail-free card by marrying his victim.

U.S. Department of State 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. What about our country and our kids?

In addition, the U.S. is a signatory to the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including 5.3 which mandates ending child marriage under 18 no exceptions by 2023.

The [American Medical Association](#) has called for an [end to Child Marriage](#) in [resolution H-60.901, 2019](#), 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.

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[The 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 Coercion and benefiting commercially by the receipt of payments from the use and abuse of another human being.

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.](#)

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. What about our country and our kids?



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Respectfully submitted,

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