



TO: The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr., Chair
Members, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
The Honorable Sarah K. Elfreth

FROM: Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
J. Steven Wise
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DATE: March 4, 2020

RE: **SUPPORT** – Senate Bill 949 – *Family Law – Authorization for a Minor to Marry*

The Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP) is a statewide association representing more than 1,100 pediatricians and allied pediatric and adolescent healthcare practitioners in the State and is a strong and established advocate promoting the health and safety of all the children we serve. On behalf of MDAAP, we submit this letter of **support** for Senate Bill 949.

Senate Bill 949 provides important changes to Maryland's law regarding a minor's right to marry. The bill would limit the right to marry to individuals who are 17 and enhances the requirements that must be met for an individual who is age 17 to marry, including that there may not be more than a 4 year difference in age. Under current law, an individual, age 16 or 17 is allowed to marry if the individual has consent of the parent or guardian or has been certified to be pregnant or has had a child. An individual who is age 15 may not marry without consent of a parent or guardian and a certification that the individual is pregnant or has had a child.

Limiting the ability to minors to marry to age 17 with no more than 4 years difference in age substantially limits the threat of a minor being forced or coerced into a marriage. Forced marriage victims experience significantly high rates of sexual abuse, economic threats, and isolation. Additionally, many married minors do not have the legal rights of adults. A 2016 review by The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists found that women and girls who were threatened with forced marriage reported higher instances of intimate partner violence.

Furthermore, parents may believe early marriage is in their daughter's best interest, especially if she's pregnant. However, the vast majority of girls who marry before age 18 face significant lifelong challenges. American women who marry before the age of 18 are more likely to face psychiatric disorders like clinical depression, according to a 2011 nationwide study published by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Early marriage doubles a teenager's chances of living in poverty and triples the likelihood of domestic violence, compared to married adults. Senate Bill 949 provides important enhancements for the protection of minors as it relates to the right to marry. A favorable report is requested.

For more information call:

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