



**Testimony in Support of SB949
Family Law – Authorization for a Minor to Marry
Wednesday, March 4, 2020**

TO: The Honorable William Smith, Chair, The Honorable Jeff Waldstreicher, Vice Chair, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Laura E. Irwin, Chair, Montgomery County Community Action Board

As advocates for the low-income community, the Montgomery County Community Action Board (CAB) supports increasing the minimum age to marry in Maryland to eighteen. While SB949 takes a step in the right direction by increasing the marriage age to seventeen when a minor has been emancipated and when the prospective partner is no more than four years older than the minor, CAB recommends increasing the minimum age to eighteen in all circumstances.

Approximately 3,130 children were married in Maryland between 2000 and 2014, including more than 5 children under the age of 15.ⁱ Research shows that children who marry are far more likely to face serious physical and mental health problems and domestic violence. Furthermore, child marriage often leads to an increased risk of poverty. Many of these children drop out of school and 70% of child marriages end in divorce, often leading to a life of poverty.ⁱⁱ

As the voice of low-income residents in Montgomery County, CAB advocates for vulnerable members of our community, including children. Research shows that the detrimental effects of child marriage are quite clear. CAB believes that children should have the opportunity to pursue an education and become self-sufficient adults. In most cases, child marriage prevents this from happening. Changing the minimum age to marry in Maryland to eighteen will ensure that no child in the state faces the numerous negative impacts of child marriage.

The Community Action Board recommends amending SB949 to reflect a minimum marriage age of eighteen as a way to protect children and prevent poverty.

We thank you for your consideration.

ⁱ Unchained at Last <http://www.unchainedatlast.org/>

ⁱⁱ The Washington Post https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/02/10/why-does-the-united-states-still-let-12-year-old-girls-get-married/?tid=pm_pop_b&utm_term=.62a7b9c8ef6c