

SB

133

**<TARGET><BILL>SB 133</BILL><SUBJECT>SB
133</SUBJECT><COMM></COMM></TARGET>**

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Senator Berta Gardner *Senate District I*

To: Senator Kevin Meyer
Chair, Senate State Affairs

From: Senator Berta Gardner *Berta Gardner*
SB 133 Prime Sponsor

Subject: Senate State Affairs Committee Calendaring Request for SB 133
Minimum

Date: January 24, 2018

Re:

I respectfully request that you calendar SB 133 in the Senate Standing Committee on State Affairs, "An act relating to the minimum age of eligibility for marriage."

A copy of the bill, the sponsor statement, and additional support materials are included with this memo.

The staff assigned to this bill is Jacob Tatum who can be reached at 465-4930. Please do not hesitate to contact my office if we can provide any additional information.

WHILE IN SESSION
State Capitol
Room 9
Juneau, AK 99801
(907) 465-4930



ALASKA SENATE DEMOCRATS

WHILE IN ANCHORAGE
1500 W. Benson Blvd.
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SENATOR BERTA GARDNER

SENATE DEMOCRATIC LEADER
Senate District 1

Sponsor Statement

SB 133 "An Act relating to the minimum age of eligibility for marriage"

Zero legal protection + minimal legal rights = extreme vulnerability

This bill would protect Alaskan minors between 14 and 17 by raising the minimum age of marriage to 18, with an exception for emancipated minors, for which the minimum age would remain at 16. According to Vital Statistics, between 2006 and 2015, there were four cases of child marriage in which at least one of the partners were under the age of 15. During that same period, there were 12 divorces involving children less than 15 years of age, with the majority involving spouses older than 30. In one case, the elder spouse was 55 or older. Currently, the U.S Department of State classifies child marriage as a human rights abuse and legislation to reduce child marriage in the United States has been passed by Texas, New York, Connecticut and Virginia.

Although there are relatively few cases of child marriage in the state, to protect young Alaskans and children everywhere, it is essential that this chamber recognizes the vulnerable status of current, and potential victims of the practice and finally bring an end to child marriage in Alaska. This bill would bring Alaska into the fold with the rest of the nation where numerous other states are re-examining their marriage age laws to protect minors from child marriage. For more information, contact my aide, Jacob Tatum at 465-4930 or Jacob.Tatum@akleg.gov.

I look forward to your support of this legislation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Berta Gardner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sen. Berta Gardner

State (Does not include tribal governments)	Age of adult 18 or age noted	Age can marry						
		<13	13	14	15	16	17	18+
Alabama	19							
Alaska								
Arizona								
Arkansas							M	
California						F	F	
Colorado								
Connecticut								
Delaware								
D.C.								
Florida								
Georgia								
Hawaii								
Idaho								
Illinois								
Indiana								
Iowa								
Kansas	If married, 16+							
Kentucky								
Louisiana								
Maine								
Maryland								
Massachusetts								
Michigan								
Minnesota								
Mississippi	21					F	F	F<21
Missouri							M	M<21
Montana								
Nebraska	19 unless married							
Nevada								
New Hampshire				M	M	M	M	M
New Jersey			F	F	F	F	F	F
New Mexico								
New York								
North Carolina								
North Dakota								
Ohio						F	F	
Oklahoma								
Oregon								
Pennsylvania								
Rhode Island								
South Carolina								
South Dakota								
Tennessee								
Texas								
Utah	Majority age by marriage							
Vermont								
Virginia								
Washington								
West Virginia								
Wisconsin	17 if under criminal investigation							
Wyoming								

KEY
Requires consent
Can marry without consent
Cannot marry/ marriage can be voided
Can only marry under a certain age for conditional circumstances including pregnancy
Marriage can be voided without proper consent
Pending legislation would raise minimum marriage age

Letter to the Editor: Stop child marriages in Alaska

By **The Cordova Times** - June 16, 2017

I've just seen on One American News that the state of Alaska allows children girls at the young age of only 14 to be able to get married. This is outrageous. Sec.25.05.171 needs to be corrected so that the state does not have child marriages. It needs to be corrected to the age of 18. If a girl is too young to vote, then that girl is too young to marry. It is time for the state to get with the year of 2017. PBS radio just had a program showing that child marriages is a human right abuse. A child of 14 years of age does not have the wherewithal to make such a life changing decision. If one is under the age of 18, then that person is still a child. The program shows that many of them are abused when they marry at that age. Some are taken advantage of, tricked into marriage and coerced. Some people bargain off their daughter. Rarely is this a marriage of true love and companionship, but a type of business deal that does no good for the young girl. This outrageous law needs to be change.

John Suter

Chugiak

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The Cordova Times

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PBS.org

CHILD MARRIAGE IN AMERICA

By the Numbers

July 6, 2017 · by Anjali Tsui, Dan Nolan and Chris Amico

SCROLL TO BEGIN

At first, almost no one believed Fraidy Reiss when she said child marriage happens in the United States.

"That's not a problem here," people would say. But the laws in every state allow minors to get married under certain circumstances. As the founder of Unchained At Last, an advocacy group that's working to outlaw marriage before the age of 18, Reiss would hear from teenage girls who were looking to get out of a marriage.

Reiss wanted to know how often minors were getting married, so she went looking for an actual count.

Her group is based in New Jersey, and that's where her search began.

Has child marriage affected you?

SHARE YOUR STORY

"When I got that spreadsheet from the state health department, I was literally shaking," Reiss said.

The spreadsheet showed nearly 3,500 minors married in New Jersey between 1995 and 2012. Most minors were 16 and 17 years old.

"That number was so much higher than I had thought it would be," she said. "Then, the fact that the children were as young as 13 and the fact that it was mostly girls married to adult men."

After New Jersey, she requested marriage license data from New York. And then more states, until she had numbers from more than 30 states.

Reiss shared that initial dataset with FRONTLINE. We requested data from additional states in an effort to get a fuller picture of how many minors are getting married in the U.S., how old they are and where these marriages are taking place.

Here is what we learned:

Between 2000 and 2015, at least
207,468
minors were married in the United States

Note: Total includes data from 41 states and three counties. [View full list](#)

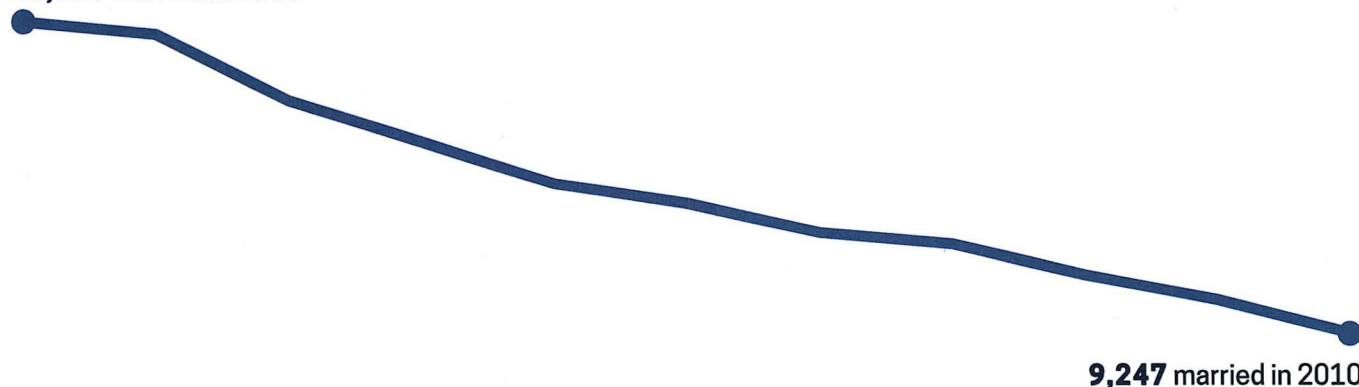
This count is incomplete. While health departments in most states keep track of how old people are when they get married, some states — including [New Mexico](#), [Nevada](#) and [Arizona](#) — only keep records at the county level. We've requested information from the biggest counties in some of those states, but gaps remain. We did not receive data from [California](#), [Georgia](#), [Maine](#), [North Carolina](#), [Oklahoma](#), [Pennsylvania](#) or the [District of Columbia](#).

States made different years' worth of data available. While most provided records for 2000 through 2010, some were able to give us more recent numbers.

It is impossible to know exactly who got married or why, as public records only show the age and gender of each person.

