

April 1, 2022

Re: House Bill HB62

Dear Distinguished Committee Members,

I am a survivor of child marriage. I was forced my mother and stepfather, at the age of 16 to marry a man of 28 years that I barely knew and with whom I had never been alone. There was not one person that I encountered in this process that asked me a question about whether I was willfully marrying this man. Even if a judge had been involved, I was living in such fear due to the abuse I was experiencing that I would not have told them that I was not willfully marrying. This was due to my having nowhere to escape to as I had been legally adopted years earlier by my stepfather. My mother abandoned my safety and pushed me into the marriage, and my father, who was not in my life, no longer had any legal rights or knew what was happening.

Once married I was taken overseas for 2.5 years by my new husband where my passport was taken from me, effectively making it child trafficking. It wasn't until I returned home that I was able to escape by having a car delivered with a key on the tire. I was 19 by then and had been pulled out of school in eighth grade and home schooled for a year before passing the High School Equivalency Exam and put into a life of servitude to cook, clean and care for younger children. I was not prepared for living in the outside world and had to find my way through the goodness of a couple that I had met briefly.

My childhood was taken from me, and I have struggled to build the life that I have today. I still carry the scars on my psyche from these events and have tried to work through the pain they have caused me in regular therapy sessions, but my frequent nightmares persist.

Today, I am a professional working in the health care industry and can attest personally and professionally to the extreme damage child marriage creates. The age of consent must be 18, no exceptions.

I am grateful for the opportunity to stand up for the defenseless children who are forced or coerced into marriage and hope that you will support or sponsor legislation to lead the way in protecting children in Alaska.

I support this bill and am in favor of the house amendment in HB62 and would like to take it a step further by going to no child marriage under 18, no exceptions; anything younger than this is equivalent to child trafficking and is human rights abuse. As we know, child marriage destroys the health, education and economic opportunities open to girls and significantly increases the risk of them experiencing violence.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Sitton



Jasmin Martin

From: Genevieve Meyer [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, April 02, 2022 4:10 PM
To: Senate Health and Social Services
Subject: RE: HB62 An Act relating to the Legislative Ethics Act; relating to solemnization of marriage and relating to the consent to marriage

Dear members of the Health and Human Services committee,

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.

This week my husband and I will celebrate our fifteenth wedding anniversary. As I reflect on the last fifteen years, I am full of joy at the life that we have shared and look forward to the next fifteen years. We have built a life in a small rural Midwest town, are raising four wonderful children and are part of a close community. We have been abundantly blessed and I am grateful every day.

This marriage is not my first marriage. I went through hell to get where I am today and would like to share some of my story with you.

At the age of 15 a 43-year-old alcoholic, unemployed, twice divorced father of two began to prey on me. My mother called the police and pressed charges, he bailed out quickly and got to work to convince my mentally ill mother to let him marry me.

Before this man even made it to court, he convinced my mother that I was the aggressor, that I was troubled and that only he could save me. He was determined to not only escape any legal consequences for his actions but to also obtain a child bride that he could control and violate without further consequences.

I was then drug to four different states over the course of several weeks. We were finally married just the two of us in a county courthouse. We arrived home to an eviction notice on the door of his trailer. The charges were dropped against him, and I began my sentence which lasted until I could escape several years later.

My education stopped at 8th grade, I had no control over my body, I could not access a doctor. I worked as much as I physically could in “under the radar” jobs and still went hungry and couldn’t purchase things like shampoo and toothpaste on a regular basis. By our second anniversary I began contemplating if I had the will to keep fighting to survive or to end my life. Being a minor, I could not file for divorce or live on my own, death began to look like my only way out.

I couldn't drive and was completely isolated. He would encourage me to drink alcohol and to use drugs to "chill out". I knew that if I began using drugs, I would never make it out and refused over and over again.

It took me decades to recover mentally, emotionally, and physically from this traumatic experience. I had to relearn how to be in a normal healthy relationship, to trust again and to not be terrified all the time.

