



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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*Testimony of Representative Laura Supica presenting*

### **LD 1185, An Act to Prohibit Persons Under 18 Years of Age from Marrying** *Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary*

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, I am Laura Supica and I represent House District 22, which includes part of Bangor. I am here today to present **LD 1185, An Act to Prohibit Persons Under 18 Years of Age from Marrying.**

In the time that I have spent trying to find ways to articulate the reasons to this great committee why raising the marriage age to 18 years of age is important, I realized that as a 44-year-old woman navigating the legal systems that are in place and understanding what it is to enter into a marriage contract, it dawned on me that a 17-year-old who does not have the same legal rights as an 18-year-old and they are not equipped to navigate this system.

We must acknowledge that those who marry at 17-years-old also has high rates of divorce, statistics those coming after me can provide. We also must acknowledge that domestic violence does exist in this world. In Maine, we are all too aware of this violence and have seen it end in murder too many times. One time is too many. This is in no way an attack on the institution of marriage or a statement of fact for all those who married at a young age. It is simply shedding light on an issue in our state that exists in the shadows, and that is forced marriage. And while we can't make a law to stop this type of coercion from ever happening, we can make sure that those who do marry have access to all the same services they would need to have if they were to need to flee a violent situation. As we will learn, finding shelter, finding lawyers, navigating the "adult world" as a 17-year-old is very different. This isn't about being mature enough, it's about being equipped enough.

I am sure you will hear this many times today, but children being allowed to enter into marriages just because their parents give their consent is dangerous. When you are under the age of 18, the decisions you are allowed to make for yourself are limited. Continued consent from your parents will still be needed for many things. Furthermore, in Maine law, the judicial review does not require consent from the individual before signing their marriage license – just the consent of their parents. Additionally, entering into a marriage at 17-years-old emancipates you from your parents, but it could very easily lead to spousal dependence that can trap someone forced into a marriage from ever trying to leave. Too many children are forced into marriages, and while even

those over 18 years of age can be forced, the difference is that when they are able to flee, they have greater access to services to help them sufficiently escape an abuser are there. By raising the age requirement from 17- to 18-years-old to marry, we can eliminate this danger.

This law protects our children and gives them an opportunity to make decisions entirely for themselves. I urge you to vote ought to pass on LD 1185, and give Maine children an opportunity to make decisions for themselves when they are legal adults.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have, but I may defer to some of the advocates on questions I know less about.

Thank you for your consideration.