Fewer Minors Are Getting Married

23,583 married in 2000



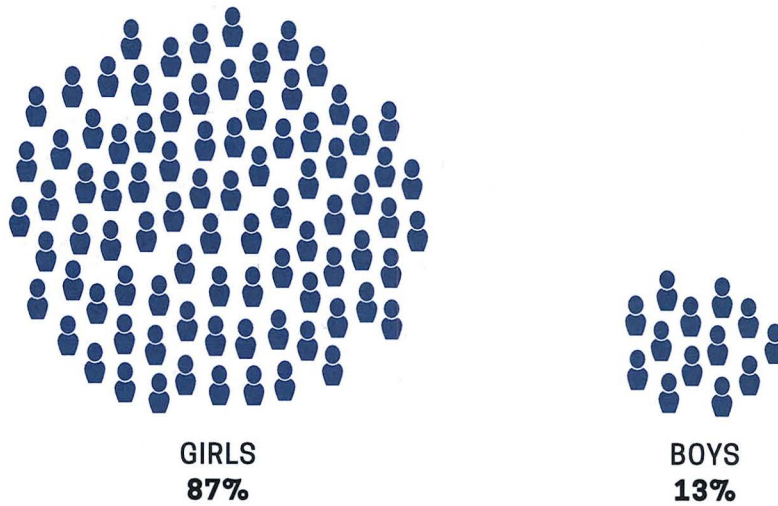
9,247 married in 2010

Note: 175,194 total minors, 38 states and two counties, 2000–2010. [View full list](#)

The number of people marrying before the age of 18 fell by about 61 percent between 2000 and 2010 in states where we have records.

Fewer Americans overall are getting married, according to the U.S. Census, and those who do are more likely to wait until their 20s or early 30s. Still, advocates argue that gaps in state laws are failing to protect minors from being forced or coerced into marriages where they may face violence and sexual assault.

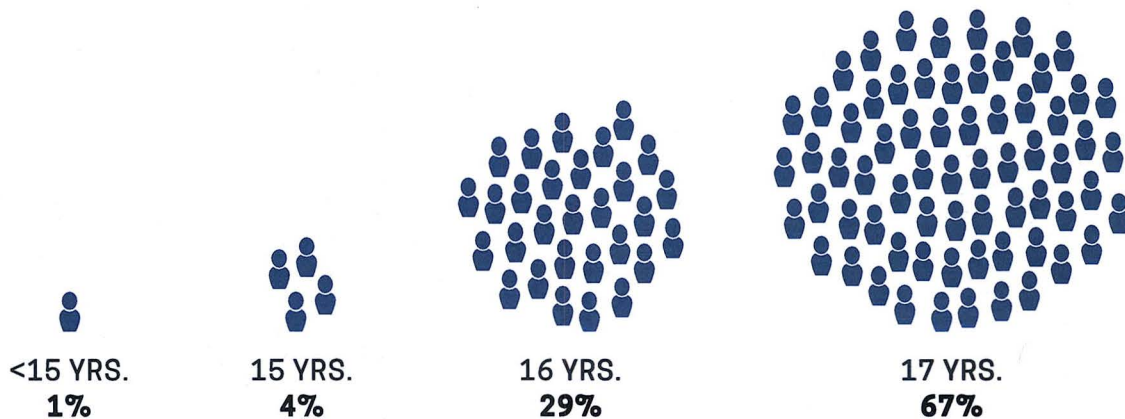
Most of the Minors Who Married Were Girls



Note: 198,729 total minors, 40 states and one county, from 2000–2015. [View full list](#)

Almost 90 percent of minors who married between 2000 and 2015 were girls. Most of them were 16 or 17 years old.

How Old Were the Minors Who Married?



Note: 197,617 total minors, 38 states and three counties, from 2000–2015. Due to rounding, numbers don't add up to 100 percent. [View full list](#)

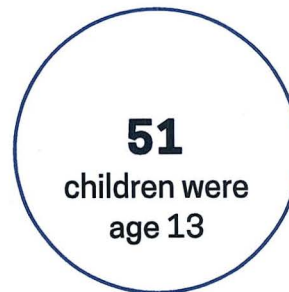
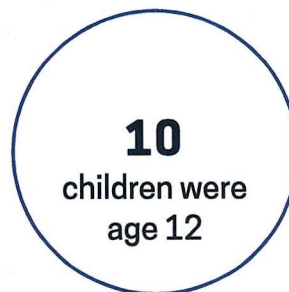
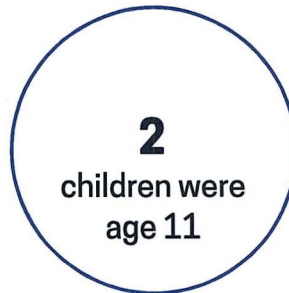
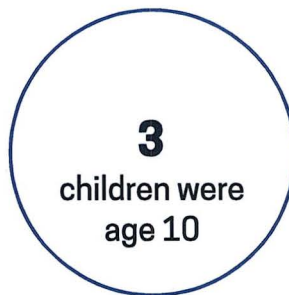
The youngest children to marry were three 10-year-old girls in [Tennessee](#) in 2001, who were married to men ages 24, 25 and 31, according to state data. The youngest groom was an 11-year-old boy, also in

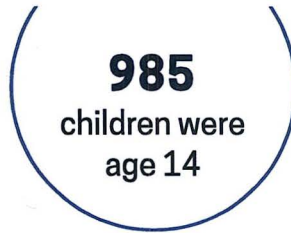
Tennessee, who married a 27-year-old woman in 2006.

Children as young as 12 were granted marriage licenses in Alaska, Louisiana, South Carolina and Tennessee.

Thirteen-year-olds were given the green light to marry in Alabama, Florida, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Washington.

The Youngest Children To Marry

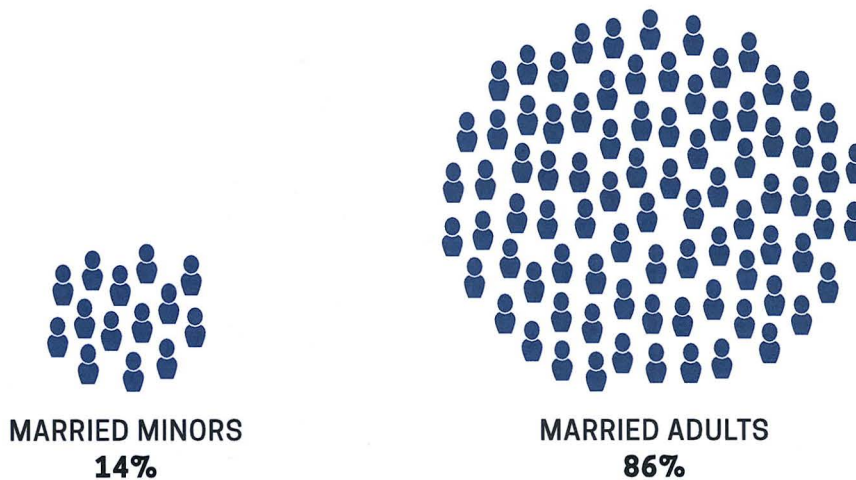




Note: 170,372 total children, 33 states and three counties, 2000–2015. [View full list](#)

Most states set the age of sexual consent between 16 and 18. A person can be charged with sexual abuse or statutory rape for having sex with a minor. Yet, we found numerous examples of children who were given marriage licenses before they could legally consent to sex. These marriages were almost always approved by court clerks and judges.

Minors Who Married Other Minors Versus Adults

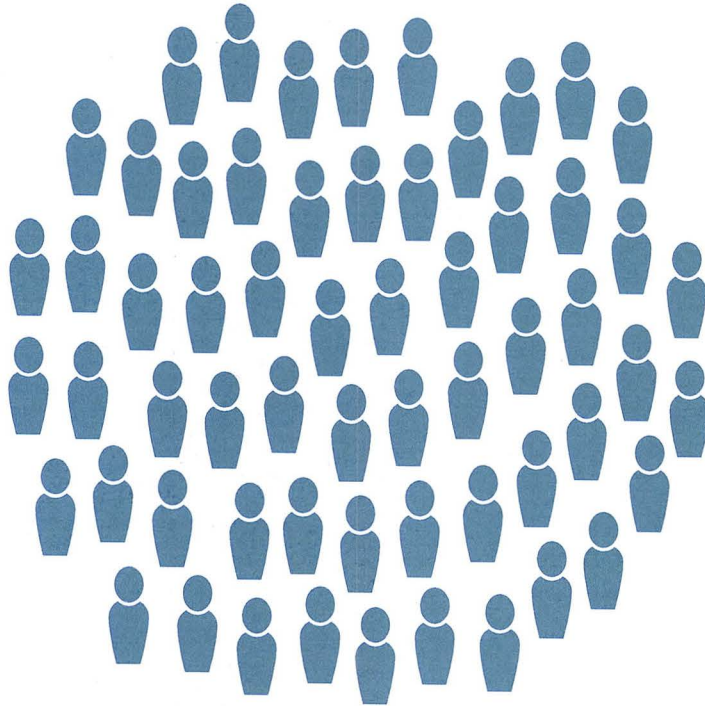


Note: 199,544 children, 39 states and three counties, 2000–2015. [View full list](#)

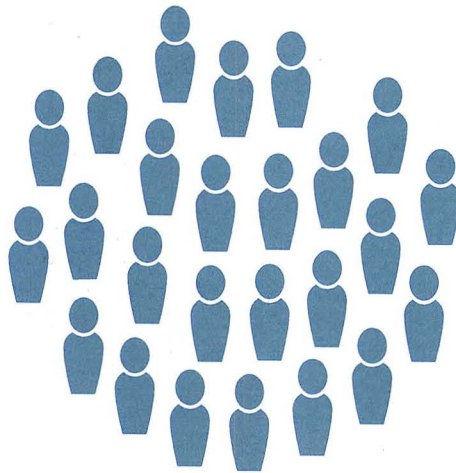
While some minors married other minors, these cases were less common. Most married adults who were 18, 19 or in their early 20s.

