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TAHIRIH OPPOSES DANGEROUSLY AMENDED NC SENATE BILL ON CHILD MARRIAGE– LOOKS TOWARDS STRONGER COMPROMISE IN THE HOUSE

The Tahirih Justice Center opposes amendments to [Senate Bill 35](#) (S35), a bill that was [originally intended](#) to increase North Carolina’s age floor to marry and protect girls and young women from the harms of child marriage. After substantial revisions by Senate leadership, the bill in its current form falls far short of progress and will continue to put children in North Carolina, and increasingly neighboring states, at risk of exploitation under the guise of marriage and other [devastating lifelong harms](#).

“Unfortunately, S35 as amended maintains the most concerning aspects of North Carolina’s current law while simply tinkering around the edges in an attempt to appear meaningful,” said Casey Carter Swegman, Tahirih Forced Marriage Initiative Project and Policy Manager. “We stand with survivors and with children of North Carolina who deserve better from their legislators. If S35 passes out of the Senate in its current form, we will continue to work with our bipartisan bill champions in the House and Senate and remain hopeful that strong legislation to protect North Carolina children from child marriage remains a possibility.”

Tahirih was hopeful that a reasonable compromise bill would be possible in the Senate. In response to concerns with the bright line of age 18 approach, the North Carolina Coalition to End Child Marriage offered a strong, commonsense compromise of an age floor of 16 with full emancipation. However, with S35, the age floor to marry in North Carolina will remain at just 14 years old— the lowest minimum marriage age set by statute in the entire country, tied with Alaska— resulting in serious personal, intergenerational, and societal costs. The bill as amended also maintains an alarming pregnancy exception, leaving North Carolina among a diminishing minority of states that have not eliminated that problematic provision from law in recent years. When it comes to teen pregnancy, community leaders should see red flags for potential abuse and coercion, not a green light for marriage.

“I was a 14-year-old groomed by a predator and signed over to marry him when I was just 16, so I know firsthand the devastating implications of child marriage. As community leaders, we have a responsibility to give children a fighting chance at life and not position them to have to fight to survive” said Donna Pollard, Founder and CEO of [Survivor’s Corner](#).

“We are grateful for the bipartisan support and leadership of our champions in both chambers, but we unfortunately cannot support S35 in its newly amended form. We continue to work closely with our primary sponsors to amend the language and pass a bill that will protect North Carolina children from the horrors of child and forced marriage,” said Laura Puryear, Vice President at McGuireWoods Consulting LLC.

Casey Carter Swegman, Donna Pollard, and Laura Puryear are available for comment on this topic. Please contact 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.