

January 26, 2022

Dear Chairman Grad and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Lynn Stanley, and I am the Executive Director of the Vermont Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW VT). I am writing to express our support for H631: an act to ban child marriage. This bill proposes to raise the age at which a person may obtain a civil marriage to 18 years of age.

NASW VT strongly supports this bill as our ethos as social work professionals dictates we support social change for vulnerable populations and H.631 is in line with these values.

Studies on child marriage in the United States indicate girls who are married as children have an increased risk of living in poverty, a lower level of educational attainment, and an increased likelihood of having children as a teenager. This is of particular concern as early childbearing is associated with higher adverse health, social and economic outcomes for both the mother and her child.

Social workers see clients experiencing the negative effects of early marriage, domestic violence, and the mental health challenges associated with this trauma. These issues are further compounded and complicated by the legal protections for children that become barriers when a child is married.

Vermont is a leader in establishing policies that support child welfare and the Annie E. Casey Foundation 2021 data supports this, with Vermont ranking 4<sup>th</sup> in the United States for child well-being. Legislation that prevents the granting of marriage licenses to minors would further this good work.

We ask you continue to put the welfare of Vermont children first by supporting H631.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn Stanley, LICSW  
Executive Director  
NASW VT