If I had been married at 16 or 17 the circumstances and consequences would have been the same, only a shorter period of time.

This is the reality of child marriage today. It is used to cover up abuse, traffic, children and evil in general. The data grossly underrepresents child brides quietly suffering across our nation. We are isolated but we are not invisible, we are hiding in plain sight all around you.

My first marriage was not a marriage, child marriage and these sick excuses for abuse and volition make a mockery of the beauty that is marriage. Please help us close this loophole so that not one single girl must live through the nightmare that I did.

I am asking today on behalf of myself, my fellow sisters who cannot speak up, the older church ladies who tell me that even though they married young it's not the same today. Please raise the minimum age to marry in Alaska to 18 years of age no exceptions.

Please accept my written testimony regarding HB62 - "An Act relating to the Legislative Ethics Act; relating to solemnization of marriage and relating to the consent to marriage." I feel strongly that the Alaska Senate amend this bill to change the minimum age for marriage in Alaska to age 18, with no exceptions. Alaska could be the seventh state to end child marriage.

God Bless,
Genevieve Meyer, MBA

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Genevieve Meyer

Co-Founder & Executive Director
Resiliency Foundation



[REDACTED]



[REDACTED]



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 3521 Lake Ave, Fort Wayne, IN 47805

Jasmin Martin

From: Midwest Girl [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, April 02, 2022 6:08 PM
To: Senate Health and Social Services
Subject: Testimony- Hb62

My name is Bonnie Randall. I am a Child Marriage Survivor. I would like to start by thanking you for taking steps forward by raising the eligible age for getting married from 14 to 16 years old.

I would like to share my testimony with you about what it is like being a Child Bride.

I was raped by a 21-year-old man who I thought was my friend (from work) when I was 15 years old. I became pregnant by my rapist. When my mom found out that I was pregnant, and even though she knew that my abuser had sex with me without my consent, (I told her and my abuser admitted it to her) she demanded that we get married because she couldn't afford to raise another child. We went to the Courthouse in Mtn. Home, AR to get a marriage license but were turned away because you had to be sixteen to get married there even with parental consent/ signature. My mom and soon-to-be husband drove us to Gainseville, MO to get the marriage license because you could get married there with parental consent/ signature at 15. Nobody from the County Clerks' office bothered to ask me if I was ok and wanted to get married. Instead, they looked at me like I was a slut. No other options were offered to me. It was no problem at all for my mom and abuser to get a marriage license for me! I was married 3 days later and the abuse started shortly after that.

I went back to work after my son was born and was finally able to sneak enough money aside to go see an attorney about getting a divorce right after my 16th birthday. But, I was told by all of the attorneys in town that they could not represent me because I had to be 18 to sign their contract! I asked my mom to help me by signing the contract but we were told she couldn't because I was married so she no longer had custody of me. I had nowhere else to go so I was forced to stay with my abuser because of age-related technicalities. Those same technicalities didn't make a difference when I needed to be protected!

My husband/abuser found the money that I had been saving and took it from me. I got pregnant again shortly after that. I was not able to get on my feet and get away from him until I was 21 years old.

I had to quit school because I was pregnant and married. I lost all of my friends because we no longer had anything in common. They didn't want to hang out with me and hear about changing diapers, doctor's appointments, reaching baby milestones, and being a wife. They were busy planning for prom and graduation. Neither of which I would get to be involved with since it was decided for me that I had to be an adult instead of being allowed to be a child until the appropriate time to be an adult. I got into numerous abusive relationships, had another child, and got married three more times.

I wish that I could say that things changed for the better for me after I got away from my abuser but my life didn't get any better. He used the court system to harass me by taking me to court at least twice a year to fight for custody of our children until they were 15 and 17 years old. The court system allowed him to do it even though the accusations were shown to be false every time. Any money that I was ever able to save while taking care of a family on a minimum wage paying job (which was the only kind of job that I was ever able to get because of not having a proper education) was spent on attorneys to defend myself and keep custody of the kids. I was able to get my GED but I was never able to come up with the money for college courses.

