

# ALASKA - HB62

I learned from testifying in Maryland<sup>i</sup> that ***lawmakers who have not experienced this specific of trauma themselves, cannot relate to, or begin to understand the horrific abuse and stories that child marriage survivors tell them.*** How in the world then, can we expect them to protect children from being forced into marriages? When lawmakers hold their own deep-seated biases above protecting children, **they have already failed.**

My name is Sasha K. Taylor. I was not forced into a child marriage in Alaska. I was forced into a child marriage in Arizona. I was 15 years old. I am still writing and submitting this testimony in Alaska for HB62, to tell you that lawmakers in Alaska need to raise the marriage age to 18, no exceptions and to protect minors in Alaska. I am also telling you that child marriages should not even exist as a concept anymore in society, and that all child marriages are forced.

Minors do not have the legal authority to consent, nor the legal authority to sign contracts. **These are children** and they are unaware of their options, and it's the adults in their immediate circle who are making bad decisions for them and are coercing them into these marriages as an immediate fix and a short-term solution to benefit the adults in the room. You see, **child marriage is about the bad decisions the adults are making for that child, and the child is the one who is suffering the consequences for the rest of her life. I say her, because majority of those effected are girls.**

I want you to remember this. I want you to remember this, because its also about the bad decisions lawmakers keep making when it comes to protecting minors.

I'm writing this testimony focusing on the adults in the room. This is all about the bad decisions the adults in the room make. **I'm flipping the script.** The adults in the room are the ones making the bad decisions, and the children are the ones suffering.

The lawmakers in the room, who are making the bad and uninformed decisions and who keep enforcing archaic laws – ***out of laziness so they don't have to think about a long-term fix.*** Because you all don't have a fix. You don't know how to protect minors, because ***you don't know how to fix what you have not experienced yourself. You maintain status quo, until it becomes the next guy's job to fix when you leave office.***

Lawmakers do that. In Alaska, and across many states in the United States, and in Congress. They skirt issues on minors and on marriage age laws because lawmakers are busy making whack-a-mole laws to solve issues for adults -- when the issues they should start tackling start

with the minors in their own respective states, because the issues they are tackling for adults start in childhood.

Just like the minors' guardians who need to "fix" whatever issue a minor is having, out of laziness that needs to be resolved. And the way to "fix" it is by marrying off the child, even if it means exploiting the child to a pedophile.

I need you to understand this.

***I need you to understand that in today's day and age, if a child is being married off, they are being exploited.***

If you say it's okay for a child to marry a man much older than her, then you are enabling the sex trafficking of a minor. The United States allows men to rape children. And you are saying this is okay to happen. You are putting your name out there and blasting to the world that you think it is okay for grown men to rape children. Because that is what child marriage is, and majority of girls in child marriages, are married off to much older men which is considered a sex crime. The only difference is that you say its okay to sign a paper for them to do it.

***All child marriages are forced.*** A child is completely dependent on the parent/guardian with whom they reside. And the child marriage is forced because if a child is told: "You only have option A." And option A is a marriage, that is legally defined as a forced marriage because the child was never given other options in their life to consider like "B, C, or D and so on and so forth."

As a result, all child marriages in the United States should be null and void immediately and lawmakers need to raise the marriage age, so an individual has the ability to legally consent, that being age 18 – as is the case in majority of all matters of consent in the United States.

Alaska is geographically far away from the rest of the continental United States (as is Hawaii) – both states that have marriage ages at 14 -- which is why I believe the state of Alaska and its lawmakers feels they are either not a part of the Continental United States or can get away with doing whatever they want, and that being failing the children in their state, and nobody will notice. You're all wrong. ***You are a part of the United States.*** You are failing the minors in your state. You are also failing Alaska's indigenous populations. You are denying them the right to thrive and the right to an education and the right to claim their own destinies.

