

Child Marriage Prevention Act of 2024

OVERVIEW

Child marriage is a significant problem in the United States that overwhelmingly affects underage girls who are married to adult men, often with dire consequences for their life outcomes, including physical, emotional and sexual abuse, poverty, lower educational attainment, and compromised mental and physical health.

Data shows that between 2000 and 2018, more than 300,000 minors (i.e., under the age of 18) were married in the United States, most of whom were 16 or 17 years of age. Some of these marriages included girls as young as 10 and girls who were married to men that were decades older. In addition, between the years 2007 and 2017, more than 8,500 marriage-based visa petitions involving at least one minor were approved by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the majority of which involved U.S. citizen men seeking to bring minor girls from overseas as brides or fiancées.

While the United States has long worked to support efforts to end child marriage internationally, our federal government has failed to take meaningful steps to address this issue in our own backyard. The Child Marriage Prevention Act of 2024 is groundbreaking federal legislation that represents the first concerted effort by the United States Congress to condemn and prevent child marriage domestically.

The Child Marriage Prevention Act of 2024 sends a strong message to states across our country that they must end child marriage in short order and provides incentives for them to do so by:

- Establishing a National Commission to Combat Child Marriage to study, evaluate, and report on eliminating child marriage in the United States;
- Providing those states that have already ended child marriage with increased VAWA grant funding;
- Establishing a competitive grant program for advocates in eligible states that create state-based task forces to examine child marriage and make comprehensive policy recommendations to address the issue. These grants will provide critical support to local advocates and survivors that live and work in states that have not yet ended child marriage, supporting homegrown reform movements;
- Prohibiting child marriage from occurring on federally-funded land or buildings, or property owned by the federal government (such as military bases); and
- Instructing the Attorney General to promulgate a model state statute that prohibits child marriage.

Child Marriage Prevention Act of 2024 (cont.)

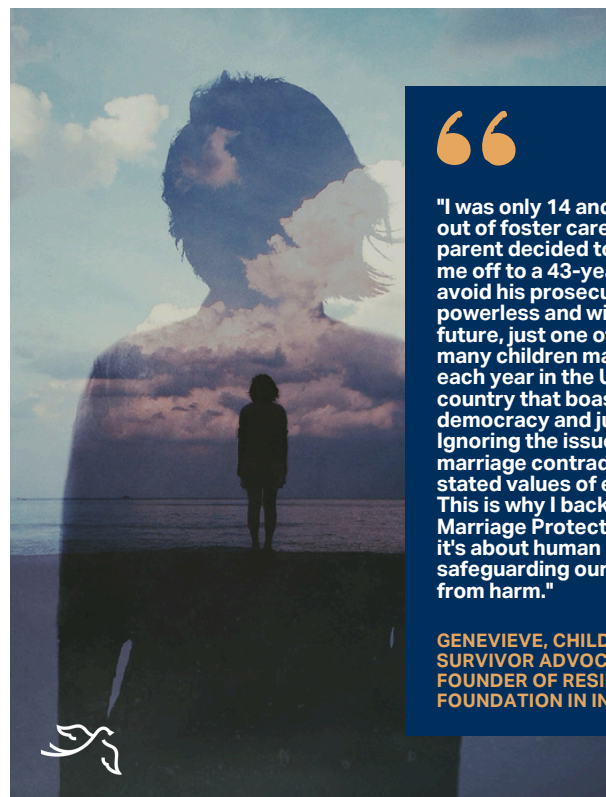
This bill would also close immigration loopholes that facilitate child marriage. It newly requires U.S. petitioners to be at least 18 years of age to petition for spousal and fiancé(e) visas, and to have been at least 18 years of age at the time of marriage for that marriage to be valid for immigration purposes. It also requires that individuals sponsored for such visas be at least 18 years of age at the time of the petition. The bill also includes a limited waiver for compelling humanitarian reasons for foreign beneficiary spouses who have not yet reached 18 at the time of petition. The waiver would be granted at the discretion of the Secretary of Homeland Security and is key to ensuring that already-married girls are not abandoned in the movement to end child marriage and recognizing that in rare instances there may be unforeseen humanitarian circumstances that warrant special consideration.

In addition, this bill would amend how a proxy marriage (in which one of the two parties is not physically present for the ceremony) can be established for immigration purposes, replacing a dangerous consummation requirement with a requirement that parties to a marriage have previously met in person within two years of the date of the ceremony.

Finally, the bill would require a report by the Government Accountability Office that, among other elements, would examine the extent to which non-citizens who were under the age of 18 at the time of marriage and/or petition have been brought into the U.S. through U.S. citizen and LPR-sponsored spousal provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act and make recommendations, including whether a minimum age of 18 for time of marriage should be set for foreign beneficiary spouses.

The Child Marriage Prevention Act of 2024 is endorsed by the Tahirih Justice Center, Esperanza United, ASISTA, Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence (API GBV), Too Young to Wed, Jewish Women International, National Alliance to End Sexual Violence, Ujima, The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, National Domestic Violence Hotline, Alliance of Tribal Coalitions to End Violence, Black Women's Blueprint, Legal Momentum, Resiliency Foundation*, Womankind, Global Hope 365, The Person Center, Raksha, Inc, Catholic Charities Fort Wayne South Bend, Daya Inc., Naila Amin Foundation*, The Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Indiana Youth Services Association, SK Sultana LLC* and the National Network to End Domestic Violence.

*Indicates an organization founded by a child marriage survivor.



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"I was only 14 and fresh out of foster care when my parent decided to marry me off to a 43-year-old to avoid his prosecution. I felt powerless and without a future, just one of the many children married off each year in the US—a country that boasts democracy and justice. Ignoring the issue of child marriage contradicts our stated values of equality. This is why I back the Child Marriage Protection Act—it's about human rights and safeguarding our children from harm."

GENEVIEVE, CHILD MARRIAGE SURVIVOR ADVOCATE & FOUNDER OF RESILIENCY FOUNDATION IN INDIANA