

TESTIMONY FOR HB 83/SB29

Family Law - Emancipation of a Minor and Authorization to Marry

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Atterbeary/ Senator Elfreth

Committee: Judiciary/ Judicial Proceedings

Organization Submitting: Lower Shore Progressive Caucus

Person Submitting: Marie Velong

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB 83 on behalf of the Lower Shore Progressive Caucus. The Caucus is a political and activist organization on the Eastern Shore, unaffiliated with any political party, committed to empowering working people by building a Progressive Movement.

It is disappointing to see that this piece of legislation has been introduced six times and failed to pass, while well over 20 states have passed it or a similar bill since its first introduction in 2016. How is this even possible in this day and age? Our state law allows 15- year-olds to marry in the case of pregnancy or birth of a child if they have parental consent; 16 and 17 year-olds can marry with only parental consent. This bill would allow 17-year-olds to marry, with parental consent, someone who is, at most, four years their senior. Anyone younger than 17 would have to wait. This requirement protects young girls from being pressured into marrying much older men. If the 15-year-old were raped by such a person, it would be considered statutory rape.

National statistics show that 80% of minor marriages end in divorce. These young girls often stop their education after marriage making them dependent on their partner for financial security and opening a potentially abusive relationship. Divorce in this situation would leave many young girls financially compromised and without many options. To give our young women a fair shot at life, we must pass this legislation and end this barbaric practice. What can the State of Maryland possibly gain from allowing a 15 or 16-year-old child to marry a person older than them? For these reasons, the Lower Shore Progressive Caucus supports this bill and recommends a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.