

DATE

The Honorable Cottie Petrie-Norris
Member, California State Assembly
1021 O Street, Suite 4230
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Assemblymember Petrie-Norris

The California Coalition to End Child Marriage supports **ABXXX**, which would set the marriage age in California at 18, no exceptions.

This bill would correct California's dangerous, archaic laws that allow a parent and/or a judge to enter a minor of *any age* into marriage. More than 8,000 children in California are entered into marriage every year, and the annual number has been increasing in recent years.

Disturbingly, a child-marriage license is a “get out of jail free” card for a would-be child rapist, since sex with a child under age 18 is a sex crime unless the perpetrator first marries the child.

Minors can easily be forced to marry or to stay in a marriage before they turn 18 and get the full rights of adulthood. Regardless of their maturity level, minors even a day before their 18th birthday cannot easily leave home, get help from an advocate, enter a domestic violence shelter, retain an attorney or bring a legal action independently.

Further, child marriage destroys American girls' health, education and economic opportunities, and increases their risk of experiencing violence. Those who marry before 18 have a 70-80% chance of divorcing, which brings additional hardship and instability. The U.S. State Department calls marriage before 18 a “human rights abuse.”

ABXXX would end this human rights abuse and bring California in line with states across the nation and countries around the world that are making their marriage age 18, no exceptions. For these reasons, the California Coalition to End Child Marriage is in strong support of this bill. Thank you for authoring this important measure.

Sincerely,

The California Coalition to End Child Marriage