

HB 0242 - Family Law - Emancipation of a Minor and Authorization to Marry
House Judiciary Committee

January 28, 2021

Witness: Sasha Taylor (Survivor of Child Marriage)

Address: Confidential (can use Tahirih Justice Center Address – 6400 Arlington Blvd, Suite 400, Falls Church, VA 22042)

Position: Support

I submit this testimony in support of HB 0242.

My name is Sasha K. Taylor. I am a third-generation victim survivor of a forced arranged marriage, living now in the Washington, DC area.

I previously testified in-person but am unable to attend this year since I am recovering from ACDF Surgery – a neck fusion – because of injuries sustained when I was 10 years old, after my father threw me across the room by my hair, when I tried to stop him when he was beating my mother, who was pregnant at the time. Economic conditions, physical and verbal abuse in the household, is one of the reasons that families may seek to marry their children off at a young age.

Even though my marriage took place in September 1991 in Arizona, it could easily have taken place, and can still take place, in Maryland where archaic laws allow legal guardians to forcefully marry off their minor children.

In Fall of 1991, I began my sophomore year in high school. I 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 in a local court. I have one photo from that day. I am sitting in a waiting room surrounded by family. Still to this day, I don't know who filled out my paperwork. Everyone is waiting for us to be called in front of the judge. I just 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 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 they have not discovered the power of their own voice.
- 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.
- I was unable to speak, and remained silent that day. I have been silent since that day.

You see, the two things that 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. To get me out of that abusive household, my Mother and Grandmother arranged for this marriage. They

felt this was their only option, since the same was done to them. They didn't imagine any other choice for me, because they were not given another choice. They did not have the privilege of choosing college, or education, or a fulfilling career. An immediate marriage to get out of an abusive household was a cycle that kept repeating, over and over again.

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 victim impact 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, some still as children, to secure land deals when the US was still a young territory. These laws need to change. As a First World country, America can do better to protect its minor children.