



3201 C Street, Ste. 110  
Anchorage, AK 99503  
(907) 248-7676

[alaskachildrenstrust.org](http://alaskachildrenstrust.org)

#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

First Lady Donna Walker

*Honorary Chair*

Rep. Ivy Spohnholz, *Chair*

Tlisa Northcutt, *Vice Chair*

Julie Woodworth, *Treasurer*

Elsie Boudreau, *Secretary*

Ginger Baim, *Past Chair*

Susan Anderson

Melanie Bahnke

Deborah Bitney

Gregory Deal

Michael Hanley

Carley Lawrence

José Luis Martínez

Sherry Modrow

Joy Neyhart

Ramona Reeves

Marcus Wilson

Lisa Wimmer



February 22, 2018

Re: HB 310 - "An Act relating to the minimum age of eligibility for marriage."

Alaska Children's Trust's vision is all children in Alaska grow up in safe, stable and nurturing communities. Alaska has struggled with some of the highest rates (per capita) of child abuse and neglect in the nation for decades. Child marriages are frequently used to hide child sexual abuse. ACT fully supports stopping this practice by supporting HB 310 by raising the state's minimum marriage age from 14 to 18 except in the case of emancipated minors.

The United States has denounced child marriage in other countries as a 'human rights abuse that contributes to economic hardship,' yet in Alaska, the statutes do not reflect this perspective. House Bill 310 seeks to protect Alaska's children who lack many of the legal rights extended to adults from experiencing this form of abuse.

Current marriage laws place a child in a very vulnerable situation where they could be coerced into marrying an abuser. Many child sexual abusers in the United States utilize loopholes in marriage laws, like being able to marry a 14-year-old, to legalize their abuse. When the relationship is abusive, leaving their spouse may be extremely difficult. House Bill 310 will protect children by requiring them to have the same rights as adults before getting married.

In addition, marriage before the age of 18 correlates with poor health and can interrupt or discontinue education. Limited education makes it incredibly difficult for these women to become financially independent in the event of domestic violence or divorce. Having forgone education and work opportunities, these individuals may be left to choose between poverty and staying with, in the best case, someone they no longer want to be with, and in the worst case, an abuser. Because of challenges like mental health issues, limited education, and limited work experience; women who were married as minors are 31% more likely to live in poverty when older. These hardships are felt not just by the individuals, but also the state, which may end up footing the bill for various health and food services on behalf of the individual and any children they may have.

There is no single solution to resolve the complex issue of child abuse and neglect. To effectively turn the curve on this epidemic, we must deploy multiple strategies in a cohesive and strategic method. Raising the state's minimum marriage age from 14 to 18 except in the case of emancipated minors is one way to protect Alaska's children. Please support HB 310.

Sincerely,

Trevor J Storrs  
Executive Director  
Alaska Children's Trust

Together we can prevent child abuse and neglect