



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 9, 2025

CONTACT: Lynn Tramonte (lynn@anacaonallc.com / 202-255-0551)

Missouri Bans Child Marriage

“Early marriage stunts children’s futures and growth for the rest of their lives. Every person in Missouri now has the right to decide, as adults, whether to marry, and to whom.”

JEFFERSON CITY - Incredibly, in 2025, child marriage is still legal in most of the United States. But now the practice is banned across Missouri — making the Show Me State a leader in protecting children from this insidious form of child abuse.

“The harms of early marriage stay with children for the rest of their lives. Bipartisan champions in the Missouri Legislature worked hard to end child marriage and protect all children in Missouri,” said **Alex Goyette, Public Policy Manager at the Tahirih Justice Center**. “Every person should have the right to decide — freely and for themselves, as adults — whether they want to get married, and to whom.”

The bill to end child marriage in Missouri, HB 737, was introduced by Rep. Melissa Schmidt (R). State Sen. Tracy McCreery (D), Sen. Rick Brattin (R) and Rep. Renee Reuter (R) all sponsored legislation to the same effect, working together to advance the legislation.

According to former State Senator Thompson Rehder, married children are 50% more likely to drop out of school; four times less likely to graduate from college; and 31% more likely to live a future life in poverty than their unmarried peers. They experience domestic violence at more than three times the national average. Eighty percent of their marriages end in divorce.

Child marriage was banned in the District of Columbia, Maine, and Oregon earlier this year. Passing legislation in four more jurisdictions makes 2025 the most successful year yet for the national campaign to end child marriage, launched by Tahirih’s campaign in Virginia in 2016. *Check out this Tahirih Justice Center two-pager for an overview.*

In a moving essay for the *Kansas City Star*, Thompson Rheder explained how she chose marriage at the age of 15 to escape an abusive home, and soon regretted it. She dropped out of school, became pregnant, and worked odd jobs to pay the rent. “At 15,



when I made this life changing decision, I wasn't Democrat or Republican," she wrote. "I was a child, with a child's brain and a mother who struggled with mental illness, looking for a way out. This bill isn't about politics. It's about protecting children."

Until 2018, Missouri had one of the laxest marriage laws in the United States, allowing thousands of predators to use the cover of a legal marriage to mask their sexual, psychological, and physical coercion of minors. The legislature installed some safeguards, but it was not enough to fully protect children. With the enactment of HB 737, marriage under the age of 18 is forbidden in Missouri — no exceptions.

MORE INFORMATION

Learn more about the status of child marriage bans across the states in this Tahirih Justice Center [backgrounder](#). Follow the national campaign to end child and forced marriage at <https://preventforcedmarriage.org/>.

###

The Tahirih Justice Center is a national, nonprofit organization that serves women, girls, and all immigrant survivors of gender-based violence. By amplifying the experiences of survivors, our mission is to create a world in which all people share equal rights and live in safety and with dignity.