



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF COUNCILMEMBER BROOKE PINTO
THE JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, N.W., SUITE 106
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

September 16, 2024

Nyasha Smith, Secretary
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Secretary Smith,

Today, along with Councilmembers Nadeau, R. White, Gray, Parker, Frumin, Lewis-George, Henderson, and Bonds, I am introducing the Child Marriage Prohibition Amendment Act of 2024. Please find enclosed a signed copy of the legislation.

Child marriage can be defined as any marriage where at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age. Forced marriage is a marriage in which one and/or both parties have not personally expressed their full and free consent to the union.¹ The age of consent for marriage is 18, but dangerous legal loopholes allow a parent to enter a 16- or 17-year-old into marriage by only providing their². Currently, fewer than 10 states and two U.S. territories have made it illegal for people younger than 18 to get married. All other states allow it—sometimes with the permission of a parent, judge, or both³

Child and forced marriage negatively impacts a young person's health, autonomy, and education and economic opportunities, as well as increases their risk of experiencing violence. Research shows that child marriage has significant negative consequences including but not limited to: high-risk pregnancies and childbirths due to age, depression and emotional distress, overall dissatisfaction with married life or life in general, lack of independence, high-risk social behaviors such as smoking and alcohol consumption, lack of access to social and health services, social isolation, and a lack of access to job and educational opportunities.⁴ Research also shows that

¹ United Nations. *Child and forced marriage, including in humanitarian settings*. OHCHR. [Available here](#).

² Casey Carter Swegman, *DC Could Become a Leader in the Movement to Protect Children from Child Marriage*, Tahirih Justice Center (June 12, 2023), [available here](#).

³ Kimberly Kindy, *As Advocates Push for Child Marriage Bans, Some States Resist*, Washington Post (Mar. 17, 2023), [available here](#).

⁴ Yoosefi Lebni, J., et al., *Exploring the Consequences of Early Marriage: A Conventional Content Analysis, Inquiry: A Journal of Medical Care Organization, Provision and Financing*, 60, 469580231159963 (2023), [available here](#).

survivors experienced more domestic violence, including various forms of physical and emotional violence.⁵

Moreover, child and forced marriage has become a substantially pressing issue in recent years. Over the last year, the number of minors married in the District increased significantly where two minors were married in 2020, five minors were married in 2021, one minor was married in 2022, and *fifteen minors* were married in 2023.⁶ This big uptick in 2023 could be a result of nearby states passing their own reforms, leading the District to become a destination for child marriage.⁷ Maryland and Virginia, both passed child marriage prohibition legislation within the past two years, highlighting the crucial need for the District to enact similar legislation swiftly.

Additionally, the State Department recognizes marriage before 18 as an abuse of human rights⁸. The Child Marriage Prohibition Act of 2024 would declare the age of marital consent in the District to be 18 years of age and would prohibit marriage for anyone under the age of 18 with no exceptions.

Should you have any questions about this legislation, please contact Anaiah Mitchell, Legislative Policy Advisor, at amitchell@dccouncil.gov.

Thank you,



Brooke Pinto
Councilmember, Ward 2
Chairwoman, Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
Council of the District of Columbia

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Data provided by Unchained at Last.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ U.S. Department of State, et al., United States Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls (March 2016), [available here](#).

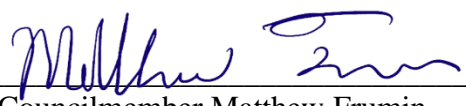
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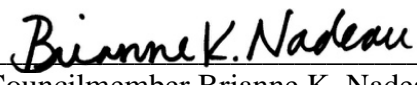
Councilmember Anita Bonds



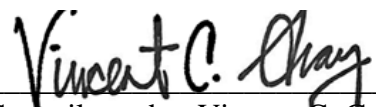
Councilmember Brooke Pinto



Councilmember Matthew Frumin



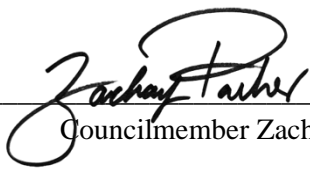
Councilmember Brianne K. Nadeau



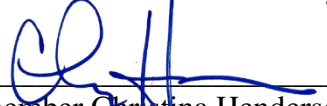
Councilmember Vincent C. Gray



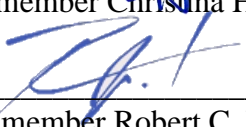
Councilmember Janeese Lewis George



Councilmember Zachary Parker



Councilmember Christina Henderson



Councilmember Robert C. White, Jr.

A BILL

IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

To amend An Act To establish a code of law for the District of Columbia to provide that the age of marital consent shall be 18 years of age with no exceptions, and to prohibit the Clerk from issuing a marriage license to any person who is under the age of 18.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this act may be cited as the "Child Marriage Prohibition Amendment Act of 2024".

Sec. 2. An Act To establish a code of law for the District of Columbia, approved March 3, 1901 (31 Stat. 1391; D.C. Official Code § 46-401 *passim*), is amended as follows:

(a) Section 1285(4) (D.C. Official Code § 46-403(4)) is amended by striking the phrase

41 “16 years” and inserting the phrase “18 years” in its place.

42 (b) Section 1291 (D.C. Official Code § 46-410) is amended by striking the phrase
43 “marry, and if they are under age the names of their parents or guardians,” and inserting the
44 phrase “marry,” in its place.

45 (c) Section 1292 (D.C. Official Code § 46-411) is amended to read as follows:

46 “If any person intending to marry and seeking a license therefore shall be under 18 years
47 of age, the Clerk shall not issue such license.”.

48 Sec. 3. Fiscal impact statement.

49 The Council adopts the fiscal impact statement in the committee report as the fiscal
50 impact statement required by section 4a of the General Legislative Procedures Act of 1975,
51 approved October 16, 2006 (120 Stat. 2038; D.C. Official Code § 1-301.47a).

52 Sec. 4. Effective date.

53 This act shall take effect after approval by the Mayor (or in the event of veto by the
54 Mayor, action by the Council to override the veto), a 30-day period of congressional review as
55 provided in section 602(c)(1) of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, approved December
56 24, 1973 (87 Stat. 813; D.C. Official Code § 1-206.02(c)(1)), and publication in the District of
57 Columbia Register.