I am 51 years old now, my kids are all grown and have lives of their own. And I am still suffering from what happened to me, through no fault of my own, when I was a child. I still can only get minimum wage paying jobs. I was never able to get out of the rut and afford to improve my situation. I have trouble finding anything that brings me joy and go through serious bouts of depression. Sometimes it is so debilitating that I have to force myself to get out of bed.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. Please consider making the eligible age to get married in your state 18 with no exceptions. Even one more child going through the things that I and many other children have been forced to endure because the current laws do nothing to protect us from being forced to marry is too many!

Dear Senator,

My name is Aliya Abbas. I am a child marriage survivor and activist to end child marriage in the United States. As a child marriage survivor, I request you to amend HB62 - "An Act relating to the Legislative Ethics Act; relating to solemnization of marriage and relating to the consent to marriage." I feel strongly that the Alaska Senate amend this bill to change the minimum age for marriage in Alaska to age 18, with no exceptions. Doing so would make Alaska the seventh state to end child marriage. 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.

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 forced marriage are also likely to 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 legal rights they need to escape at 18, to receive any sort of assistance, or to divorce independently. 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 wholeheartedly 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, I was taken out of school & 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.

We need to step up and protect our children. It harms no one, costs nothing and ends this human rights abuse. Please support the amendment of this bill to change the minimum age for marriage in Alaska to age 18, with no exceptions.

Thank You,

Aliya Abbas

ALASKA - HB62

I learned from testifying in Marylandⁱ that ***lawmakers who have not experienced this specific of trauma themselves, cannot relate to, or begin to understand the horrific abuse and stories that child marriage survivors tell them.*** How in the world then, can we expect them to protect children from being forced into marriages? When lawmakers hold their own deep-seated biases above protecting children, **they have already failed.**

My name is Sasha K. Taylor. I was not forced into a child marriage in Alaska. I was forced into a child marriage in Arizona. I was 15 years old. I am still writing and submitting this testimony in Alaska for HB62, to tell you that lawmakers in Alaska need to raise the marriage age to 18, no exceptions and to protect minors in Alaska. I am also telling you that child marriages should not even exist as a concept anymore in society, and that all child marriages are forced.

Minors do not have the legal authority to consent, nor the legal authority to sign contracts. **These are children** and they are unaware of their options, and it's the adults in their immediate circle who are making bad decisions for them and are coercing them into these marriages as an immediate fix and a short-term solution to benefit the adults in the room. You see, **child marriage is about the bad decisions the adults are making for that child, and the child is the one who is suffering the consequences for the rest of her life. I say her, because majority of those effected are girls.**

I want you to remember this. I want you to remember this, because its also about the bad decisions lawmakers keep making when it comes to protecting minors.

I'm writing this testimony focusing on the adults in the room. This is all about the bad decisions the adults in the room make. **I'm flipping the script.** The adults in the room are the ones making the bad decisions, and the children are the ones suffering.

The lawmakers in the room, who are making the bad and uninformed decisions and who keep enforcing archaic laws – ***out of laziness so they don't have to think about a long-term fix.*** Because you all don't have a fix. You don't know how to protect minors, because ***you don't know how to fix what you have not experienced yourself. You maintain status quo, until it becomes the next guy's job to fix when you leave office.***

Lawmakers do that. In Alaska, and across many states in the United States, and in Congress. They skirt issues on minors and on marriage age laws because lawmakers are busy making whack-a-mole laws to solve issues for adults -- when the issues they should start tackling start

with the minors in their own respective states, because the issues they are tackling for adults start in childhood.

Just like the minors' guardians who need to "fix" whatever issue a minor is having, out of laziness that needs to be resolved. And the way to "fix" it is by marrying off the child, even if it means exploiting the child to a pedophile.

I need you to understand this.

I need you to understand that in today's day and age, if a child is being married off, they are being exploited.

