

The Honorable William C. Smith
Chair Judicial Proceedings
Miller Senate Office Building 2 East Wing
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis Md 21401

January 22, 2022

RE: Favor SB 29 Emancipation of a Minor and Authorization to Marry

Dear Chair Smith:

I am writing to express my favor of SB 29, as it combats child marriages and promotes the rights of minors. As an **advocate** of minors, I have **firsthand** knowledge of the trauma that minors suffer when adults force negative life decisions on them. Minors who have been adversely influenced and suffered at the hands of adult motives struggle to establish a healthy lifestyle and make their own decisions.

The sponsors of SB 29 realize the need to have safeguards in place to protect minors from being forced or coerced into nonconsensual marriage that can lead to abusive relationships. Unless the law is changed, we cannot protect our children.

Minors 15 years of age do not have the ability to make an informed decisions regarding marriage. The legalization of marriage at the age of 15 makes it acceptable for forced and arranged marriages to dominate persons. However, the minors are often left in abusive situations with little hope of escape. Fear of the married person can stagnate the minor's ability to develop into a wholesome adult.

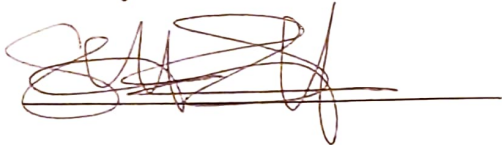
SB 29 will raise the age limit of marriage to 17 and limit the age of the spouse to an acceptable age range that promotes the same level of maturity of the intended partners. Most importantly this bill has court oversight requiring the minor to petition the court for emancipation from their parents and show evidence of maturity and self-sufficiency from their parents. If they can be self-sufficient from their parents, they can be self-sufficient from their intended mate. Just as important, the necessity of both partners having to show legitimate proof of their identification and residency allows the court to determine stability of the intended marriage. Additionally, advising the court of facts regarding the relationship helps the court to determine if the marriage is consensual.

SB 29 has precautions in place to deter the possibility of marriage between a minor and an adult who may have an authoritative role in the minor's life. Furthermore, requiring the intended partner to have a criminal background check, not being involved in trafficking or any behavior that involves mistreatment of minors, is a good defense against nonconsensual and unhealthy marriages.

The sponsors of SB 29 are sensitive to know that life changes and although the marriage may be consensual, the minor is to be provided with information that may be needed in the future. The overall well-being of minors should be paramount as we move forward to having wholesome adults in our future. In 2022 the constitution of marriage should not be filled with fear but be a lifetime commitment to the person you love.

For all the above we urge you to pass SB 29.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in brown ink, appearing to read 'Shanetta Slayton', written over a horizontal line.

Shanetta Slayton