



STUDENTS AGAINST CHILD MARRIAGE

Testimony to Vermont House Committee on Judiciary | January 28, 2022 in **STRONG SUPPORT** of H631: Ending Child Marriage

Distinguished committee members: Students Against Child Marriage is the nation's only 501(c)(3) nonprofit devoted to ending American child marriage through student activism. We lead the youth and grassroots arm of the advocacy movement fighting this abuse. To protect childhood and society's most vulnerable, we implore you to vote "YES" on H631.

- **Child marriages are not innocent teen love stories.** They are composed of young girls coerced by their parents into marrying adult men many times their age.

→ 13-years-old and pregnant, Dawn Tyree was forced into marrying the 32-year-old man who had been assaulting her. The marriage was used to protect her parents and the abuser from criminal prosecution. And she is not the only one (studentsagainst.org/Dawn).

- **Child marriages puts girls' health at risk:** Agencies working with girls facing or fleeing forced marriages report that nearly all have contemplated or attempted suicide (Tahirih Justice Center).
- **Child marriage is child abuse:** girls married before age 15 are 50% more likely to be sexually abused by their partners (Tahirih Justice Center).
- **Child marriage perpetuates educational inequities:** girls who marry under age 19 are 50% more likely to drop out of high school and 4x less likely to graduate college (Tahirih Justice Center).
- **Child marriage is a system designed to entrap:** once married, guardianship is frequently transferred over to the spouse, and girls who flee are classified as runaways and forced to return to the very abuser they were trying to escape.

THIS ABUSE IS HAPPENING RIGHT HERE IN VERMONT

- **280 children** were married in Vermont between 2000 and 2019. About 80% were girls wed to adult men. (Unchained At Last and Vermont Department of Health)

THERE IS A SIMPLE LEGISLATIVE SOLUTION THAT SAVES LIVES

- **H631** currently sits before your committee. Your vote on this zero-cost bill would harm no one and have an immeasurable impact on the countless girls you will be saving from this human rights abuse.

Students Against Child Marriage has mobilized the nation's youth against child marriage. We have launched nearly 50 chapters with more than 500 members throughout the United States. To date, over 10,000 supporters have taken action with us, resulting in more than 35,000 emails and phone calls directed to lawmakers in support of life-saving legislation like H631.

This bill costs nothing, harms no one, and ends a human rights abuse in your districts.

Distinguished committee members: the nation's youth and our allies of all ages urge you to immediately vote "YES" in support of this legislation.