If you say it's okay for a child to marry a man much older than her, then you are enabling the sex trafficking of a minor. The United States allows men to rape children. And you are saying this is okay to happen. You are putting your name out there and blasting to the world that you think it is okay for grown men to rape children. Because that is what child marriage is, and majority of girls in child marriages, are married off to much older men which is considered a sex crime. The only difference is that you say its okay to sign a paper for them to do it.

All child marriages are forced. A child is completely dependent on the parent/guardian with whom they reside. And the child marriage is forced because if a child is told: "You only have option A." And option A is a marriage, that is legally defined as a forced marriage because the child was never given other options in their life to consider like "B, C, or D and so on and so forth."

As a result, all child marriages in the United States should be null and void immediately and lawmakers need to raise the marriage age, so an individual has the ability to legally consent, that being age 18 – as is the case in majority of all matters of consent in the United States.

Alaska is geographically far away from the rest of the continental United States (as is Hawaii) – both states that have marriage ages at 14 -- which is why I believe the state of Alaska and its lawmakers feels they are either not a part of the Continental United States or can get away with doing whatever they want, and that being failing the children in their state, and nobody will notice. You're all wrong. ***You are a part of the United States.*** You are failing the minors in your state. You are also failing Alaska's indigenous populations. You are denying them the right to thrive and the right to an education and the right to claim their own destinies.

Alaska has the highest share of the American Indian and Alaska Native population at 22% and child marriage is especially high among children of Native American descent, according to the

think tank Child USA, a non-profit for children protection. There are 5.2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives making up approximately 2 percent of the U.S. population.ⁱⁱ

Throughout the Middle Ages, a marriage was characterized as property exchanges between two families and girls who were eligible to be married off were married by their families since the start of and prior to menstruation.ⁱⁱⁱ This practice continues globally because a girl is married off against her will every 2 minutes. Worldwide, more than 650 million women alive today were married as children. Every year, at least 12 million girls are married before they reach the age of 18. This is 28 girls every minute. One in every five girls is married, or in union, before reaching age 18.^{iv} This “worldwide” statistic includes the U.S. and it also includes Alaska.

Child marriage laws in the U.S. colonies dates to English common law and focuses on parental rights and controlling the child for economic reasons. Families use marriage gain property and heirs by marrying off their daughters instead of focusing on their education and well-being.

After the American Revolution, U.S. states modified marriage laws based on region -- with northern states emphasizing parental consent and southern states emphasizing property acquisition via marriages. These practices continue to this day. Marriage also included coverture – where a husband and wife became one legal entity, and a wife was unable to sue her husband and her money belonged to him. This also meant a wife was unable to bring rape charges against her husband.

Disturbing and disgusting child marriage laws and its practices adopted since colonial times that lawmakers kept modifying for their own selfish benefits to gain territories, political clout, property, money, inheritance, or influence have carved deep in the U.S. law books and won't let girls in the U.S. thrive and gain an education. The social implication of this horrifying practice still haunts the overall statistics on education, financial, social, political, and economic sectors for women overall in the U.S.

A recent study conducted by Unchained at Last found that 60,000 marriages since 2000 occurred at an age or spousal age difference that should have been considered a sex crime.¹

This includes Alaska, and the state of Arizona where I was married off forcefully at the age of 15 to a 22-year-old man, whom I had never seen or met before in my life.

According to a report from the Tahirih Justice Center—a nongovernmental organization committed to addressing gender-based violence—approximately 70 to 80 percent of marriages

¹ https://www.unchainedatlast.org/united-states-child-marriage-problem-study-findings-april-2021/#_ftn8

where at least one party is under the age of eighteen end in divorce, and early marriage is one of the best predictors of marital failure.

Children who marry in their mid-teens experience the highest marital failure rates—at 80 percent. In contrast, individuals who postpone marriage to age twenty-five experience lower marriage fewer than 30 percent of marriages ending in divorce.

