

Memo of support LD1185 Ending Child Marriage
March 31, 2025

Chair Carney, and distinguished committee members:

My name is Sara Tasneem, and I am a survivor of forced child marriage. I currently reside in El Sobrante, CA. I am a vocal survivor and advocate to end forced child marriage because of the horrors that I had to endure as a child with absolutely no escape, legal or otherwise. I hope that no other child at any age must go through what I have. The dangerous loophole which allows 17-year-olds to marry in the state of Maine can and must be removed to protect this group of minors who do not share the same rights as an adult.

Like many victims of forced child marriage, my father and legal guardian was the one who forced me to marry. At the age of fifteen, during a summer visit to see my dad, I was forced into a marriage I did not want. My father introduced me to my husband-to-be one morning and I was told I would marry him that night. That man was thirteen years my senior, he 28 years old and I was fifteen. My mother did not even know that this was taking place. After a spiritual wedding ceremony that evening, I was handed over to this stranger, and left in his care. I lost my childhood, my freedom, and myself that night. I would never be the same person again. My perpetrator had full control over my life. I was not allowed to go back to school, talk to my mom or go back to her home. Instead, I was raped daily and was impregnated at fifteen years old. At an age where all I had dreamed of was going to the Air Force and then law school, I was instead forced into a marriage and motherhood with a stranger almost twice my age.

Six months after our spiritual ceremony I was **legally** married at the age of 16 and pregnant to my rapist. My pregnant belly should have alerted authorities to a rape instead of a rubber stamping my marriage certificate. I was not advised of my rights or even asked if I wanted the marriage. My dad consented on my behalf with a notarized permission slip. None of it felt like a real marriage to me. It began to feel more and more like prison after our legal marriage and the birth of my daughter. My personal experience highlights the very real dangers that minors face when being forced into a marriage. My perpetrator would have stopped at nothing to entrap me in a marriage so that he could escape statutory rape charges.

It took me eight long years of surviving my abusive relationship and overcoming enormous obstacles to file for divorce. It then took three years to finalize my divorce. As a minor, I would have been turned away from domestic violence shelters if I had tried to leave, but I could not even drive until the age of 23 because of my controlling and abusive husband. There was no escape for me as a minor. Sadly, I am not the exception. It has taken me years to recognize and address the severe impacts that child marriage has had on me, including PTSD from the prolonged abuse, recovering from the financial, sexual, emotional, and physical abuse.

There are **so many** reasons why child marriage is harmful to minors. Respectfully, I cannot think of one good reason why MAINE would want to continue these harms and expose minors to a human rights abuse.

I thank you for your time.

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