

SB0173 Family Law - Emancipation of a Minor and Authorization to Marry

Judicial Proceedings Committee – January 26, 2021

Sponsors: Senators Sarah Elfreth and Shelly Hettleman

Position: Support

Testimony of Scott Poyer, Clerk of the Circuit Court, Anne Arundel County

Thank you Chairman Smith and members of the committee for this opportunity to testify in support of SB0173. For the record, my name is Scott Poyer and I am the Clerk of the Circuit Court for Anne Arundel County. My testimony today is not on behalf of the Maryland Judiciary. I am here representing myself as the elected official who is responsible for issuing marriage licenses and performing marriage ceremonies in Anne Arundel County.

I am in favor of SB0173 because I do not feel the current laws provide enough protection for minors who may find themselves being pressured into marriage.

I believe there is a relative lack of safeguards for minors under the current system. While it takes two to get married, only one applicant needs to make the application and we may never see the other applicant. We only see both if our office performs the marriage ceremony. If an outside officiant performs the ceremony, we won't see them. We just receive a green piece of paper telling us the marriage has taken place. And these days anyone can be ordained to perform

weddings in Maryland. It takes about five minutes and costs \$29.99 to go online to be ordained.

So under our current system, one spouse can fill out the application, get pretty much anyone to perform the ceremony, and they have a valid Maryland marriage license recognized in all 50 states. And no one else will have ever seen the minor who was involved to determine if the minor was under duress or was marrying against their will.

I support the proposed legislation because it provides better safeguards for minors by raising the minimum marriage age to 17, requiring an attorney be appointed to represent the minor, and also requiring a court hearing for each case.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this bill.