How Old Were the Adults Who Married Minors?

18-20 YRS. **60%**

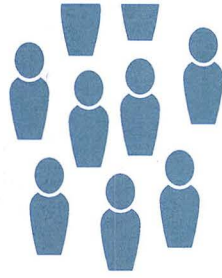


21-23 YRS. **25%**



24-26 YRS. **9%**





27-29 YRS. YRS. **3%**



>29 YRS. **3%**

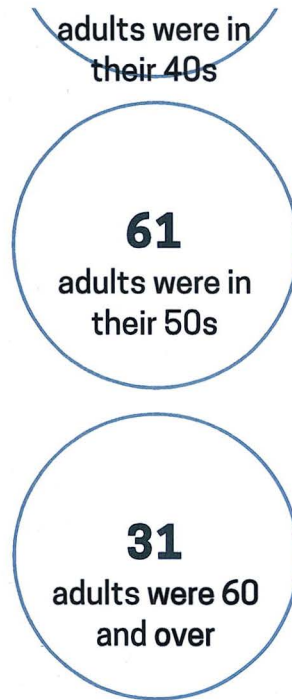


Note: 113,513 adults, 25 states, 2000–2015. [View full list](#)

In rare cases, minors were permitted to marry adults who were decades older.

The Oldest Adults Who Married Minors

368



Note: 113,513 adults, 25 states, 2000–2015. [View full list](#)

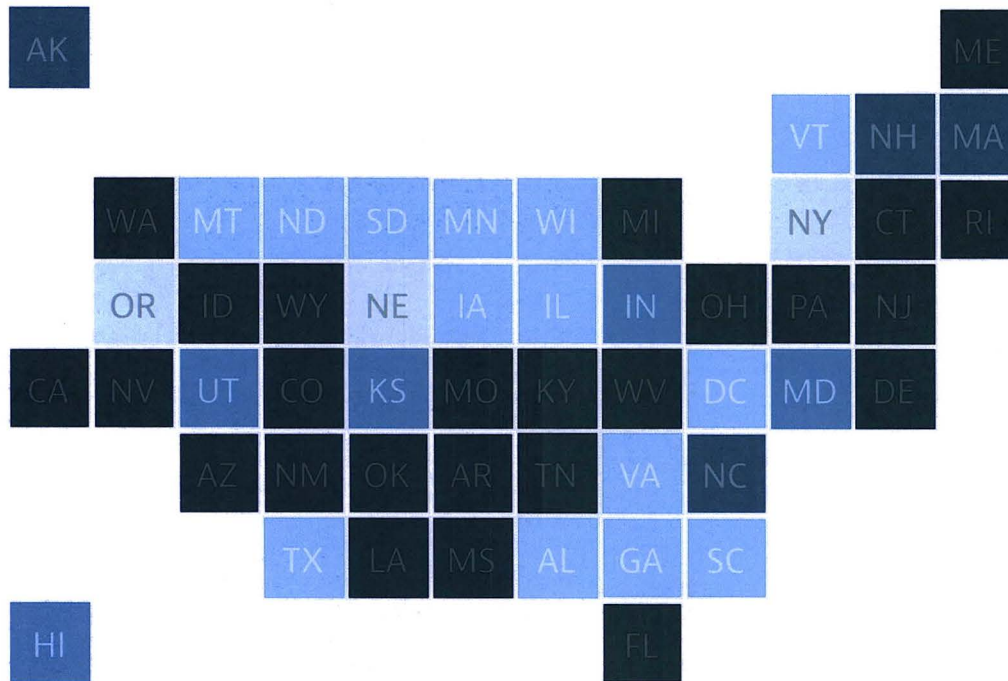
In 2010, a 17-year-old girl married a 65-year-old man in [Idaho](#).

One of the oldest people to marry a child was a 74-year-old in [Alabama](#). His bride was 14. (The state later raised its minimum marriage age to 16).

"A large age difference is an automatic red flag, but a small age difference is not an automatic green flag," said Jeanne Smoot, an attorney with the Tahirih Justice Center, an organization that offers legal services for women and girls fleeing violence, and which has advocated to ban marriage for all minors.

Advocates say it's rare for law enforcement to charge an adult with statutory rape if he or she is married to a minor. In some states, "the same acts that would be statutory rape outside of marriage are made lawful within," Smoot added.

How Early Can You Get Married?



Age floor

none 12-14 15 16 17

Source: [Tahirih Justice Center](#)

People can get married on their own once they reach the age of adulthood, which is 18 in almost every state. But every state allows minors to get married at younger ages in some situations. Minors almost always need a parent's consent, and sometimes, a judge's approval.

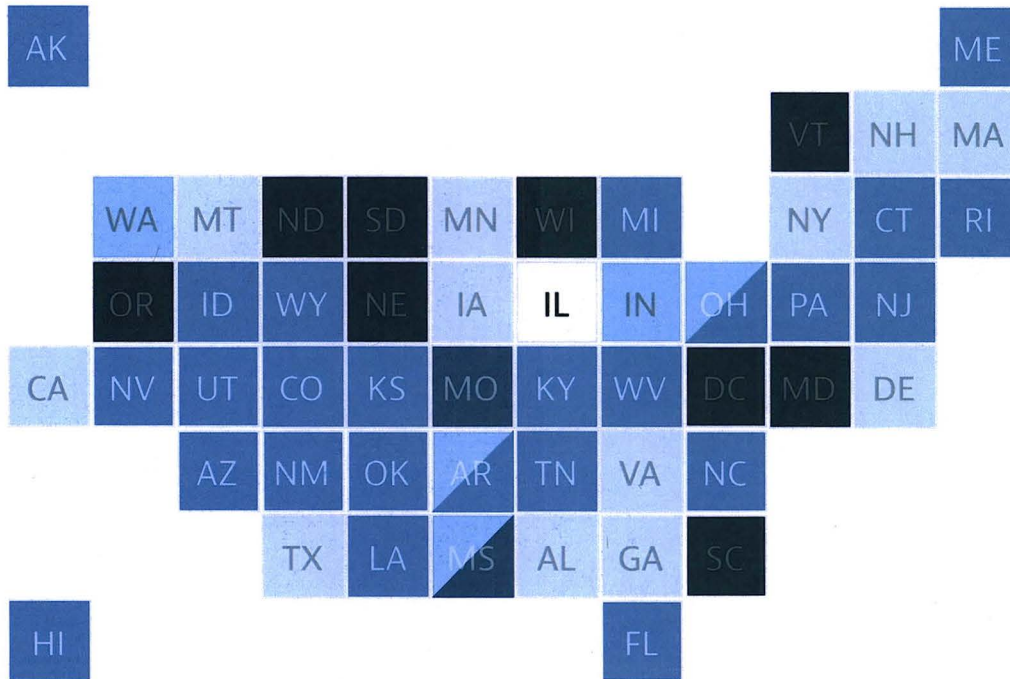
(See the cards below for details on each state's laws and marriage rates)

In [Oregon](#) and [Nebraska](#), minors have to be at least 17 years old to get married. Other states draw a line at 14, 15 or 16.

In [New Hampshire](#), a law that has been on the books since 1907 allows girls as young as 13 and boys as young as 14 to marry. In [Massachusetts](#), girls can legally marry at 12, while boys can at 14. Both states require a judge's approval and at least one parent's consent.

In 26 states, there's no minimum marriage age, according to the Tahirih Justice Center. Children in those states can get married at any age if certain conditions are met.

