



January 28, 2022

House Committee on Judiciary
Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

**Testimony in Support of H631: Ending Child Marriage
Presented to the Vermont House Committee on Judiciary**

Chair Maxine Grad and Distinguished Committee Members:

The Justice of the Peace Association urges support for H631, an act to end child marriage.

The Justice of the Peace Association (JPUs) is the professional membership organization representing civil marriage officiants throughout New England. On behalf of its Vermont members, **I respectfully ask you to vote YES in favor of H631 *an act relating to raising the age of eligibility to marry.***

JPUs members have voiced strong opposition to all child marriages. They have said that they would not feel comfortable performing them and would likely refuse to do so. These marriage officiants are professionals who take an oath to execute the laws of the state and to abide by JPUs' Code of Ethics. Allowing children to wed puts these two at odds with one another as our ethics code requires officiants to act in the best interest of their clients.

This is because child marriage devastates girls' lives. It destroys their health, education, and economic opportunities, and increases their risk of experiencing violence. In fact, the U.S. State Department has called marriage before 18 a "human rights abuse."¹

The officiants who are on marriage's front lines want you to know this is not hypothetical to them. As an illustration, in October 2018, members of the Justice of the Peace Association voted overwhelmingly in favor (95%) to join the national Coalition to End Child Marriage. Meaning, ***they voted for a no-exception platform to make 18 the minimum age to wed.***²

H631 will protect all children in the state of Vermont from the dangers of child marriage. Passage of this bill will also alleviate the state's justices of the peace from conflicting legal and ethical obligations. As such, **on behalf of the Vermont members of the Justice of the Peace Association, I respectfully ask you to vote in favor of H631.**

Thank you for this opportunity to share our position. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,



Loretta Jay, MA
Managing Member
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¹ United States Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls, page 21. March 2016. Retrieved on January 26, 2022, from <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/254904.pdf>

² Coalition to End Child Marriage, Justice of the Peace Association. Retrieved from <https://www.findajp.com/jpus/coalition-to-end-child-marriage/>