Lawmakers in Alaska: You can pat yourself on the back thinking you have “achieved” something by raising the age of marriage from 14 to 16. In reality, this proposed bill is incredibly lazy and achieves nothing. You *can* keep that age and sign off on all the girls getting forcefully married off by their guardians.

But then I want you to do this. I want you to then start keeping track and conduct research of the domestic disturbance calls, the babies abused, the children being given away or found dead, food stamp applications, high school dropouts, college dropouts, student loan debts, divorces, social services applications, health issues, domestic violence shelter applications, mental health services, and all the other local, state, and federal resources your state asks for that your population needs.

Then go back and do an audit of how old the girls are in all these situations and how many of them were married off as minors. You’ll find that many of them are married off as minors because they were told they had no other choice by the adults in their immediate circle.

Again: You all are trying hard to fix issues of adulthood when you need to start in childhood.

Start by ending child marriage in your state.

SASHA K. TAYLOR

Founder | Reality Of A Desi Girl™

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#endchildmarriageUSA

ⁱ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/02/17/maryland-child-marriage-laws/>

ⁱⁱ Koski, Alyssa (April 2018). "Child Marriage in the United States: How Common Is the Practice, And Which Children Are at Greatest Risk?: Child marriage in the United States". *Perspectives on Sexual & Reproductive Health*. 50 (2): 59–65. doi:10.1363/psrh.12055. PMID 29664190. S2CID 4896715.

ⁱⁱⁱ Vivian E. Hamilton, *The Age of Marital Capacity: Reconsidering Civil Recognition of Adolescent Marriage*, 92 B.U. L. REV. 1817, 1824 (2012).

^{iv} <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/child-and-forced-marriage-including-humanitarian-settings#:~:text=One%20in%20every%20five%20girls,union%2C%20before%20reaching%20age%2018.>

4 April 2022

Rep. Matt Claman

Mr. Chair and distinguished representatives, my name is Rev. Cian Mulhern an Ordained Minister from Wasilla and representing Celtic Ministries.

Other people in the wedding industry like Joe for Chugach Peak Photography and Erin from Alaska Destination Weddings have provided many different numbers of how many states don't have witnesses or only one witness and I do not need to repeat all that.

I have been a minister and performing weddings for 23 years and have traveled to and performed weddings in many different states where no witnesses are required. Alaska's destination wedding numbers are growing and I do believe that house Bill 62 will help to grow destination weddings in Alaska considerably. I perform about 150 weddings each year here in Alaska and 90% of those weddings are destination weddings. These couples are traveling from all over the world to get married here in Alaska. Most of these couples come by themselves for small intimate elopements and then to honeymoon here in the state. They do not know anyone here to witness their wedding ceremony for them, and after being told that there must be two witnesses at the ceremony it is left

up to me and other wedding industry professionals to find and provide the witnesses for them. It is not always easy to find people that are willing to spend half their day driving back and forth for a 30-minute wedding ceremony. Also, most couples are not thrilled to have two people they have never met, be a part of this very special day, and find it just a little intrusive.

The other large part of weddings that I perform is for our servicemen and women from JBAR and Fort Wainwright. These couples are most of the time new to Alaska and also do not yet have any friends and don't even know their neighbors yet.....

These witnesses are not being used to verify who these couples are or check IDs. In fact, that is what the Bureau of Vital Statistics does when each couple applies for their marriage license and picks it up. The witnesses are also not called on to verify the wedding or that it was performed correctly, that would be one thing, but there is no way to even know who these witnesses are, from just a signature and address that are on the marriage license.

In my professional opinion, there is no need for witnesses anymore and I support House Bill 62. I believe that this is the first of many changes that need to be made to the State's laws on marriage in order for Alaska to capitalize on the ever-growing destination wedding industry.

I am also very supportive of the amendment to HB 62 that raises the minimum age that one can get married.

I thank you and I appreciate your time today and I will also be on the phone for personal testimony and questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Rev. Cian Colm Mulhern