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**Sponsor Testimony for House Bill 511**  
**February 28, 2017**  
**Before the House Community and Family Advancement Committee**

Chairman Ginter, Vice Chair LaTourette, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the House Community and Family Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 511. The goal of this bill is to protect those most often in need of our protection—our children. In this bill, we propose to change the earliest age for marriage in Ohio to 17 and only with approval from the juvenile court.

Ohio's current marriage laws are a web of confusion with a jumble of statutory law, common law and judicial rules. See the attached chart. It appears under current Ohio law, that females are free to marry at age 16 or 17 if consent is given from each parent, or custodial parent, guardian, or person whose consent is required. Their male counterparts may not marry unless the female is pregnant with their child or has delivered their child. In this case consent is given from each parent or custodial parent whose consent is required and the juvenile court grants consent. These same requirements apply to males and females younger than 16. Between 2000 and 2015, 4,443 girls age 17 or younger were married in Ohio including 59 girls under the age of 15. Marriage licenses involving girls 17 and under were filed in 47 counties in Ohio. We

often think of child marriages as happening in some distant part of the world. Tragically, they're happening here as well. One publicized example from Texas demonstrates the dangers inherent in allowing child marriages. Trevicia Williams, who was 14 at the time, was forcibly married to an ex-convict and current registered sex offender — 12 years her senior. Trevicia was emotionally and physically abused throughout her marriage. The first time her husband hit her she asked to return home, and her mother refused. Sometimes parents are the cause of the tragedies that happens to these young women who are either emotionally or physically coerced into marrying too young, often to men who are substantially older than they. In 2002, a pregnant 14 year old was allowed to marry a 48 year old in Gallia County. Nationally, girls and young women aged 16 to 24 experience the highest rate of intimate partner violence, and girls aged 16 to 19 face victimization rates almost triple the national average.

We are not prohibiting marriages for minors in love who want to spend their lives together. We're only postponing them until the child is 18, thereby giving them a better chance of success both as partners and parents. The consequences of a child marriage can be extremely detrimental to both the child and our society. Often these child marriages result in

- Increased medical and mental health problems;
- Increased high school drop-out rates;
- An increased risk of future poverty, and;
- Up to 80% divorce rates

We strive at every turn to protect minors from adult situations. They are prohibited from drinking alcohol, buying cigarettes, renting an apartment, renting a car, entering into a contract, and from getting their own credit cards to name a few. We have even decided that they are not mature enough to vote. HB 511 seeks to protect our most valuable asset by preventing the forced marriages of children, putting both parties to a marriage on more equal footing, and mitigating the risks that marrying underage poses to a girl's safety, health, education, and welfare.

Thank you again for allowing us to testify on House Bill 511. We would be happy to answer any questions at this time.