

My name is Sasha K. Taylor. I support SB 949 because it would be a step closer to what I prefer, a minimum age of 18. But I seek amendments to SB 949 because I think it needs to do more to ensure that the minor really can support a household on their own, to increase the chance that they're not being forced into the marriage and to make sure they have options if they need to leave the marriage.

I am a third-generation victim survivor of a forced arranged marriage, living now in the Washington DC area. Even though this took place in September 1991 in Arizona, it could easily have taken place in Maryland, or any state where archaic laws still allow legal guardians to forcefully marry off their minor children.

In 1991, I began my sophomore year in high school. I got off the bus, and was told to go to my Grandmother's home for dinner. When I arrived, I discovered that I was to be engaged to a man seven years older than me, whom I had never met or spoken to before. I was surrounded by family members, forced into submission, and engaged that night.

A few months later, this individual's student visa was expiring, and the families agreed to marry us legally. I have one photo from that day. I am sitting in a waiting room surrounded by family. I still don't know who filled out the paperwork. Everyone is waiting for us to be called in front of the judge. I walked up, and repeated what I was told to say. I was not able to speak up. NO child is able to speak for themselves, when these atrocities are occurring to them.

- No child is able to speak when they are scared and surrounded by family.
- No child is able to speak when they are pressured or abused into submission.
- No child is able to speak because nobody ever asks them what they want.
- No child is able to speak because there is nobody there to speak for their best interest.
- No child is able to speak because there is nobody there to advocate for them.
- No child is able to speak because nobody ever questions the process, since "*it's the law*" and local government employees are simply checking boxes and doing their jobs.
- No child is able to speak because they don't have the privilege of choice.
- No child is able to speak because they have not discovered the power of their own voice.
- I was unable to speak, and remained silent that day. I had been silent since that day.

You see, what almost every victim survivor of forced arranged marriages have in common are; **abuse and socioeconomic background**. My father was a physically and emotionally abusive man and to get me out of that house, my Mother and Grandmother arranged this marriage, since they felt this was their only option, because the same had been done to them. They didn't imagine any other choice for me, because they were not given any another choice. They did not have the privilege of choosing college, or a fulfilling career. It was a cycle that kept repeating, over and over again.

Every victim of a forced arranged marriage is raped. Either the night of, or soon after their wedding night. There is no such thing in her world as meeting a guy on her own because HE was HER choice, and there is no such thing as falling in love with him. Victims of forced marriages don't get to have that. If it were up to me, marriage at 18 would be a federal law in the US, and this battle would not be happening state to state.

Archaic laws repeat toxic cycles and set generations back years, without education or careers. It took me over ten years to complete my college degree. I have no relationship with anyone I went to high school with, nor they to me. I did not experience high school like a kid should. I never had a high school crush. I never went out on a date in college. I never had experiences like all young adults should. My childhood was taken away from me. Even conversations with individuals around me are difficult to have. What do you even talk about? What did you do at 15? I was groomed to go in a back room to make out with someone I was not the least bit attracted to, be a daughter-in-law, and think of the kids I was supposed to have with him, and stay home and be a wife. And I was not allowed to leave the house to go see my family. Not a conversation starter, exactly.

I still cannot believe I am writing a statement about laws that should not even exist anymore in today's day and age. These laws only benefit those that seek to exploit their children, and repeat cycles of abuse. These are archaic laws made in early times when women were seen as property, and married off as children, to secure land deals when the US was still a young territory. These laws need to change. As a First World country, the United States – **this state** – can do better to protect its children.