

From: Judy Wiegand  
Sent: Wednesday, February 15, 2023 9:42 AM  
Subject: HB 148

I am Judy L. Wiegand. I am a resident of Kentucky and I hold a doctorate in physical therapy. I work with children 3-21 years old. I wanted to tell the story of a teenage marriage. She was thirteen years old and had a crush on a boy that was almost seventeen years old. Her non-experienced judgment put her in the wrong place and the wrong time and she was sexually assaulted. Later, it was discovered that she was pregnant and the social norm for the area put into place by the local community leaders, was that she should marry. The community leaders thought that it was admirable that the young man would offer to marry this now tainted girl and the local saying was that some father is better than no father. So the couple stood before a county court clerk with documented evidence the girl was pregnant. No one called the police, child protective services or even questioned it at all. When she left the court house, she had no job, no money, no home, and no driver's license. It was like she vanished. She was forced to survive. The man she married didn't work. Truancy officers didn't look for her or even to come to check on her wellbeing. She tried to go back to school but wasn't old enough for driver's license and babies were not allowed on the school bus. She tried to find a job but wasn't old enough for a driver's license and hours were limited with child labor laws. Because she could not sit for her GED until she was 18, she had no choice but to apply for state assistance ( food stamps, Medicaid, anything available). After her child was born, she could make life and death decisions for the baby but could not sign legal documents for herself. When her husband became violent and abusive, she was told she could not legally divorce until she was 18. She was stuck. Neighbors would not assist in a domestic situation and she was estranged from her parents (the husband's rules). It was a long road and hard struggle to put her life back together and not to remain in the state supported setting after her eighteenth birthday.

This is my story; that little girl was me. I was taken out of the state to Virginia to marry because the courts were more lax. I have testified in Kentucky ( and other states) to advocate for a strong new law against child marriage. I am asking you, Vermont, for support HB 148 so other children do not miss out on their childhood and endure such hardship.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Judy Wiegand, Pt , DPT