

Submitter: Vilasini Wright
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB548
Testimony of Vilas Wright

Survivor/Advocate

May 5 2025

Good morning,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony with you today. I am a survivor of child marriage and an advocate and member of the NATIONAL COALITION to END CHILD MARRIAGE.

At the age of 13, I was violently raped and left on the side of the road. I was covered in bruises and bite marks and was therefore not able to hide it from my father. When it came to light, my parents decided that I should be married off. Five months later, I was married to a man I didn't know who was more than twice my age. No one asked me. I was a naive and innocent little girl. No one stopped it. No one stood up and questioned if this was right or wrong. You have the power to do that today.

At 13 years old, I lived with this man, being raped repeatedly as a mere possession until he tossed me aside after a little more than a year and I became homeless and lived on the streets. I never attended high school. I was not able to get a job because I had no training and was not old enough to be hired. I survived by trading my body for shelter and food. After all, it seemed to carry no other value.

My experience is not unique. Countless children lose their rights and autonomy and suffer life-long repercussions from this human rights abuse. No child should be getting married off. It is non-consensual until they are an adult. If the minor requires consent from an adult, this should be a red flag for you. There is no exception that can make this practice justified. Marriage is challenging enough for well adjusted adults. Children have no need to be contractually committed into a relationship before they are able to get their full rights as an adult.

The consequences of the events of my childhood will remain with me for the duration of my lifetime. I fight my demons every day and use my voice against injustice whenever possible. If my efforts and words to you as a survivor and an advocate can save one child from living the hell that comes as a result of children getting married, then I am asking you to hear my testimony and protect future generations of innocent children from this fate. You have the power to do that today by making the minimum age to marry, the age of majority or 18 without exception.

Thank you for listening.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you have any questions.

Vilas Wright