***Alaska has the highest share of the American Indian and Alaska Native population at 22% and child marriage is especially high among children of Native American descent,*** according to the

think tank Child USA, a non-profit for children protection. There are 5.2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives making up approximately 2 percent of the U.S. population.<sup>ii</sup>

Throughout the Middle Ages, a marriage was characterized as property exchanges between two families and girls who were eligible to be married off were married by their families since the start of and prior to menstruation.<sup>iii</sup> This practice continues globally because a girl is married off against her will every 2 minutes. Worldwide, more than 650 million women alive today were married as children. Every year, at least 12 million girls are married before they reach the age of 18. This is 28 girls every minute. One in every five girls is married, or in union, before reaching age 18.<sup>iv</sup> This “worldwide” statistic includes the U.S. and it also includes Alaska.

Child marriage laws in the U.S. colonies dates to English common law and focuses on parental rights and controlling the child for economic reasons. Families use marriage gain property and heirs by marrying off their daughters instead of focusing on their education and well-being.

After the American Revolution, U.S. states modified marriage laws based on region -- with northern states emphasizing parental consent and southern states emphasizing property acquisition via marriages. These practices continue to this day. Marriage also included coverture – where a husband and wife became one legal entity, and a wife was unable to sue her husband and her money belonged to him. This also meant a wife was unable to bring rape charges against her husband.

Disturbing and disgusting child marriage laws and its practices adopted since colonial times that lawmakers kept modifying for their own selfish benefits to gain territories, political clout, property, money, inheritance, or influence have carved deep in the U.S. law books and won't let girls in the U.S. thrive and gain an education. The social implication of this horrifying practice still haunts the overall statistics on education, financial, social, political, and economic sectors for women overall in the U.S.

***A recent study conducted by Unchained at Last found that 60,000 marriages since 2000 occurred at an age or spousal age difference that should have been considered a sex crime.<sup>1</sup>***

***This includes Alaska, and the state of Arizona where I was married off forcefully at the age of 15 to a 22-year-old man, whom I had never seen or met before in my life.***

According to a report from the Tahirih Justice Center—a nongovernmental organization committed to addressing gender-based violence—approximately 70 to 80 percent of marriages

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.unchainedatlast.org/united-states-child-marriage-problem-study-findings-april-2021/#\\_ftn8](https://www.unchainedatlast.org/united-states-child-marriage-problem-study-findings-april-2021/#_ftn8)

where at least one party is under the age of eighteen end in divorce, and early marriage is one of the best predictors of marital failure.

Children who marry in their mid-teens experience the highest marital failure rates—at 80 percent. In contrast, individuals who postpone marriage to age twenty-five experience lower marriage fewer than 30 percent of marriages ending in divorce.

Lawmakers in Alaska: You can pat yourself on the back thinking you have “achieved” something by raising the age of marriage from 14 to 16. In reality, this proposed bill is incredibly lazy and achieves nothing. You *can* keep that age and sign off on all the girls getting forcefully married off by their guardians.

But then I want you to do this. I want you to then start keeping track and conduct research of the domestic disturbance calls, the babies abused, the children being given away or found dead, food stamp applications, high school dropouts, college dropouts, student loan debts, divorces, social services applications, health issues, domestic violence shelter applications, mental health services, and all the other local, state, and federal resources your state asks for that your population needs.

Then go back and do an audit of how old the girls are in all these situations and how many of them were married off as minors. You’ll find that many of them are married off as minors because they were told they had no other choice by the adults in their immediate circle.

***Again: You all are trying hard to fix issues of adulthood when you need to start in childhood.***

***Start by ending child marriage in your state.***

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**#endchildmarriageUSA**

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/02/17/maryland-child-marriage-laws/>

<sup>ii</sup> Koski, Alyssa (April 2018). "Child Marriage in the United States: How Common Is the Practice, And Which Children Are at Greatest Risk?: Child marriage in the United States". *Perspectives on Sexual & Reproductive Health*. 50 (2): 59–65. doi:10.1363/psrh.12055. PMID 29664190. S2CID 4896715.

<sup>iii</sup> Vivian E. Hamilton, *The Age of Marital Capacity: Reconsidering Civil Recognition of Adolescent Marriage*, 92 B.U. L. REV. 1817, 1824 (2012).

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/child-and-forced-marriage-including-humanitarian-settings#:~:text=One%20in%20every%20five%20girls,union%2C%20before%20reaching%20age%2018.>