



BREAKING THE SILENCE
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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB548: ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE IN OREGON

PRESENTED TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY ON FEBRUARY 19, 2025

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher and Distinguished Committee Members:

AHA Foundation wishes to be recorded in strong support of SB548. AHA Foundation thanks the introducers of this bill for their efforts, and the Committee for prioritizing a hearing on this important legislation.

The marriage laws in Oregon allow one parent to enter a 17-year-old into marriage with nothing more than “written consent.” SB548 eliminates this dangerous provision, and ensures minors can no longer be exploited or abused under the guise of marriage.

Minors, having not yet reached the age of majority, can easily be forced into marriage or trapped in an abusive marriage in which they are forced to stay. Minors being coerced into marriage may fear familial violence should they refuse to comply, or they may be physically or emotionally manipulated into an unwanted marriage. Because they have not yet reached the legal age of majority, minors face significant legal and practical barriers if they try to leave home, enter a domestic violence shelter, retain an attorney, or file a legal action such as a divorce.

AHA Foundation has worked with victims, including minors, facing forced marriage, and knows full well that these barriers are grounded in reality. The individual stories we have seen are also supported by the data. Between 2000 and 2021, some 3,604 minors were entered into marriage in Oregon.¹ Between these years, at least 83% percent of the children married were minor girls wed to adult men.² And just between 2000-2014, at least 1,272 and possibly as many as 1,814 marriages occurred with a spousal age difference that would’ve met the definition of a sex crime outside of marriage.³

Child marriage severely limits opportunities in health, education and economic freedom. It also increases risk of domestic violence. Given these harms, one case of child marriage is one too many. If mechanisms are in place that allow for thousands of cases to slip through the cracks, the common sense solution is to enact the necessary law to close these gaps.

Governments should not participate in child marriage or make it legally possible for parents to force minors to marry. Those at risk must be protected by a legal framework that guarantees their human rights. The solution is simple: eliminate the dangerous provision in the marriage laws that place the children of Oregon at risk of exploitation and abuse and **vote YES on SB548.**

¹ Fraidy Reiss, Child Marriage in the United States: Prevalence and Implications, Journal of Adolescent Health (December 2021), [https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(21\)00341-4/fulltext](https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(21)00341-4/fulltext).

² Based on the nonprofit Unchained At Last's analysis of marriage-certificate data from the Oregon Center for Health Statistics.

³ Alissa Koski, et. al., Child Marriage or Statutory Rape?, Journal of Adolescent Health (March 2022), [https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(21\)00552-8/fulltext](https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(21)00552-8/fulltext).



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About AHA Foundation

AHA Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit founded by women's rights activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and is the leading organization working to end honor violence that shames, hurts or kills thousands of women and girls in the U.S. each year, and puts millions more at risk. We ensure that women and girls of all races, cultures, religions, beliefs and backgrounds who are facing honor violence have a way out, and that survivors get the help they need to thrive.

Since 2010, the Foundation's programs include: 1) compiling data on these crimes, which are not currently tracked by U.S. law enforcement or government agencies, 2) publishing reports and articles and organizing conferences about the continued oppression of women and girls in the U.S., 3) outreach and education to expand and strengthen state and national legislation for the protection of women and girls, 4) training of law enforcement and service providers, and 5) connecting women and girls in crisis to appropriate services. AHA Foundation has trained over 3,400 frontline service providers on responding to cases of gender based violence, honor violence and forced marriage, and partnered with Crisis Text Line to create America's first honor violence and forced marriage helpline.