

Submitter: Mandy Havlik
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB548
Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Mandy Havlik, and I am submitting this testimony in strong support of SB548, legislation that would finally end all marriage before age 18 in Oregon, without exceptions. I am a survivor of child marriage, and I share my story in the hope that no other child is ever forced to endure what I did.

I met my abuser at the age of 12 in the Pentecostal evangelical church I was raised in. He was 18. Our church promoted Christian fundamentalism and discouraged all outside influences, including education, television, secular music, or friendships beyond the church. Girls were taught their calling was to marry a preacher and serve his ministry. I was groomed within this system.

At 13, our relationship became physically intimate. It was facilitated and encouraged by my own mother, who helped arrange our secret meetings. Despite warnings from coworkers at a law firm where I worked in high school, my family pressured me to continue the relationship. I was 15 when I graduated high school, with a scholarship to Arizona State University, which I was discouraged from using because it would "interfere with God's will."

When I finally broke off the engagement at 16, the consequences were immediate. My family turned against me. My parents made home life unbearable and restricted my contact with friends. After one dinner with him, he drove me to a construction site and tried to force me to have sex. I refused. He became enraged, physically assaulted me, and hit me until I lost consciousness. My eye was swollen shut. Still, I was forced to attend church the next day.

I tried to run away, but as a minor, I had no legal pathway to emancipation. I eventually fled to Colorado with the help of coworkers, but my parents forced me to return. At 17, I gave up. A week after my birthday, I was forced to marry him. My mother signed the license. That piece of paper gave legal cover to years of abuse.

In marriage, the abuse escalated, emotional, financial, physical. As a married minor, I was considered emancipated, but I had few real rights. I couldn't get into a shelter, rent an apartment, or seek legal recourse. I was legally trapped.

At age 20, I fled again, this time for good. I left with the help of my brother and a few friends. My parents helped my husband steal my car. They cut off all contact and I

was excommunicated from the church members. I lost everything, my community, my family, my job, my credit. The divorce left me financially and emotionally shattered. I still have no relationship with most of the people I knew for the first 20 years of my life.

SB548 is a straightforward, bipartisan solution. It keeps the legal age of marriage at 18 and eliminates the dangerous exceptions that allow children to be coerced into marriage with parental consent alone. Oregon has seen over 3,600 child marriages since 2000. Most involve girls married to adult men. This is not just a policy failure, it is a human rights crisis!

Child marriage is a legal trap. It increases the risk of abuse, poverty, and lifelong trauma. It strips children of autonomy and protection. The U.S. State Department classifies marriage under age 18 as a human rights abuse. Oregon should not be complicit in this abuse.

SB548 costs the state nothing, harms no one. It keeps children safe and allows for them to have a childhood. Please stand with survivors and stop this from happening to the children in the at age of Oregon.