

**Olivia Lim Testimony**  
**SB0949 Family Law – Authorization for a Minor to Marry**  
Support with Amendments  
March 4th, 2020

Thank you. My name is Olivia Lim and I am a student at Marriotts Ridge High School in Howard County and a member of our school's Girl Up club. Girl Up is a movement to advance girls' skills, rights, and opportunities so that every girl can reach their fullest potential. I am testifying in support of SB0949 and the amendments proposed by the Tahirih Justice Center to further strengthen the bill.

Looking at me you might think I look mature - I'm standing in front of a Senate Committee, I'm lobbying on behalf of a bill - and that such a mature minor should have the right to be married if they want. But I'm here to tell you, while I am ready to stand in front of you to fight for the rights of girls, I am *not at all* ready for marriage.

And neither was Michelle. Like Sungyoon, I am here to share the story of a courageous survivor of child marriage who has had to overcome countless obstacles. It is Michelle's story and the stories of so many others that have inspired me to be here today.<sup>1</sup>

In her own words Michelle's mother and father were drunks. They separated when she was 14 and it became apparent that she was in the way of her mother's drinking and many, many men.

Michelle was an honor student in High School when she began talking to the brother of her cousin's boyfriend. She was 14 and he was 21. She did not think anything of it because he was so kind to her. He listened and took her back and forth to school because Michelle's mother was never there or too drunk to get out of bed. He also fed her. They became close. It did end up being sexual which she did not think anything of at the time because she was young and alone.

Just a few days before her 16th birthday, Michelle's mother came home and threw her out. So she went and stayed with a friend from school. About a week later she was in Honors English class and put in handcuffs by an Officer for being a runaway. She was placed in a single cell just like you see on TV. Michelle's mother came the next day and told her that in order to get out she would have to marry her friend/boyfriend or her mother would leave her in jail.

Michelle was terrified. The man was 23 and she had just turned 16. But she agreed just to get out of jail. Her mother took her to the local courthouse and made her marry someone she did not want to because she had power over her and there was nothing Michelle could do. Once they got married they walked outside the Courthouse and her mother said "now get out of my house!" Here she was an Honor Student, now married with no place to go. She ended up living in the back of his truck...

Again, he was 23 and Michelle was a week over 16. Throughout the marriage she was pregnant multiple times and miscarried over 5 times due to the abuse and being hit in the stomach over and over. She lost a child who died inside her while she was 5 months pregnant. It was horrible. She had no one to confide in and nowhere to go because she was 16, 17 and all her friends still lived with their parents so there was nothing they could do. She was too ashamed to tell anyone and did the typical lying about black eyes and bruises. She went from aspirations of Law School to being forced to marry someone that she now considers a child molester because he and her mother preyed on her and there was nothing she could do...because she was too young and had no voice.

This bill would have protected a girl like Michelle. While she is not yet ready to fully and publicly share her story, she has told us that she is not ashamed and she knows the importance of exposing the details of the brutal abuse she experienced throughout her childhood and her forced child marriage. I hope that you will keep her and all the other girls behind the statistics in mind when you vote to support this bill.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> For more details of Skyler's story and those of many other former child brides stepping forward advocating for change, please see: <https://www.tahirih.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2019-Child-Marriage-Survivor-Story-Compilation-FOR-WEB.pdf>