



**Unfavorable
HB83/SB29**

Family Law – Emancipation of a Minor and Authorization to Marry

By Laura Bogley-Knickman, JD

Director of Legislation, Maryland Right to Life

On behalf of our members across the state, I respectfully ask for your UNFAVORABLE report on House Bill 83/Senate Bill 29 regarding Authorization to Marry for minors. Maryland Right to Life applauds any sincere effort to protect minors from being coerced into marriage, but as written, this bill will coerce pregnant minors into abortion.

The State's authority in issuing marriage licenses is LIMITED. This bill expands the authority of the state over the institution of marriage, will have a punitive effect on pregnancy and marriage and will coerce teenage mothers into abortion to avoid criminal prosecution for their boyfriends or intended spouses.

Pregnancy is Not a Crime

While members of this Assembly unnecessarily introduce bills to decriminalize abortion (there are no existing criminal penalties), this bill seeks to criminalize pregnancy. The bill fails to adequately define the nature of sexual crimes under this bill, but **uses pregnancy itself as evidence for a crime.** While the State does have an interest in protecting minors from being exploited by adults and those in positions of authority, this bill will have the effect of intimidation and coercion to force consensual young couples to abort their children to evade criminal prosecution.

Marriage is a Valuable Institution

The State should be promoting the institution of marriage and encouraging fathers to take more responsibility for providing for the needs of their preborn children and the mothers' care throughout pregnancy. This bill encourages fathers to neglect their responsibilities to evade the law.

Hypocritically, while the state is liberalizing marriage policies for all other categories of persons, they want to prohibit marriage and criminalize pregnancy for any person under the age of 18. This same Assembly enacted legislation last year pronouncing that a child of 12 years of age, possesses the necessary maturity to make mental health decisions for himself or herself without parental knowledge or consent.

Countless studies have demonstrated that consensual marriage is a valuable institution that provides for the well being of children and society as a whole. Teenage marriage in itself is not unnatural or perverse. In fact, delaying marriage until later in life is only a modern societal convention furthered by the sexual revolution of the 1960's and the prolific distribution of chemical birth control. Throughout most of human history, the biological maturity on the part of a young woman was sufficient indication of her readiness for marriage. For some young women, consensual marriage still is an acceptable choice or option and these women should not be deprived of their choice by an overreach of this state.

MDRTL has objections with the following provisions of this bill:

- Bans marriage under the age of 18 unless:
 - The person seeking authorization to marry is 17 or older; AND
 - The intended spouse is *no more than* 4 years older; AND

- A court first grants an emancipation order conditional on several stringent requirements including that the minor can prove maturity to marry and self sufficiency from parents, guardians or intended spouse.
- A court may not issue an order granting emancipation and authorization to marry if the minor female is pregnant or has a child with the other party “that evidences that the petitioner was the victim of a sexual crime committed by the intended spouse”.

Marriage is About Sharing Responsibilities

The maturity and self-sufficiency requirements the state here imposes to issue an emancipation order and authorization to marry is prohibitive and discriminatory. No other marriage licenses are qualified on these subjective and arbitrary conditions. Marriage by its nature is about mutual collaboration and cooperation – a type of co-dependency. Most households are necessarily two-income households as the cost of living continues to increase and families can rarely survive on one income. Pregnant teenagers deserve our support to improve their parenting outcomes, not abortion coercion.

Abortion Coercion

The State of Maryland has an obligation to protect minors from exploitation and this must include exploitation by the profit-minded abortion industry.

With the documented severity of physical and psychological repercussions of abortion, protection from abortion coercion becomes even more essential in ensuring that the best interests of pregnant minors are protected. Under current Maryland law, there is no explicit measure prohibiting any individual from coercing a woman into abortion.

The *majority* of women who have had abortions (64%) report afterward that they were pressured into the decision. Coercion encompasses any situation in which a pregnant mother is made to feel – by any means – that she has *no choice* but an abortion. Coercion sends a mother into the belief that *either the baby dies or I will die or suffer great harm*.

Pregnant youth face various forms of coercion to undergo abortion. Coercion can occur because the state or school fails to provide a pregnant student options to abortion. The abortion industry typically uses the phrase “improving educational outcomes for pregnant students” pitting a pregnant mother against the very person she is entrusted to protect. They are not as interested in preventing pregnancy, as they are financially interested in preventing *live birth*.

Exploiting Pregnant Women for Profit

If this intention of this state is to protect minors from exploitation, the state must cease its promotion and partnerships with abortion providers and activists – not subject teens to further abuse and exploitation.

The abortion industry self-identifies as *pro-choice*, but in reality, choice has little to do with the abortion transaction. Far from enshrining protections from coercion, the abortion industry operates on omission: they omit important questions about coercion during pre-abortion “counseling” and fail to provide information about the effects of a coerced abortion.

Abortion providers also have demonstrated an unwillingness to protect women and girls against sexual abuse and trafficking by refusing to report suspected abuse to law enforcement or other public authorities while agreeing to commit abortions on suspected victims.

Abortion is not health care

Abortion is not health care. It is a brutal procedure that damages women's physical and mental health and ends the lives of their preborn children through suction, dismemberment or chemical poisoning. Maryland law permits only licensed physicians to perform abortions.

Yet recent efforts by radical abortion activist-legislators to authorize **non-physicians to prescribe chemical abortion pills**, is demonstrable evidence that abortion is *not health care*. The recklessly negligent telaboration policies enacted by this Assembly that permit students to obtain dangerous Do-It-Yourself chemical abortion pills through the mail, school health center or vending machines, will subject women to **"back-alley" style abortions** where they hemorrhage and suffer their abortions alone, and flush their babies down toilets. Abortion is not health care but the greatest human and civil rights injustice of all time. The State of Maryland must do better for women and families.

Love them Both

83% of Americans polled favor laws that protect both the lives of women and unborn children.

Maryland Right to Life, Inc. (MDRTL) supports public policy that recognizes the fundamental value of every human life. 83% of people polled support public policies that support the lives of both mothers and children. Public funding must be prioritized to support programs and services that support life over the *destruction* of life, including prenatal and well-baby care, affordable adoption programs and foster care reform.

For these reasons we urge you to issue an unfavorable report on this bill and reintroduce a clean bill next session that promotes consensual marriage and furthers the intended purpose of protecting minors from sexual exploitation and coercion.