Judicial Approval Laws



Age where judicial approval is needed

none <15 <16 <17 <18

special
circumstances

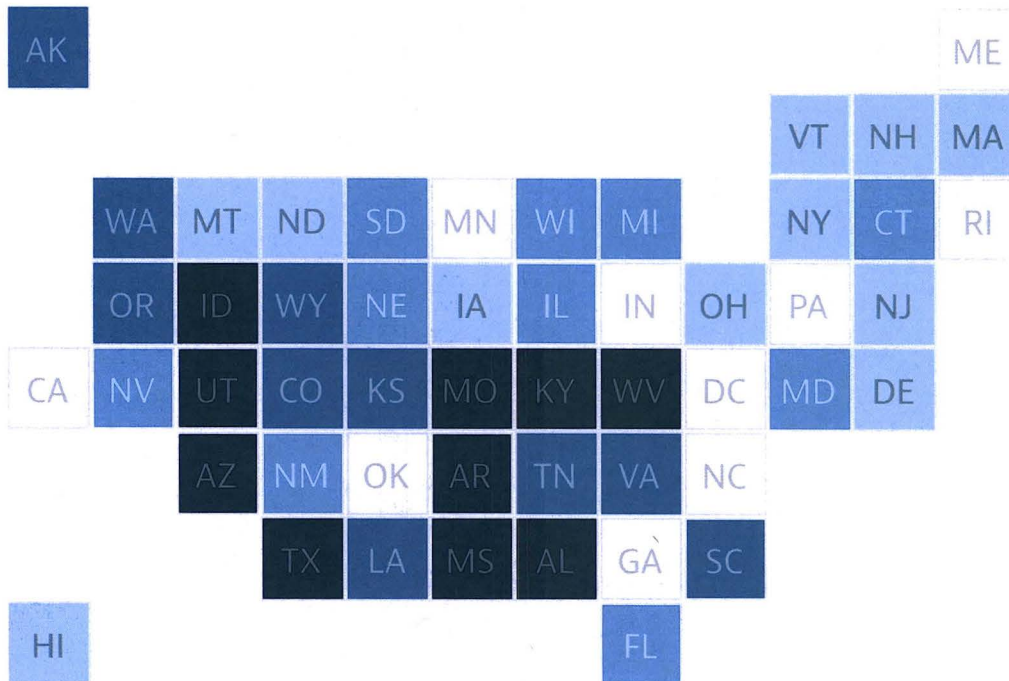
ages differ with gender
(male upper left / female lower right)

Source: [Tahirih Justice Center](#)

Ten states require all minors to petition a judge for a marriage license, according to a forthcoming Tahirih report. In most states, only children under 16 have to make their case before a judge.

Laws in nine states allow minors to marry before the age of 16 with a judge's approval if the bride is pregnant. When a pregnancy is involved, parental consent is not always necessary.

Child Marriage Rates, 2010



Rate per 10,000 marriages

2-14 17-23 26-37 38-84

data not available

Source: [Unchained at Last](#), FRONTLINE

We calculated the rate of child marriage in the U.S. for 2010 — the most recent year for which we have data for the greatest number of states. The numbers show that marriages involving minors occurred most often in states like [Idaho](#), [Kentucky](#) and [West Virginia](#), which have large rural populations.

Minors are most likely to get married in places that are rural and poor, according to Nicholas Syrett, who combed through historical marriage records while researching his book, *American Child Bride: A History of Minors and Marriage in the United States*.

“Almost all the evidence indicates that girls in cities don’t get married young, that girls from middle class or wealthy families, don’t get married young,” Syrett said. “This is a rural phenomenon and it is a phenomenon of poverty.”

Explore our database to learn how many children married in each state. Click on the cards to see the laws that allowed them to marry.

Anjali Tsui is the Abrams Journalism Fellow for the FRONTLINE/Columbia Journalism School fellowship program.

Child Marriage: State by State

Select state

SORT:

ALPHABETICAL A-Z Z-A

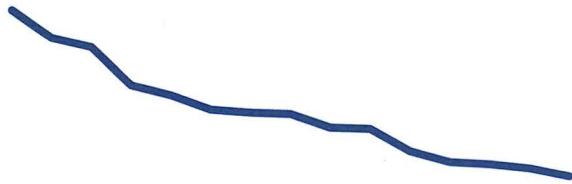
MARRIAGE RATE LOWEST HIGHEST

TOTAL MARRIAGES LOWEST HIGHEST

Alabama

TOTAL CHILDREN MARRIED (2000-2014)

8,657



CHILD MARRIAGE RATE (2010)

43 per 10,000 married

Alaska

TOTAL CHILDREN MARRIED (2000-2014)

756



CHILD MARRIAGE RATE (2010)

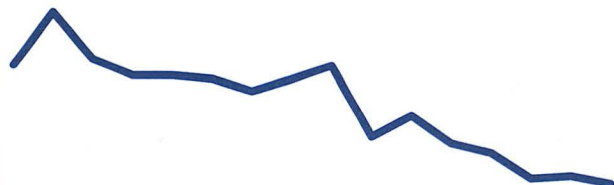
25 per 10,000 married

Arizona

(Maricopa County)

TOTAL CHILDREN MARRIED (2000-2015)

4,767



CHILD MARRIAGE RATE (2010)

58 per 10,000 married

Arkansas

TOTAL CHILDREN MARRIED (2000-2014)

7,512



CHILD MARRIAGE RATE (2010)

46 per 10,000 married

California

Colorado

TOTAL CHILDREN MARRIED

Not available

CHILD MARRIAGE RATE

Not available

TOTAL CHILDREN MARRIED (2000-2014)

4,813



CHILD MARRIAGE RATE (2010)

37 per 10,000 married

Connecticut

TOTAL CHILDREN MARRIED (2000-2014)

1,211



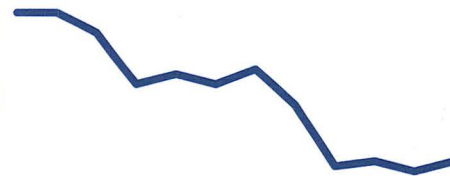
CHILD MARRIAGE RATE (2010)

17 per 10,000 married

Delaware

TOTAL CHILDREN MARRIED (2000-2011)

204



CHILD MARRIAGE RATE (2010)

2 per 10,000 married

District of Columbia

TOTAL CHILDREN MARRIED

Not available

CHILD MARRIAGE RATE

Not available

Florida

TOTAL CHILDREN MARRIED (2000-2015)

16,486



CHILD MARRIAGE RATE (2010)

22 per 10,000 married

Georgia

TOTAL CHILDREN MARRIED

Not available

Hawaii

TOTAL CHILDREN MARRIED (2000-2014)

721

CHILD MARRIAGE RATE

Not available



CHILD MARRIAGE RATE (2010)

7 per 10,000 married

Idaho

TOTAL CHILDREN MARRIED (2000-2014)

4,752



CHILD MARRIAGE RATE (2010)

84 per 10,000 married

Illinois

TOTAL CHILDREN MARRIED (2000-2013)

7,005



CHILD MARRIAGE RATE (2010)

21 per 10,000 married

Indiana

TOTAL CHILDREN MARRIED (2000-2014)

3,108



CHILD MARRIAGE RATE

Not available

Iowa

TOTAL CHILDREN MARRIED (2000-2014)

1,260



CHILD MARRIAGE RATE (2010)

11 per 10,000 married

Kansas

TOTAL CHILDREN MARRIED (2000-2014)

2,916

Kentucky

TOTAL CHILDREN MARRIED (2000-2015)

10,618

Sunday Review

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OP-ED COLUMNIST

11 Years Old, a Mom, and Pushed to Marry Her Rapist in Florida



1359



ANNA PARINI

MAY 26, 2017



Nicholas Kristof

When she was a scrawny 11-year-old, Sherry Johnson found out one day that she was about to be married to a 20-year-old member of her church who had raped her.

“It was forced on me,” she recalls. She had become pregnant, she says, and child welfare authorities were investigating — so her family and church officials decided the simplest way to avoid a messy criminal case was to organize a wedding.

“My mom asked me if I wanted to get married, and I said, ‘I don’t know, what is marriage, how do I act like a wife?’” Johnson remembers today, many years later. “She said, ‘Well, I guess you’re just going to get married.’”

So she was. A government clerk in Tampa, Fla., refused to marry an 11-year-old, even though this was legal in the state, so the wedding party went to nearby Pinellas County, where the clerk issued a marriage license. The license (which I’ve examined) lists her birth date, so officials were aware of her age.

