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BILL TO END CHILD MARRIAGE INTRODUCED IN NORTH CAROLINA

Raleigh, NC – Today, companion bills to amend the lawful age to marry were introduced in both chambers of the North Carolina legislature to protect minors from the harms of child marriage by raising the state’s minimum marriage age to eighteen, without exceptions. North Carolina currently has the lowest age for marriage set by statute in the United States (tied with Alaska), allowing children as young as 14 years old to marry, resulting in serious personal, intergenerational, and societal costs.

“This bill would take North Carolina from behind the national curve to a leadership position in the movement to end child marriage,” said Casey Carter Swegman, Forced Marriage Initiative Project Manager at the Tahirih Justice Center. “The urgency is growing, as many of North Carolina’s neighboring states have already made progress against child marriage. If we do not pass this law now, North Carolina will increasingly become a regional destination for child marriage.”

The current laws have not been amended for 20 years and do not consider research from the last decade that shows the devastating effects of early marriage on girls’ safety, welfare, and wellbeing, and links child marriage with human trafficking and other abuse and exploitation. Between 2000 and 2019, over 4,000 minors were listed on marriage license applications in just 50 North Carolina counties, and [researchers estimate](#) that number to be close to 10,000 for the entire state. An alarming 93% of those minors married an adult, with over 200 minors marrying someone at least 10 years their senior.

Sen. Vickie Sawyer learned about this issue two years ago and decided to take action. She reached out to the Tahirih Justice Center, which has successfully worked to pass similar legislation in other states, about working together to introduce legislation to end child marriage in North Carolina. “It pains me knowing that North Carolina is tied with Alaska for having the lowest age for marriage in the United States. This legislation will protect so many vulnerable children who are forced into marriages and subjected to the negative personal and societal repercussions that follow suit,” said Senator Sawyer.

“The filing of [HB41/SB35](#) ‘Amend Lawful Age to Marry/18 Years of Age’ is a step on the path to protecting upcoming and future generations,” said Donna Pollard, Child Marriage Survivor Advocate and Founder of [Survivors’ Corner](#). “I have been advocating passionately for this change to prevent other vulnerable girls from becoming trapped in a life of exploitation and abuse as I once was. If you want to prevent cycles of poverty, domestic violence, and sexual abuse, this bill does that by providing the opportunity for young girls to develop into strong, independent women.”

HB41/SB35 will ensure that all parties to a marriage are on equal legal footing and will protect children from the abuse and exploitation that can occur under the guise of marriage and the lifelong harm that often results from marrying underage, no matter the circumstances.

Rep. Saine, a longtime champion of legislation that protects children, said, “I am proud to be part of a strong, bipartisan coalition that is working to end the horrors of child and forced marriage in North Carolina. This state has disturbingly become a tourist destination for those looking to marry children as young as 14. This bill will put a stop to that practice and protect children from North Carolina and around the country.”

The [Tahirih Justice Center](#), a national leader in the fight to end violence against women and girls, and experts on forced and child marriage, is proud to partner with Laura Puryear from McGuireWoods Consulting LLC to support this bill and grateful to Sen. Vickie Sawyer (R-Iredell), Sen. Valerie Foushee (D-Orange), and Sen. Danny Britt (R-Robeson), as well as Rep. Jason Saine (R-Lincoln), Rep. Brian Turner (D-Buncombe), Rep. Ashton Clemmons (D-Guilford), and Rep. Kristin Baker (R-Cabarrus) for championing this crucial legislation in North Carolina.



Rep. Brian Turner, one of the House primary sponsors, said, "Child marriage is wrong. This bill will help put an end to a cruel practice that many times results in human trafficking and teenage girls being placed in dangerous relationships with limited to no legal protections." His colleague Rep. Kristin Baker added, "I am pleased to join my colleagues in submitting this bill which provides a critical step in protecting young people, in particular young women, and thereby enhances opportunities for their futures."

Donna Pollard, Casey Carter Swegman, and Laura Puryear, McGuireWoods Consulting LLC are available for comment. Please contact Rachel Pak at media@tahirih.org to arrange an interview.

About the Tahirih Justice Center

The Tahirih Justice Center is a national, nonprofit organization that serves immigrant survivors fleeing gender-based violence. By centering the voices of survivors in communities, courts, and Congress, Tahirih's mission is to create a world in which all people share equal rights and are treated equitably.