

Submitter: Brandi Dredge

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB548

Testimony in Support of SB548

Presented to the Oregon Senate Committee on Judiciary | February 19, 2025
Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher and Distinguished Committee Members:

Good afternoon. My name is Brandi Dredge. I am an author, a teen mom, a child marriage, domestic violence, and sex crime survivor, who proudly stands here today with Unchained at Last and my fellow members of The National Coalition to End Child Marriage as a survivor ally.

When I was sixteen, I met a twenty-four-year-old man, whom some boys in my high school lived with, and with stars in my teenage eyes, I believed he hung the moon. Four months later, I was pregnant, and a year after that, I was begging my mom to give parental consent for me and my boyfriend to get married after the attorney representing him on criminal theft charges suggested we do so before the sentencing. Since my boyfriend was a persistent and prior felon, the attorney wanted to use the marriage in the arguments for leniency on his sentence to show the judge he was a changed man, a family man with a new wife and baby. In 1997, at seventeen, I became his bride; he was twenty-five.

Over the next nine years, the statistics surrounding child marriage, such as the high likelihood of poverty, lack of further education, and enduring many forms of abuse, would ring true in my marriage in addition to the fact that I had married a sexual predator which was something I struggled to see even after the sheriff leading the sex crime investigation said the only difference between me and the other girls he had sexually abused was that he married me, and I had evidence of the crime, our son's DNA. In 2007, we got divorced, and he was convicted of two counts of statutory rape. One of those counts of statutory rape is for the crime he committed against me.

It has taken me a lot of years to finally see, accept, and say I am a child marriage, domestic violence, and sex crime survivor. I lost my childhood, and along the way, I lost myself. I rationalized many bad things under the guise of marriage; I couldn't see them as clearly as the sheriff, the prosecutor, and the judge could, which is why I am here today. To help others see what I couldn't.

With hindsight, I can see the manipulation, the grooming, and how the long-term effects of abuse and trauma have played out in my life and the lives of my children. I know the guilt my mom carries to this day, knowing she was the one who signed for the marriage. A marriage that my dad didn't agree with. I know first-hand the pain my

child marriage has caused, and I can look back at that starry-eyed teen and say that wasn't the right thing and I am sorry no one protected you.

Times change. When we know better, we do better, and there are children the current marital law doesn't protect. We know this, and we can't rationalize and/or ignore this. We must stand by the truth: our children are children until they reach the age of majority, the age defined by the state when a person gains all legal rights and responsibilities as an adult. Which means seventeen-year-olds are children, too.

So, in 2025, let's do better, close the loopholes, lead with common sense, and protect all our children by declaring that children shouldn't be married before they reach the age of eighteen, no matter what.

Thank you for your time.

Brandi Dredge

Survivor ally