

Dear Assembly Member [...],

I am writing as one of your constituents regarding the children of California who will be married before the law this year. I am a California resident who has had the privilege of completing my freshman year of college this May. I turned 18 last July, and had the state of California permitted me to marry beforehand, my chances of getting this far in my education statistically would have been slim. According to the Pew Research Center, girls who are married before they are legal adults are 50 percent more likely to drop out of high school and four times less likely to receive a college education.

Although the United States' State Department considers child marriage "a human rights abuse," California has no minimum age requirement for marriage if one of the child's parents or guardians and a judge permits the union. California is the sixth highest state in the nation for recorded per capita marriages of 15-17 year olds, at 5.5 children per thousand, according to Pew Research Center. Child marriage negatively impacts the child's educational opportunities, economic opportunities, health, and safety.

Child marriage laws circumvent statutory rape laws and disregard the meaning of consent. Adults and minors may not legally engage in sexual relations, but in California, they may if they are married. California does not give children the right to legally consent to sex with adults, but it does give one of the child's parents and a judge the right to consent for the child to marry and have a sexual relationship within that marriage. This is unjust because it gives parents and guardians a voice over their child's sexuality that not even the child possesses.

One of the biggest problems with allowing marriage before legal adulthood is that many services that must be available to married people, and specifically married females, are only available to adults. According to Unchained at Last, girls who are married before the age of 18 are more likely to be victims of domestic abuse, but many women's and domestic abuse shelters refuse to serve minors. A person who is allowed into a marriage also deserves the right to leave, but divorce lawyers are often inaccessible to minors. Not only does child marriage allow what the United States' State Department considers "a human rights abuse" to take place, but it traps the victims within the situation. The institution of marriage is organized around adulthood and if domestic abuse shelters and divorce lawyers are unavailable to minors, then so should be the ability to marry.

I believe that marriage should be banned for children under the age of 18 because girls and children in California deserve to have the same freedom from marriage that I had in my adolescence. I hope that you will protect the children that you represent by promoting anti-child-marriage legislation during your service in office.

Thank you,

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