

**Written Testimony in Support of H148: Act to Ban Child Marriage
Presented to the Vermont Senate Judiciary Committee | March 23, 2023**

Chair Sears, Vice Chair Baruth and distinguished committee members: I respectfully urge you to vote "YES" on H148 and put an end to the reprehensible and abusive practice of child marriage.

As a licensed clinical psychologist with a specialty in trauma and PTSD, I have seen first-hand the devastating impact that child marriage may have on its victims. I have conducted diagnostic interviews and psychotherapy sessions with immigrants and refugees who were adult survivors of child marriage, so I know that child marriage can result in lasting symptoms of post-traumatic stress, major depression, dissociative disorders and other psychiatric disorders.

Without the passage of H148, children of 16 and 17 years old may be forced by parents -- including for reasons of financial exploitation -- into abusive marriages that could scar them for life. Please think about the health and safety of those children and give your full and active support to H148. Thank you for your attention to this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Eric R. Aronson, PsyD
Licensed Psychologist-Doctorate

Good day,

On Thursday, March 23, 2023 you will be asked to vote on H148. As a mother and concerned individual, I wholeheartedly urge you to vote to YES to eliminate the harmful, archaic practice of child marriage.

I was unaware, until recently that 298 minors, two as young as 15, were married in Vermont between 2000 and 2022. Can you image your daughter or granddaughter being forced into an arranged partnership at this young age, in our spot in the world of privilege and freedoms? These victims are often voided the opportunity of education and inner growth only to be kept under strict conditions of their so-called partner. They are stuck in a life not their own. I can not fathom my daughter, or any young girl, being forced into a situation such as this. Can you?

Condemning a child to a life not of her own choosing is not only a sad fact in our state, it's a reality. A reality you can end by voting to end H148. Please vote with your conscience.

Thank you for your time,
Karen Sturtevant

Dear Chair Sears and Senate Judiciary Committee Members Baruth, Hashim, Norris, and Vyhovsky:

My name is Marguerite Adelman, and I am a member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) of Burlington and Champlain Valley Amnesty International. Our organizations are members of the Vermont Coalition to End Child Marriage. As human rights, social justice, peace organizations, we strongly support H.148 and encourage you to vote **Yes** on this important bill for girls in Vermont.

Child marriage before 18 is a human rights abuse. In July 2015, the Human Rights Council of the United Nations adopted its first substantive resolution recognizing child and forced marriage as a human rights violation. In addition, marriage before 18 is recognized as a human rights abuse by the U.S. State Department because of the devastating lifelong consequences - especially for girls.

Child marriage threatens the lives and futures of girls, robbing them of their agency to make decisions about their lives; disrupting their education; making them more vulnerable to sexual abuse and violence, discrimination, and mental health disorders; and preventing their full participation in economic, political, and social spheres.

Child marriage may lead to women and girls attempting to flee their communities or commit suicide to avoid or escape the marriage.

In the U.S. girls who marry before 18 are:

- Less likely to finish high school or graduate from college
- Three times more likely to have at least 5 children
- 31% more likely to live in poverty

It's even worse for pregnant teens who marry.

- They are more likely to suffer economic deprivation and instability than pregnant teens who stay single.
- And as 70-80% of child marriages end in divorce, a pregnant teen will likely end up in situation where she has more children than she would have had if she remained single, but has less education and less income, and potentially has nowhere to go and is completely on her own when her marriage fails.

We may not be able to do much about child marriage across the globe, but we can certainly stop child marriage here in Vermont and close the loopholes that force some girls to get married without their full, free and informed consent. Vote Yes on H.148 and defend the human rights of girls in our state.

Sincerely,
Marguerite Adelman