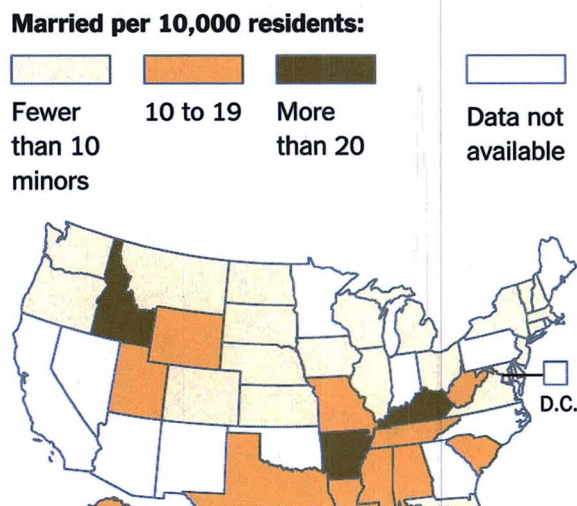
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Not surprisingly, the marriage didn’t work out — two-thirds of marriages of underage girls don’t last, [one study](#) found — but it did interrupt Johnson’s attendance at elementary school. Today she is campaigning for a state law to curb underage marriages, part of a nationwide movement to end child marriage in America. Meanwhile, children 16 and under are still being married in Florida at a rate of one every few days.

You’re thinking: “Child marriage? That’s what happens in Bangladesh or Tanzania, not America!”

The Landscape of Child Marriage

Idaho had the most married children on a per-capita basis among states that provided data; Texas led in sheer numbers of children married. Based on state records covering 11 years, 2000 to 2010.



In fact, more than 167,000 young people age 17 and under married in 38 states between 2000 and 2010, according to a search of available marriage license data by a group called Unchained at Last, which aims to ban child marriage. The search turned up cases of 12-year-old girls married in Alaska, Louisiana and South Carolina, while other states simply had categories of “14 and younger.”

Unchained at Last was not able to get data for the other states. But it extrapolated that in the entire country, there were almost 250,000 child marriages between 2000 and 2010. Some backing for that estimate comes from the U.S. Census Bureau, which says that at least 57,800 Americans age 15 to 17 reported being in marriages in 2014.

Among the states with the highest rates of child marriages were Arkansas, Idaho and Kentucky. The number of child marriages has been falling, but every state in America still allows underage girls to marry, typically with the consent of parents, a judge or both. Twenty-seven states do not even set a minimum age by statute, according to the Tahirih Justice Center’s [Forced Marriage Initiative](#).

A great majority of the child marriages involve girls and adult men. Such a sexual relationship would often violate statutory rape laws, but marriage sometimes makes it legal.

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In New Hampshire, a girl scout named Cassandra Levesque learned that girls in her state could marry at 13. So she set out to change the law.

A legislator sponsored Cassandra’s bill to raise the age to 18, and researchers found that two 15-year-olds had recently married in New Hampshire, along with one 13-year-old. But politicians resisted the initiative.

“We’re asking the Legislature to repeal a law that’s been on the books for over a century, that’s been working without difficulty, on the basis of a request from a minor doing a Girl Scout project,” [scoffed](#) one state representative, David Bates. In March the Republican-led House [voted to kill the bill](#), leaving the minimum age at 13. (Legislators seem willing to marry off girls like Cassandra, but not to listen to them!)

New Jersey lawmakers passed a bill that would make their state the first in the country to ban marriages of people under 18, but Gov. Chris Christie this month

blocked the legislation. New York legislators are considering a bill backed by Gov. Andrew Cuomo to raise the age to 17, from the current minimum, 14.

Opponents worry that raising the age will lead to out-of-wedlock births, and they note that many underage marriages are consensual.

Globally, a girl marries before the age of 15 every seven seconds, according to estimates by Save the Children. As in Africa and Asia, the reasons for such marriages in the U.S. are often cultural or religious; the American families follow conservative Christian, Muslim or Jewish traditions, and judges sometimes feel that they shouldn't intrude on other cultures.

Johnson, the former 11-year-old unwitting bride who is now fighting for Florida to set a minimum marriage age (there is none now), says that her family attended a conservative Pentecostal church and that other girls of a similar age periodically also married. Often, she says, this was to hide rapes by church elders.

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She says she was raped by both a minister and a parishioner and gave birth to a daughter when she was just 10 (the birth certificate confirms that). A judge approved the marriage to end the rape investigation, she says, telling her, "What we want is for you to get married."

"It was a terrible life," Johnson recalls, recounting her years as a child raising children. She missed school and remembers spending her days changing diapers, arguing with her husband and struggling to pay expenses. She ended up with pregnancy after pregnancy — nine children in all — while her husband periodically abandoned her.

"They took the handcuffs from handcuffing him," she says, referring to the risk he faced of arrest for rape, "to handcuffing me, by marrying me without me knowing what I was doing."

"You can't get a job, you can't get a car, you can't get a license, you can't sign a lease," she adds, "so why allow someone to marry when they're still so young?"

Those are precisely the reasons marriages for even 17-year-olds are problematic, according to Fraidy Reiss, who founded Unchained at Last to fight forced marriage and child marriage. Bullied by their parents into marriage, she says, girls may feel powerless to object — and fearful of telling a judge that they don't want to wed. If

they try to flee an abusive marriage, they are turned away from shelters and may be treated as simple runaways.

Some judges and clerks intervene on behalf of young girls; others do not. Reiss says one clerk told a 16-year-old bride: “Don’t cry. This is supposed to be the happiest day of your life.”

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“For almost all of them,” says Reiss, “marriage means rape on their wedding night and thereafter.” Reiss, now 42, says she was forced into a marriage at age 19 by her ultra-Orthodox Jewish family.

Lyndsy Duet, now a school counselor in Texas, told me that she was forced into a marriage at 17 after enduring a series of rapes beginning when she was 14, by a young man her conservative Christian family had taken into the house. Confused, shamed and helpless, she didn’t speak up — but her rapist did.

“He asked my parents if he could marry me,” Duet remembers. “My mom was crying, she was so happy.”

Duet felt powerless to resist her parents’ pressure — and it was eight years before she could flee what she says was a violent marriage. Once, she says, her husband threatened her with a chain saw, and it was only when she went to college on her own and proved a brilliant student (she graduated first in her class) that she was able to escape.

“Most girls who reach out to us love their families,” Reiss says, “and their primary concern is that they don’t want their families to get into trouble.”

The United States has denounced child marriage in other countries as a “human rights abuse that contributes to economic hardship,” in the words of a [State Department document](#) published last year.

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Let’s listen to ourselves. State legislators must understand that child marriage is devastating in Niger and Afghanistan — and also in New York and Florida. It’s past time to end child marriage right here at home.

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Demonstrators rally at the Massachusetts State House in May for a bill to ban marriage for anyone under the age of 18. (Meredith Nierman/WGBH)

In Fight Over Child Marriage Laws, States Resist Calls for a Total Ban

JULY 6, 2017 /

by ANJALI TSUI ([HTTP://WWW.PBS.ORG/WGBH/FRONTLINE/PERSON/ANJALI-TSUI/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/person/anjali-tsui/)) Abrams Journalism Fellow, FRONTLINE/Columbia Journalism School Fellowships

As a girl growing up in California, Nicole handled pet snakes, bullfrogs and iguanas. She dreamed of becoming a veterinarian. But when she was 16 years old, she says she was pressured to marry a 25-year-old man.

Around the country, teenagers need to be at least 18 to get married on their own. But the laws in every state allow people to marry at younger ages with parental consent, and sometimes, a judge's approval.

Nicole, who asked to be identified only by her middle name, says her marriage was orchestrated by her late grandmother — who believed a girl's only purpose was to become a wife and mother. A judge also approved the union.

"I really thought that they were going to pull me aside and I was going to be able to back out of it," she said. "I was expecting someone to ask questions, especially because of my age."

The marriage ended after two years when her husband died in a car accident. Now, at 29, Nicole is asking lawmakers in California to set stricter rules around underage marriage.

Over the last two years, Democratic and Republican lawmakers in California and across the nation have been grappling with whether to rewrite decades-old laws that have allowed thousands of minors to marry legally. Lawmakers in 11 states have proposed measures to raise the minimum marriage age. So far, four bills have succeeded.

In June, Connecticut banned marriage before 16 (<https://www.cga.ct.gov/2017/ACT/pa/pdf/2017PA-00054-R00HB-05442-PA.pdf>), New York raised its minimum marriage age (<https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-signs-legislation-ending-child-marriage-new-york>) from 14 to 17 and Texas set new rules (<http://www.legis.state.tx.us/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=85R&Bill=SB1705>) that limit marriage to minors who have been emancipated — meaning a court has granted them the same rights as an adult.

