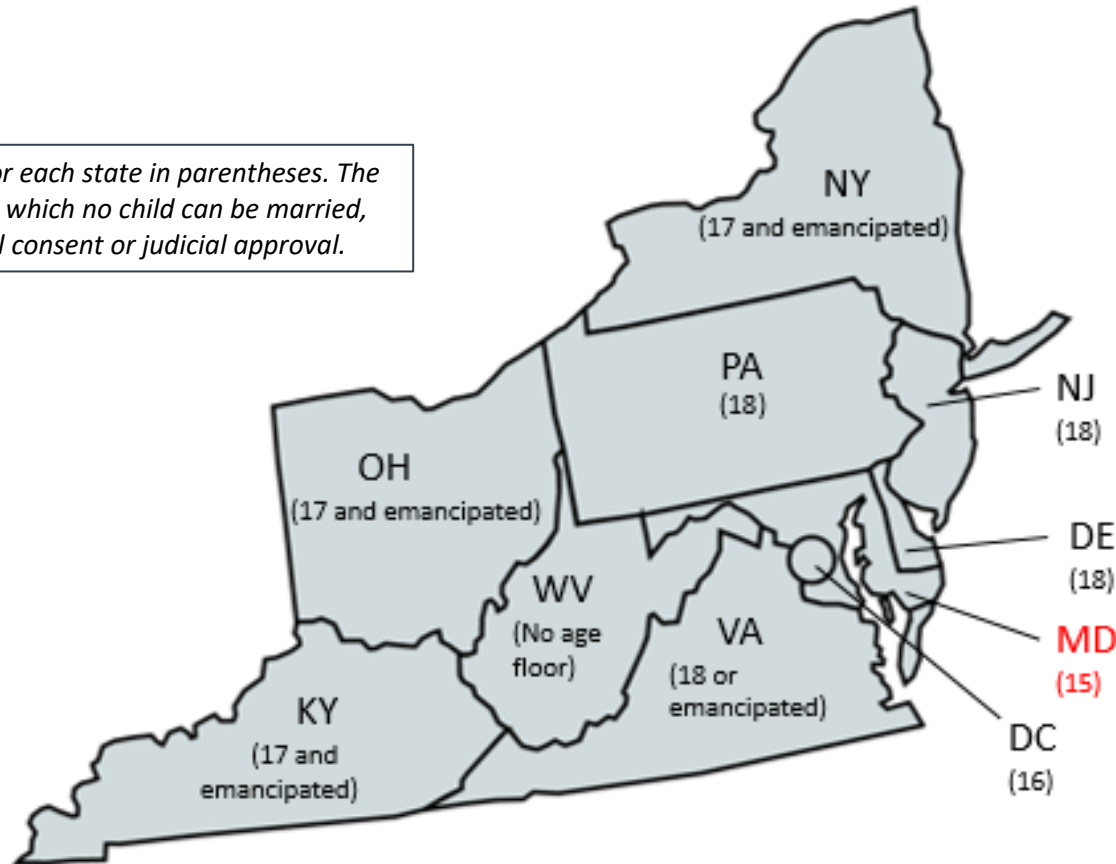












How Maryland's Child Marriage Laws Compare to Other States in the Region

Age "floor" is given for each state in parentheses. The floor is the age below which no child can be married, regardless of parental consent or judicial approval.



FAST FACTS:

- Maryland's current laws on minimum marriage age are weaker than any other state plus DC in this region, with the possible exception of West Virginia. That state does not have an age floor, but does involve a judge for individuals under age 16.
- Seven states & DC set a higher age floor than Maryland. Most require that individuals be legal adults (age 18, or emancipated) before marrying.
- Maryland is the only state in the region that still has a pregnancy exception, and is only one of five such states nationwide. Most states now recognize that a pregnant underage girl may need a protection order, not a marriage license.

State	Basic Summary of Minimum Marriage-Age Laws	
DC		Age 16 w/parental consent
DE		Age 18, no exceptions
KY		Age 17 w/judicial approval <i>and</i> if court-emancipated based on several criteria, <i>and</i> if age difference of parties is not more than 4 yrs
MD		Age 15 w/both parental consent and pregnancy/childbirth; age 16-17 if <i>either</i> criteria is met
NJ		Age 18, no exceptions
NY		Age 17 w/ judicial approval <i>and</i> if court-emancipated based on several criteria
OH		Age 17 w/judicial approval <i>and</i> if court-emancipated based on several criteria, <i>and</i> if age difference of parties is not more than 4 yrs
PA		Age 18, no exceptions
VA		Age 18, or court-emancipated based on several criteria. Individuals are eligible for emancipation in VA starting at age 16 and there is additional judicial vetting if the petition for emancipation is based on the intent to marry.
WV		No age floor w/judicial approval; age 16-17, w/parental consent

“[At] the age of 16,...my mother decided she wanted me out of the house and got an offer from a man twice my age to marry me.

This was good news for my mother as she had begun to get jealous of the interest her new husband had taken in me...

And so I was married, and as a 16 year old child married to a man twice my age, it was like he owned me. He abused and raped me and eventually I gave birth to two children whom he would ultimately kidnap...I was married for over 4 years and I wasn't allowed to leave the house...it was like living in a jail cell.”

- *Testimony from former “child bride” brought from out of state to Maryland for marriage when she was still a minor.*

Across the nation since 2016, twenty-five states have reformed their laws on minimum marriage age. In 2018, Delaware and New Jersey enacted new laws to set age 18, *no exceptions*, as the minimum marriage age. Pennsylvania did the same in 2020. Legal reforms in four other states in the region, including Virginia, now all require parties to be legal adults. After reforms were enacted in Virginia, more Virginia-resident minors were brought to Maryland to be married. In 2018, a 15 year old was brought from Delaware to marry a 22-year-old under Maryland’s pregnancy exception – even though in both states, sex between parties of those ages is a crime.

Unless Maryland also strengthens its laws against child marriage, it will increasingly become a destination for the exploitation of children.

