

**Supporting House Bill 1455 and Senate Bill 5695 Sample Support Letter**

**Subject:** Support HB1455/SB5695, Ending child marriage in Washington

**Sample Text:**

I am writing to urge you to pass HB1455/SB5695, the bills that would end all child marriage in Washington, without exception, out of the House Committee on Civil Rights and Judiciary and the Senate Committee on Law and Justice, respectively. Currently, the marriage age in Washington is 18; however the law includes dangerous loopholes that allow 17-year-olds to marry with parental “consent” and minors aged 16 and younger, with no minimum age specified in the law, to marry with judicial approval. HB1455/SB5695 eliminate these dangerous loopholes.

Data from the Washington Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics collected by the nonprofit Unchained At Last shows between 2000 and 2018, approximately 4,831 children were married in Washington. Between 2011 and 2014, children as young as 15 were entered into marriage and at least 80 percent of the children married were minor girls wed to adult men. Between 2000 and 2014 at least 35 marriages occurred at age/spousal age difference that should have constituted a sex crime.

Before minors reach the legal age of adulthood they can easily be forced to marry, due to their limited legal capacity. They face legal and practical barriers if they try to leave home, enter a domestic violence shelter, retain an attorney, or file a legal action, including divorce. Further, there is no way to ensure that the required parental “consent” is not, in reality, parental coercion. In fact, when minors are forced to marry the perpetrators are often the minors’ parents. There is also no judicial mechanism that can ensure a minor is not being forced to marry. Minors facing forced marriage may fear familial retribution or violence should they not comply, causing them to not alert the court.

Child marriage also severely jeopardizes outcomes in health, education, and economic freedom. It also increases the risk of domestic violence. I therefore urge you to pass HB1455/SB5695 out of committee, and prevent the minors of Washington from being subjected to the abuse and exploitation of child marriage. The longer we wait, the more children we put at risk.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.