

Child Marriage Prevention Act of 2026

OVERVIEW

Child marriage is a significant problem in the United States (U.S.) that overwhelmingly involves adult men marrying girls who are children. Child marriage often has dire consequences for girls' life outcomes including physical, emotional and sexual abuse, poverty, lower educational attainment, and compromised mental and physical health.

Data shows that between 2000 and 2018, more than 300,000 children (i.e., under the age of 18) were married in the U.S. - some were as young as 10 and often married to much older men. In addition, between 2007 and 2017, more than 8,500 marriage-based visa petitions involving at least one minor were approved by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. The majority involved adult U.S. citizen men seeking to bring girls from overseas as brides or fiancées.

While the U.S. has long supported efforts to end child marriage internationally, we have failed to take meaningful steps to address this issue in our own backyard. The Child Marriage Prevention Act of 2026, first introduced in 2024, is groundbreaking federal legislation that represents the first concerted effort by the U. S. Congress to condemn and prevent child marriage domestically.

The Child Marriage Prevention Act of 2026 sends a strong message to states across our country that they must end child marriage in short order, and incentivizes them to do so by:

- Establishing a National Commission to Combat Child Marriage to study, evaluate, and report on eliminating child marriage in the U. S.;
- Providing states that have already ended child marriage with increased VAWA grant funding;
- Establishing a competitive grant program for states to create dedicated task forces to examine and make comprehensive policy recommendations to address child marriage. These grants will provide critical support to advocates and survivors in states that have not yet ended child marriage, supporting local reform movements;
- Prohibiting child marriage from occurring in or on property owned or funded by the federal government (such as military bases); and
- Instructing the Attorney General to promulgate a model state statute that prohibits child marriage.

Child Marriage Prevention Act of 2026 (cont.)

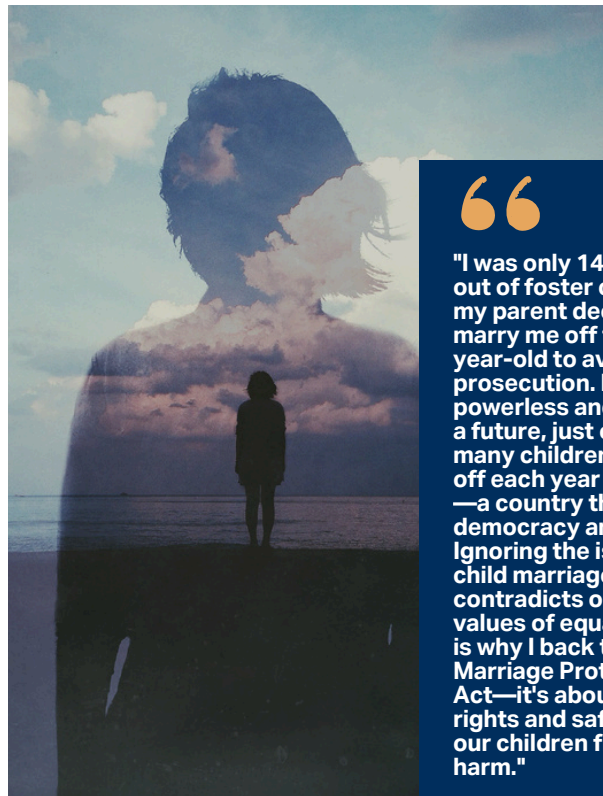
This bill also closes immigration loopholes that facilitate child marriage. It newly requires U.S. petitioners for spousal and fiancé(e) visas to be at least 18 years of age, and to have been at least 18 years of age at the time of marriage to a foreign visa beneficiary. It also requires beneficiaries to be at least 18 years of age when the petition is filed except in extremely limited circumstances.

In addition, the bill repeals the dangerous consummation requirement for a “proxy marriage” (when one of the parties is not physically present for the ceremony). Requiring consummation in order to validate a “proxy marriage” is known to incentivize rape. Instead, the bill requires spouses to have met in person within the two years prior to the date of the wedding ceremony.

Finally, the bill requires the Government Accountability Office to examine, among other things, the extent to which U.S. citizens and permanent residents sponsor foreign spouses who were under 18 at the time of marriage, and to make recommendations as to whether foreign spouses should also be required to have been at least 18 at the time of marriage.

The Child Marriage Prevention Act was previously endorsed by: Tahirih Justice Center, Alliance of Tribal Coalitions to End Violence, National Alliance to End Sexual Violence, The National Domestic Violence Hotline, National Network to End Domestic Violence, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, Too Young to Wed, VOW for Girls, ASISTA Immigration Assistance, Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence, Esperanza United, Global Citizen, Raksha, Inc, Jewish Women International, Ujima, The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community, Peaceful Families Project, Womankind, Sanctuary for Families, Maitri, Resiliency Foundation*, Global Hope 365, SK Sultana LLC*, The Person Center, Legal Momentum, Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Texas Council on Family Violence, Paving the Way Foundation, Texas Muslim Women's Foundation Inc., United Against Human Trafficking, and others.

*Indicates an organization founded by a child marriage survivor.



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"I was only 14 and fresh out of foster care when my parent decided to marry me off to a 43-year-old to avoid his prosecution. I felt powerless and without a future, just one of the many children married off each year in the US—a country that boasts democracy and justice. Ignoring the issue of child marriage contradicts our stated values of equality. This is why I back the Child Marriage Protection Act—it's about human rights and safeguarding our children from harm."

GENEVIEVE, CHILD MARRIAGE SURVIVOR ADVOCATE & FOUNDER OF RESILIENCY FOUNDATION IN INDIANA