Advocates for reform say existing marriage laws are failing to protect minors from being pressured or forced into marriage. They are campaigning to outlaw marriage before age 18.

But these measures have faced stiff resistance from lawmakers and groups across the political spectrum who are wary of completely banning marriage for minors. They say teenagers should be allowed to marry under certain circumstances. Pushback has come from women's rights groups and the American Civil Liberties Union on the left, as well as libertarian politicians and abortion opponents on the right.

"I thought once I point this out and tell people what's happening in your state, look at these archaic laws. It's a no-brainer," said Fraidy Reiss, the founder and executive director of Unchained at Last, a group that has been lobbying legislators to end child marriage. "I had no idea that it would be this difficult."

The push for new protections currently being debated in California follows a failed bid to ban marriage before 18. That original effort was opposed by the ACLU, which argued that the proposal "unnecessarily and unduly intrudes on the fundamental right of marriage."

"We're not convinced that banning legal marriage will stop these coercive relationships from happening," said Phyllida Burlingame, the reproductive justice policy director at the ACLU of California. "They will push these young women further from the reach of social services."

The Children's Law Center of California, which works with children in the state's foster care system, also opposed the bill. It said some minors who are pregnant may not want their children to be born out of wedlock. The group also argued that raising the marriage age would strip minors of one of their only pathways to exit foster care through emancipation.

The bill has since been amended to set stricter rules for judges to follow when they're deciding whether a minor can get married. It is being considered in the California Assembly and would require judges to interview minors and their prospective spouses separately. Courts would also have to report any suspicions about child abuse or neglect to child protective services.

"We now require the court to take some aggressive, proactive action in determining what is in the best interest of the child," said State Senator Jerry Hill, a Democrat who proposed the initial ban. "That, to me, is a big win."

200,000 Married Before Age 18

More than 200,000 minors were married in the United States between 2000 and 2015, according to a [FRONTLINE analysis of marriage records \(http://apps.frontline.org/child-marriage-by-the-numbers/\)](http://apps.frontline.org/child-marriage-by-the-numbers/). The data comes from 41 states and the largest counties in Arizona, Nevada and New Mexico. Figures were unavailable for several of the nation's most populous states, including California and Pennsylvania.

The analysis shows that the number of minors marrying has fallen by more than half since 2000. Nonetheless, advocates say state laws remain weak and all too often fail to protect vulnerable minors from being pressured or forced into marrying.

It's impossible to know the circumstances behind these marriages, as the records only reveal the age and gender of each party. But the data shows child marriage remains most common in states with large rural populations, like Idaho and Kentucky.

Almost 90 percent of the minors who married were girls. Most minors were 16 and 17 years old. In a handful of the most extreme cases, children as young 10, 11 and 12 were given marriage licenses in Alaska, Louisiana, South Carolina and Tennessee.

The majority of minors married adults who were 18, 19 or in their early 20s. Yet, several hundred minors were legally permitted to marry adults in their 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s.

Around half of all states do not set a minimum marriage age, according to the [Tahirih Justice Center \(http://www.tahirih.org/pubs/understanding-state-statutes-on-minimum-marriage-age-and-exceptions/\)](http://www.tahirih.org/pubs/understanding-state-statutes-on-minimum-marriage-age-and-exceptions/), a nonprofit that serves women and girls fleeing violence. In other states, minors have to be at least 14, 15, 16 or 17 to marry.

Most states set the age of sexual consent between 16 and 18, yet advocates point out that court clerks and judges have granted marriage licenses that effectively allow people to circumvent statutory rape laws. At a minimum, they say, judges need better training to identify whether a marriage is forced or coerced.

In 32 states, the judges who approve marriage are generalists, who typically come from probate, district or circuit courts, according to a forthcoming report by the Tahirih Justice Center. Underage marriage petitions in nine states are reviewed by judges who specialize in domestic relations, juvenile or family law.

"Judges only see a snapshot and they are not social workers," said Jeanne Smoot, the senior counsel for policy and strategy at Tahirih. "They don't see the 3-D image of all the kinds of threats that a girl might be facing outside that courtroom."

Advocates say raising the marriage age to 18, with no exceptions, would ensure that minors have the same rights as adults before getting married. In some states, minors lack the ability to file a restraining order, access domestic violence shelters or seek a divorce on their own.

A Setback In New Jersey

This spring, Reiss' home state of New Jersey was poised to become the first in the nation to adopt legislation banning all marriages involving minors. There is currently no minimum marriage age in New Jersey. In all, around 2,000 minors were married there between 2000 and 2015, according to data from the New Jersey Department of Health. The majority were 16 and 17 years old, and were married with parental consent.

The bill received near-unanimous support in the General Assembly and passed with just five "no" votes in the Senate. Gov. Chris Christie, a Republican, refused to sign the proposal into law. He urged lawmakers to instead consider banning marriage before 16 while still allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to marry with a judge's permission.

In a memo to legislators (<http://nj.gov/governor/news/news/552017/pdfs/20170511b/A3091CV.PDF>), Christie voiced concern that an outright ban would "violate the cultures and traditions of some communities in New Jersey based on religious traditions."

The bill also faced opposition from anti-abortion groups. New Jersey Right to Life, an organization that says it has around 50,000 members, urged the governor to veto the bill.

"Our concern is with the 16- and 17-year-old who becomes pregnant and wants to marry the father of her child if she wishes to do so," Marie Tasy, the group's executive director, wrote in an email. "If her parents are not supportive and are unwilling to help her, they may force her into having an abortion. Or, she may feel that she has no choice than to have an abortion."

A new bill (http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2016/Bills/A5000/4883_11.PDF), which follows Christie's guidelines, has been introduced in the state assembly. The bill lacks the support of advocates like Reiss who say it fails to adequately protect minors.

Defeats in New Hampshire and Maryland

As states attempt to rewrite the laws around child marriage, lawmakers are confronting a key question: When is someone too young to get married?

Days before New Jersey lawmakers passed their bill, legislators in New Hampshire voted down a measure that would have banned marriage before 18. Girls as young as 13 and boys as young as 14 can marry in New Hampshire with the consent of a parent and judge, according to a law that has been on the books since 1907. The bill was proposed by a 17-year-old girl scout, Cassandra Levesque.

"I was appalled. I was shocked that we still have that law in the books and that many other states still have that law in the books too," Levesque said.

During a legislative hearing in March, Democratic representative Mary Beth Walz, who supported the ban, listed all the things that minors cannot do in New Hampshire due to laws that recognize “the physical and emotional immaturity of teens.”

“They cannot vote. They can’t sign a contract. They can’t sign a lease on an apartment. They can’t buy a car. They can’t buy a house. They can’t open a bank account. They couldn’t even toast themselves at their own wedding,” she said. “We do not treat children as adults when they’re under the age of 18.”

The proposal drew opposition from Republican lawmakers and some Democrats who said there were already safeguards in place, like requiring judges to approve all marriages involving a minor.

“This has been the policy in our state. It has been working,” said Rep. David Bates, a Republican who voted against the bill. “If we pass this we will be ensuring forever that every child born to a minor is born out of wedlock.”

Bates argued that the proposed ban would create more single-parent households. He also worried that soldiers, who may join the military at 17, might be prevented from marrying their partners before being deployed.

The New Hampshire House of Representatives voted to indefinitely postpone the bill.

One month later, in April, a similar proposal (<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmMain.aspx?pid=billpage&stab=01&id=hb0799&tab=subject3&ys=2017rs>) failed in Maryland.

Maryland allows 16- and 17-year-olds to marry with parental consent, though consent is not needed if the girl is pregnant. Fifteen-year-olds can only marry if they are pregnant and have permission from their parents. More than 3,100 minors were married in the state between 2000 and 2014. The majority who married were 16- and 17-year-old girls. At least 69 marriages involved pregnant teens marrying partners who had committed statutory rape, according to an analysis of state data by the Tahirih Justice Center.

American women who marry before the age of 18 are more likely to face psychiatric disorders like clinical depression, according to a nationwide study published by the American Academy of Pediatrics (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2011/08/24/peds.2011-0961.full.pdf>) in 2011. A more recent survey from Texas Women’s University (<https://preventforcedmarriage.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Child-Brides-Forced-Marriage-and-Partner-Violence-in-America-Tip-of-an-Iceberg-Revealed.pdf>) found that women and girls who were threatened with forced marriage reported higher instances of intimate partner violence.

“To me, the abuse that happens to these children, particularly young girls, who get married to significantly older men is the number one concern,” said Vanessa Atterbeary, a Democratic lawmaker who sponsored a bill to raise the marriage age to 18.

