



**Representative John M. Rogers**

**60<sup>th</sup> House District**

**Sponsor Testimony on House Bill 511**

Chairman Ginter, Vice Chair LaTourette, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the House Community and Family Advancement Committee, thank you for allowing Rep. Lanese and I the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony for House Bill 511, legislation that would adjust the underage marriage laws in Ohio.

Currently, Ohio Law provides that minors may marry, with proper consent, at the age of 16. Those who are 18 years of age are not prohibited from marrying another. Additionally, an exception can be made by a juvenile court for younger, pregnant teens, so long as they have parental consent.

According to the Ohio Department of Health, between the years 2000 and 2015, there were 4,443 girls who were 17 years of age or younger that married in Ohio. During that same time span, just 301 boys under the age of 17 were married with the approval of a parent or juvenile court. Often times, a minor girl faced with an untimely pregnancy, may choose to marry the father of the child, who may be considerably older.

The large discrepancy between teenage minors getting married begs the question if the age at which teenagers in Ohio can marry, especially young girls, is too lenient. And, does a marriage between minors set the couple up for failure?

The pressures of a marriage between teens in and of itself can be readily evident. A minor couple, where one is pregnant, can create an even more difficult environment for one, the other, or both - especially when choices to be made by teenagers or between couples with a larger age difference may not be mentally prepared for these new found responsibilities or drastic lifestyle changes.

Moreover, young couples are more likely to struggle to make ends meet, require assistance, subsidies or support from others to make ends meet - financially or otherwise. Indeed, according to a national study done by the Boston University Law Review, approximately 80% of the marriages involving young teens end in divorce.

Divorce, in many cases, leaves a single parent (often the mother) taking care of a child by herself or with the care of parents or grandparents. With new caretaker responsibilities, the ability for young parents, or the custodial parent of a divorce, to seek a higher education in an effort to obtain a job and provide for themselves and family can be difficult to say the least. Child support becomes a matter to be settled and must frequently be enforced in the domestic relations court.

With teenage parenting there may be less schooling, restricted independence, fewer life experiences, minimum wage employments opportunities and a host of so many other issues. Indeed, an underage marriage may very well prove to be more of an obstacle for a young couple as opposed to a benefit.

House Bill 511 would require that both individuals be 18 years old for a marriage license without the consent of a parent, guardian or the juvenile court (pursuant to Juvenile Rule 42 as adopted by the Ohio Supreme Court), in whose jurisdiction the minor female resides.

Under this legislation, consent to marry for a person or couple who is/are “emancipated” at the age of 17 years old must be obtained from the Juvenile Court before a license to marry is issued by a Probate Court. Furthermore, if one person is 17 years old, the other person cannot be more than four years older than the other can.

To be emancipated, a person will have entered the armed services of the United States, become employed and is self-subsisting, or has otherwise become independent from the care and control of a parent or guardian.

When determining whether a 17 year old may be married, this legislation requires the juvenile court to consider consultations with a parent, a guardian, or child-welfare organization having custody of the child, or an attorney appointed to represent the child’s interests. The bill also changes the age requirement of when marriage counseling is required from the age of 18 to 17. The bill outlines procedurally, considerations when a a minor child is pregnant or has had a child born out of wedlock. Finally, House Bill 511 specifies that a court may not issue a license to marry “until such child has been born, or it is found beyond doubt by the juvenile court that the minor female is pregnant and intends to have the child.”

In conclusion, we again thank you for allowing us to testify today. We appreciate your consideration of this matter, we respectfully ask for your support and we would be open to any questions you may have about this legislation.