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February 17, 2025

SENT VIA EMAIL

The Hon. Floyd Prozanski
Chair, Senate Judiciary Committee
900 Court St. NE, S-413,
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Testimony in support of S.B. 548

Dear Chair Prozanski and Committee Members:

I am writing on behalf of the FFRF Action Fund (FFRF AF) to voice support for S.B. 548, which would end child marriage loopholes in Oregon. FFRF AF is an affiliate of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, a national nonprofit organization with more than 40,000 members across the country, including more than 1,200 members in Oregon. We work to ensure that our laws remain secular in order to protect the constitutional separation between state and church.

We strongly urge the committee to vote in favor of this bill, which will make the minimum age for marriage in Oregon 18 with no exceptions.

Oregon law currently allows children under the age of 18 years old to get married with parental consent.¹ In an ironic and unjust twist, minors may be forced to marry, but are not “old enough” to file for divorce. This shows so clearly why a teenager who is not considered old enough to end a marriage should not be old enough to marry in the first place. A recent study² shows that almost 300,000 minors were married in this country between 2000–2018. Not surprisingly, 86 percent of the children married during this time period were girls, most marrying adult men with an average spousal age difference of four years. When minor boys married, the average age difference was 1.5 years.

New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof described one incident in which a 13-year-old was impregnated by an evangelical Christian “counselor” decades ago.³ She was forced to

¹ [Oregon Revised Statutes Or. Rev. Stat. § 106.060.](#)

² [www.unchainedatlast.org/united-states-child-marriage-problem-study-findings-april-2021/#findings](#)

³ [www.nytimes.com/2021/06/19/opinion/sunday/child-marriage-rape.html](#)

marry her rapist, and thus he was not held criminally responsible for the rape. He also cited a 2017 case in which an 11-year-old was forced to marry her rapist in Florida. Although the State Department has deemed marriage before 18 a human rights abuse, Kristof noted that while the United States has campaigned to end child marriage in Bangladesh and Yemen, it ignores the problem at home. It is up to state legislatures to fix this problem.

These are scenarios straight out of the Bronze Age Old Testament, whose Mosaic law essentially forces rape victims to marry their rapists.⁴ The bible treats girls and women as chattel and property. Girls go from being the property of fathers to the property of husbands, who, to quote Genesis, “shall rule over” them.⁵ In the United States even now, minors who flee an abusive spouse or impending forced marriage are typically considered runaways under state law, can be returned to their homes against their will or in some states, even charged with running away.

Last year, Washington, Virginia, and New Hampshire joined ten other states when they banned child marriage. The FFRF Action Fund strongly encourages Oregon to become the fourteenth state to do so.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RD', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ryan Dudley
State Policy Manager
FFRF Action Fund

⁴ Deut. 22:28–29 (“If a man happens to meet a virgin who is not pledged to be married and rapes her and they are discovered, he shall pay her father fifty shekels of silver. He must marry the young woman . . .”) (NIV).

⁵ Gen. 3:16 (“To the woman he said, ‘I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.’”) (NIV).