Atterbeary’s bill received some support from lawmakers on both sides of the aisle as well as the Maryland Catholic Conference.

Most lawmakers were unwilling to back an outright ban, though, and the Women’s Law Center of Maryland opposed the bill due to concerns that it would restrict choices for minors without preventing issues like forced marriages and sex trafficking.

“There are certain people that culturally, religiously — it is important for them to get married if they are pregnant,” said Michelle Siri, the executive director at the law center. “We didn’t want to take that option away from them.”

“A Discomfort for Blanket Rules”

No state has gone as far as to bar marriage for all minors, but three have come close: Texas, Virginia and New York.

Last month, Texas Governor Greg Abbott, a Republican, signed a bill to ban marriage before 18. But similar to a law that took effect in Virginia last year, the measure still allows 16- and 17-year-olds to marry if they are first emancipated by a court order.

Texas had the highest known number of minors to marry in the country. More than 40,000 Texans below the age of 18 were married between 2000 and 2014, according to data from the state's department of health services.

Smoot helped craft both pieces of legislation. In the absence of an outright ban on marriage before 18, she said these measures offer the most protection to minors by granting them the legal rights of an adult prior to their wedding day.

New York's bill, signed two weeks ago by the state's Democratic Governor, Andrew Cuomo, updates a 1929 law that allowed children as young as 14 to marry. The new measure will only allow 17-year-olds to marry with parental consent and the approval of a judge who must follow guidelines to assess whether a minor is marrying by choice. More than 3,000 minors were granted marriage licenses in New York between 2000 and 2010, according to data from the state's health department.

Other states have taken slightly different approaches. In February, legislators in the Missouri House of Representatives passed a bill that would ban anyone 21 or older from marrying a minor younger than 17. The measure would allow 17-year-olds to marry with parental consent and those who are younger would also need a judge's approval. The bill, however, failed to pass in the Senate.

Advocates like Smoot say these new laws mark a step forward but they are still pushing more states to adopt "the most straightforward and most protective" legislation — to prohibit marriage age before 18. For now, only two states are considering an outright ban: Pennsylvania (<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/billInfo/BillInfo.cfm?year=2017&sind=0&body=H&type=B&bn=1038>) and Massachusetts (<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/190/H2310>). Past experience suggests it may be an uphill battle. As Smoot noted, lawmakers in many states continue to express "a gut level discomfort for blanket rules."

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CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE UNITED STATES: A Serious Problem With a Simple First-Step Solution

TAHIRIH JUSTICE CENTER

The Tahirih Justice Center is a national, non-profit organization that aims to end violence against women and girls through direct legal and social services, policy advocacy, and training and education. Tahirih serves courageous survivors of abuses such as domestic violence, rape, female genital mutilation/cutting, human trafficking, “honor” violence, and forced marriage.

Through our specialized **Forced Marriage Initiative (FMI)**, Tahirih is leading efforts at the federal and state levels to tackle forced marriage as a domestic problem impacting U.S. citizen and immigrant women and girls from diverse backgrounds. Since launching the FMI in 2011, Tahirih has worked on over 500 forced marriage cases involving U.S. women and girls.

CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE UNITED STATES: AN OVERVIEW

- Based on state marriage license data recently obtained by advocates¹ and expanded upon by PBS Frontline, well over **20,000 children under age 18 were married between 2000 and 2015 in America**. 87% of them were girls, and 86% married adults.²
- **Drilling down on these statistics in any given state over that time period exposes more alarming findings.** For example, records pulled from the Virginia Department of Health showed that clerks had issued marriage licenses to pregnant girls as young as age 13, and that girls were sometimes married to men who were decades older. Similar records from Maryland show that, because of the ages and age differences of the parties and because a pregnancy was involved, dozens of children were statutory rape victims married to their rapists. Texas Department of Health records revealed judicially-approved marriages of girls as young as 12, and thousands of girls married to men who were significantly older.³
- **Children under age 18 face many practical obstacles when they try to resist or escape forced marriages.**

State laws can also work against them. Before a girl reaches the “age of majority,” when she gains the rights of a legal adult, she may be legally unable to take critical steps to protect herself. Depending on the state, she may not be able to leave home, stay in a shelter, file for a protective order, or even file for divorce on her own. Child protective services may also be legally unable to protect a minor from a forced marriage or from an abusive spouse once married.

- **Most U.S. states have laws that seem to set the minimum age of marriage at 18, but then allow for exceptions to the rule that can drop the true minimum age much lower in practice.** In fact, 25 states have no age “floor,” meaning that as long as exceptions are met, a child of any age may be married. Many other aspects of current state laws put children at acute risk of forced marriages and other abuse and exploitation. For example, in several states, a court clerk can approve all underage marriage license applications. Only 13 states involve judges in every case. Even in states that require judges to be involved at least in some cases, few provide any meaningful guidance for a judge’s decision making or put any other safeguards in place to protect the child from harm.⁴

CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE UNITED STATES: INCREASING RISKS, LIMITING OPTIONS

Child marriage denies young people more than the right to decide if, when, and whom to marry — it denies them the opportunity to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

In addition to the extensive global data about the many harms of child marriage (including its linkages to maternal and child mortality, domestic and sexual violence and human trafficking, and HIV infection), mounting U.S.-specific evidence demonstrates the devastating, lifelong consequences that can result from child marriage, including:

- **Family instability.** Between 70-80% of marriages involving individuals under age 18 end in divorce. For teen mothers, getting married and later divorcing can *more than double* the likelihood of poverty, making them worse off than their counterparts who do not marry as teens.⁵
- **Curtailed education and constrained work opportunities.** A girl's education can be interrupted or discontinued when she marries, limiting her ability to become financially independent in the event of domestic violence or divorce. Women who marry in their teens tend to have more children, earlier, and more closely spaced, which can prevent them from accessing education and work opportunities.⁶ Women who marry before the age of 19 are 50% more likely to drop out of high school and four times less likely to graduate from college. Not surprisingly, then, a woman who marries young is a striking 31 percentage points more likely to live in poverty when she is older.⁷
- **Diminished mental and physical health.** A major study of U.S. women who married as children found they experienced higher rates of psychiatric disorders (in some cases, nearly 3 times as high as those who married as adults), and were more likely to seek health services.⁸ Other research has shown that they are more likely to experience a range of serious medical problems.⁹

These substantial personal costs can also mean tremendous inter-generational and social costs.¹⁰

The acute vulnerability of girls and young women in the U.S. to physical, emotional or verbal abuse¹¹ also raises major red flags with respect to child marriage:

- Nationally, girls and young women aged 16-24 experience the highest rates of intimate partner violence among all such victims, and girls aged 16-19 face victimization rates *almost triple the national average*.¹² Yet in most states, while girls aged 16-17 make up the vast majority of children who are being married, they are *least protected* by minimum marriage age laws, as court clerks can issue them marriage licenses based on parental consent alone.
- The younger the adolescent, the more likely it is that if they are sexually active, they have experienced coercive sex — this is the core understanding that underlies statutory rape laws.¹³ Yet in many states, statutory rape laws are set aside by other state laws that permit marriages of adolescents younger than the legal age of consent to sex.
- In addition, “[b]eing physically or sexually abused makes teen girls six times more likely to become pregnant.”¹⁴ Yet several states have express pregnancy exceptions to their minimum marriage ages. Such provisions fail to grasp that the pregnancy may be the result of rape and abuse. Granting the marriage license could subject a pregnant teen to further rape and abuse, and moreover, isolate her from help.

For all of these reasons, Tahirih urges the elimination of child marriage throughout the United States – as a critical first step, by setting the minimum legal marriage age at the age of majority.

