

[date]

[Elected Official]
[Address Line 1]
[Address Line 2]

Dear [Elected Official]:

Recently, I was horrified to learn that child marriage remains a very real problem in this country, and especially in California. Our state has the sixth highest rate of child marriage per capita in the country, with 5.5 out of every 1,000 fifteen-to-seventeen year-olds being married. Despite the internationally recognized minimum age for marriage being 18, there is *no absolute minimum age requirement* for marriage in California. When this occurs in other countries, our State Department deems it a violation of fundamental human rights, yet this continues to occur within our own borders at mind-blowing rates.

The futures of children forced into marriage are often quite grim. About 80% of marriages involving minors occur between underage girls and grown men, and child marriage allows the adults that marry minors to bypass statutory rape laws. Child brides are more likely to live in poverty, and they are *three times more likely* to be beaten by their husbands than women married after 21. To make matters worse, they face significant obstacles when attempting to leave an abusive marriage, as many domestic violence shelters refuse to serve minors.

I urge you to sponsor legislation similar to the laws recently passed in Texas and Virginia. Banning marriage for all minors, regardless of parental consent or judicial approval, is the only real solution. Often, it is the parents of these kids who coerce them to get married and, as we have seen time and time again, judicial discretion leads to the wonton application of justice. Many marriage licenses are simply “rubber stamped” and the judge who approves the marriage never meets with the child bride or groom. Evidence of the toxicity of child marriage is abundant, it is time California gets serious about protecting our kids.

Thank you,

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