



March 23, 2023

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

**Letter in Support of H148: Ending Child Marriage
Presented to the Vermont Senate Committee on Judiciary**

Chair Sears, Vice Chair Hashim and Distinguished Committee Members:

The Justice of the Peace Association urges support for H148, an act relating to raising the age of eligibility to marry.

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 H148 an act relating to raising the age of eligibility to marry.**

JPUs members have voiced strong opposition to *all* child marriages. Professional officiants say they would not feel comfortable marrying children 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 Code of Ethics 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. Children do not have access to the same legal protections as adults. Simultaneously, when a child is married, they no longer qualify for protection as a child, either. The problem is not a matter of the child's maturity. Rather, it is all about a lack of legal rights.

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.**¹

H148 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 H148.**

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

Sincerely,



Loretta Jay, MA
Managing Member
lorettajay@JPus.org

¹ Coalition to End Child Marriage, Justice of the Peace Association. Retrieved from <https://www.findajp.com/jpus/coalition-to-end-child-marriage/> on February 16, 2023.