ENDNOTES

1. See statistics from 38 states that provided records on the marriages of minors from 2000 to 2010, cited in Nicholas Kristof, "11 Years Old, A Mom, and Pushed to Marry Her Rapist in Florida," (*New York Times*: May 26, 2017) available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/26/opinion/sunday/it-was-forced-on-me-child-marriage-in-the-us.html>. Unchained At Last led this effort to collect state marriage license data, with contributions by Tahirih on several states (assisted pro bono by the law firm of Hogan Lovells).
2. See statistics cited in Anjali Tsui, Dan Nolan, and Chris Amico, "Child Marriage in America: By the Numbers" (*PBS Frontline*: July 6, 2017), available at <http://apps.frontline.org/child-marriage-by-the-numbers/>.
3. See Tahirih Justice Center, "Child Marriage in America: Current Laws Are Failing to Protect Vulnerable Children and Teens," February 20, 2016, available at <http://www.tahirih.org/news/child-marriage-happens-in-the-u-s-too/>; see also Tahirih Justice Center, *Falling Through the Cracks: How Laws Allow Child Marriage to Happen in Today's America*, August 2017, available at <http://www.tahirih.org/pubs/falling-through-the-cracks-how-laws-allow-child-marriage-to-happen-in-todays-america/>.
4. See Tahirih Justice Center, *Falling Through the Cracks: How Laws Allow Child Marriage to Happen in Today's America*, August 2017, p. 35, available at <http://www.tahirih.org/pubs/falling-through-the-cracks-how-laws-allow-child-marriage-to-happen-in-todays-america/>. In 2016, after a legislative campaign led by the Tahirih, Virginia became the first state in the nation to limit marriage to adults age 18 or older, with a narrow exception only for court-emancipated minors age 16 or older who have been given the full legal rights of adults. In June 2017, Texas and New York also signed bipartisan bills into law that limit marriage to legal adults and establish meaningful safeguards against forced marriage.
5. See research cited by College of William & Mary Law School Professor Vivian E. Hamilton, in "The Age of Marital Capacity: Reconsidering Civil Recognition of Adolescent Marriage" (*Boston University Law Review*: December 2012) 92 B. U. L. Rev. 1817, 1820 and at n. 10, 11, and 15, available at <http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2467&context=facpubs>.
6. See, e.g., Naomi Seiler, "Is Teen Marriage a Solution?" (Center for Law and Social Policy, April 2002), at pp. 7-9, available at <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/archive/0087.pdf>.
7. See Gordon B. Dahl, "Early Teen Marriage and Future Poverty," *Demography* (August 2010: 47(3): 689-718), available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3000061/>.
8. See Yann Le Strat, Caroline Dubertet & Bernard Le Foll, "Child Marriage in the United States and Its Association with Mental Health in Women" 128 *Pediatrics* 524 (September 2011), available at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2011/08/24/peds.2011-0961.full.pdf>.
9. See Matthew E. Dupre and Sarah O. Meadows, "Disaggregating the Effects of Marital Trajectories on Health," *Journal of Family Issues* (Vol. 28, No. 5, May 2007, 623-652), at pp. 646-647 ("Results show that females who marry before age 19 years or experience one or more divorces are at an increased risk of developing a serious health condition"), available at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0192513X06296296>; see also Bridget M. Kuehn, "Early Marriage Has Lasting Consequences on Women's Mental Health," news@JAMA (August 29, 2011), medical news posts by *The Journal of the American Medical Association* ("research has linked such early marriages to a higher risk of HIV or other sexually transmitted infections, cervical cancer, unintended pregnancy, maternal death during childbirth, and abortion; early marriage is also associated with malnutrition among offspring"), available at <http://newsatjama.jama.com/2011/08/29/early-marriage-has-lasting-consequences-on-women%e2%80%99s-mental-health/>.
10. A major study co-sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found a powerful relationship between adverse emotional experiences as children on our physical and mental health as adults. See information about the "Adverse Childhood Experiences" ("ACEs") Study at <http://www.cdc.gov/NCCDPHP/ACE>, <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about.html>, and <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/findings.html>. These findings suggest that not only individuals who themselves marry as children, but also the children produced of such marriages, may be more susceptible to lifelong health problems.
11. See Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, information about Teen Dating Violence, available at http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teen_dating_violence.html.
12. See www.loveisrespect.org factsheet available at http://www.loveisrespect.org/pdf/Dating_Abuse_Statistics.pdf.
13. See "Statutory Rape: A Guide to State Laws and Reporting Requirements," prepared by The Lewin Group for the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, December 15, 2004, p. 1, available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/sr/statelaws/report.pdf>, citing research findings that almost three-quarters of women who had intercourse before age 14, and 60 percent who did so before age 15, reported having a forced sexual experience.
14. See www.loveisrespect.org factsheet available at http://www.loveisrespect.org/pdf/Dating_Abuse_Statistics.pdf.

Learn more at tahirih.org/childmarriagepolicy

Alliance in Action

a blog by Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance



New Marriage Age Law Equals Better Protections for Thousands

June 27, 2016 June 22, 2016

Over the last 10 years in Virginia, thousands of children were married, as young as 13 years old; 90% were girls, and 90% of the time they married adults, who were sometimes decades older.



news.vawnet.org

The only barrier between them and a marriage license? A clerk's rubber stamp based on parental consent or, for those under age 16, parental consent + pregnancy. There was no age floor, and no safeguards against forced marriage or other abuse or exploitation.

But as of July 1, when a new law goes into effect, young people will be enabled to make their own decisions about marriage, to advocate for themselves, and to have the opportunity to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

The new law responds to a long list of urgent concerns flagged by advocates during the legislative process. These include:

- Forced marriage is a serious problem in the U.S. that impacts many adolescent girls;
- Child marriage can result in devastating, lifelong harm;
- Girls aged 16-19 are at heightened risk of abuse;
- All of the marriage licenses granted to children under age 15, and most of those granted to pregnant 15-17 year olds, sanctioned statutory rape as defined in Virginia;
- Age 16 is the minimum age in Virginia to petition a court to be considered a legal adult (“emancipated”), marriage does not automatically emancipate minors, and unemancipated minors do not have the same rights as an adult to protect themselves in case of abuse (e.g., to seek a protective order or go to a shelter); and
- Minors who are abused by their partners instead of their parents are outside of Child Protective Services’ jurisdiction in Virginia.

Given all these data points, Virginia’s current marriage age laws fly in the face of common sense and Virginia’s other laws and policies to protect children.

Today, if Virginia’s minimum marriage age laws were represented as an equation, they might read: Zero legal protection + minimal legal rights = extreme vulnerability. That’s an equation that results in serious consequences to girls’ health, safety, and well-being.

The new law will ensure that only individuals age 18 or older, or emancipated minors, can marry in Virginia.



Beth Halpern, Hope Kestle, Vivian Hamilton, Jeanne Smoot, Kristine Hall, Rebecca Robinson, Kristi VanAudenhove, Delegate Jennifer McClellan

Companion reform bills (HB 703/ SB 415) were successfully championed this legislative session by Delegate Jennifer McClellan (D) and Senator Jill Vogel (R), and strongly supported by a broad coalition led by the Tahirih Justice Center in partnership with the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance and Prevent Child Abuse Virginia.

Key provisions include:

Procedural safeguards

- 16 or 17 year olds seeking to emancipate in order to marry will petition a juvenile and domestic relations judge, who will hold a hearing, issue written findings, and can order a Department of Social Services investigation or issue other orders as appropriate;
- the minor will be appointed an attorney (guardian ad litem, or “GAL”); and
- if the petition is granted, the minor will be given the rights of a legal adult.

+

Substantive criteria

To grant the petition, the judge must find that:

- o the minor is not being forced or coerced to marry;
- o the parties are sufficiently mature;
- o the marriage will not endanger the minor (taking into account age differences and any history of violence between the parties, as well as criminal convictions for crimes of violence or crimes against minors); and
- o the marriage is in the minor's best interests – but very importantly, neither pregnancy nor parental wishes is sufficient to establish “best interests.”

=

Improved protections for children from being forced into marriage, and from the many other risks and harms of child marriage

This is tremendously important progress, but we need your help to make sure this new law actually works as intended:

1. Spread the news! Talk about the new law when you present to schools or youth audiences. Share it with family lawyers, GALs, social workers, CASA advocates, and other children's advocates with whom you work.
2. Monitor implementation! If judges and GALs do not do a vigilant job, or teens are too afraid to disclose in court what is really happening, or abusive parents or partners try to evade the new law, a vulnerable teen's next phone call may be to your agency.
3. Share stories with us! We are working with national partners to urge that child marriage be eliminated in every U.S. state. Knowing how this new law is working (or what snags it hits in implementation) will not only be crucially important to enable us to course-correct as needed in Virginia, but also to drive reforms in other states.

To learn more about the alarming data-points that built momentum behind this new law, see our earlier blog post: [“Empowering Girls in Virginia to Choose If, When and Whom to Marry” \(January 11, 2016\)](https://wordpress.com/post/allianceinaction.org/213) (<https://wordpress.com/post/allianceinaction.org/213>). Please contact Jeanne Smoot at the [Tahirih Justice Center](http://www.tahirih.org/), (<http://www.tahirih.org/>) jeanne@tahirih.org or 571-282-6161, for more info or to share your experiences.

Jeanne Smoot is the Senior Counsel for Policy and Strategy at the Tahirih Justice Center, where for over a decade she has helped lead innovative advocacy initiatives to reduce vulnerabilities of immigrant women and girls to violence and to empower them as survivors.

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