



## **Senator Kenny Yuko**

**Minority Leader  
25th District**

**Ohio Senate**  
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### **Sponsor Testimony**

#### **Senate Bill 198**

#### **Judiciary**

**Chair, Senator Kevin Bacon**

**Tuesday, February 20<sup>th</sup>**

Good morning, Chairman Bacon, Vice-Chair Dolan, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify on Senate Bill 198, which amends the laws governing the ages for which persons may marry in Ohio.

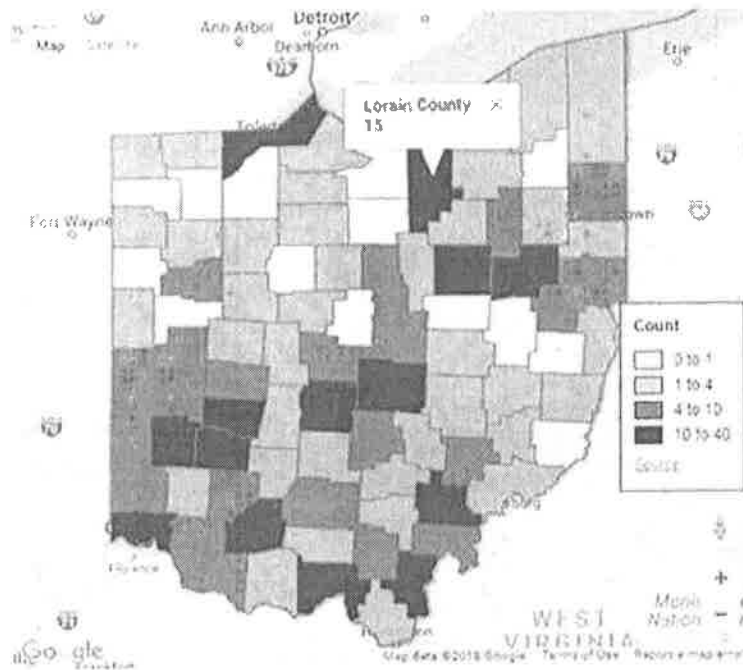
Advocates have reached out to my office asking me to address Ohio's child marriage statute. The Columbus Dispatch reported on September 11<sup>th</sup>, that more than 4,400 girls age 17 or younger were married in Ohio between 2000-2015, including 59 children who were 15 or younger. Three girls were just 14<sup>5</sup>. This issue spans through-out our state, in cities, rural towns and suburbs.

Currently, ORC 3101.01 allows girls 16 and older and males 18 and older to marry. However, with parental and judicial consent, younger children may marry. The current law is too lenient; we are allowing children to be placed in vulnerable and compromising situations with no way out. It is difficult for children to initiate legal action in their own name, meaning they can get married but not divorce. Marriage is a legal contract with real legal ramifications that children are not equipped to handle. Girls who marry as minors are significantly more susceptible to developing mental and physical health problems, and girls marrying under 18 are three times more likely to experience domestic violence<sup>3</sup>. Girls marrying before the age of 19 are 50% more likely to drop out of high school, and four times less likely to finish college. They are also prone to working for lower wages and as a result living in poverty<sup>4</sup>. Imagine someone who is 35 years-old engaging in sexual intercourse with a 14 year-old. This should be grounds for a statutory rape charge in Ohio. However, because of out-dated marriage laws instead of a prison sentence people are receiving marriage licenses.

The Dayton Daily News created a map using documents from The Ohio Department of Health Marriage Statistics division, showing the number of underage marriages approved in each county, between 2000 and 2015 (see image below). Franklin County had 39 underage marriages, Hamilton County 18, Butler County 7, Lake County 2, Drake County 6, Lorain County 15, Trumbull County 5, Cuyahoga 3, and Stark County 14.

### Ohio's Underage Marriages, 2000 to 2015

Ohio Department of Health marriage license data show the number of underage marriages approved in each county between 2000 and 2015. An underage marriage is one where the bride is under 18 and/or the groom is under 18.



Source: Ohio Department of Health

This legislation would make the following changes:

- Make the age to marry 18 or older for all Ohioans
- Allow those who are 16 or 17 to marry with judicial and parental consent
- Prohibit marriages under 16 years of age
- Removes same-sex marriage ban language from the Revised Code

Eight states have introduced bills that limit child marriages (NH, MA, NJ, MD, PA, MI, FL, and CA) and four states (TX, VA, NY, and CT) have enacted legislation that limits child marriages. Mr. Chairman, with your permission, I would like to amend the bill over the next few weeks. We need to protect our children and the future of Ohio.

Chairman Bacon and members of the Committee, I appreciate your attention and consideration of this important issue. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

1. <http://www.mydaytondailynews.com/news/crime--law/should-children-allowed-get-married-ohio-thousands/aku65cwegGyrfll9uRzISM/>
2. <http://www.daytondailynews.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/ohio-lawmaker-wants-limit-child-marriage/tbi3saYmORYIA1tFPPaakO/>
3. <http://www.unchainedatlast.org/child-marriage-shocking-statistics/>
4. [www.worldpolicycenter.org/sites/default/files/WORLD FACT SHEET LEGAL PROTECTION AGAINST CHILD MARRIAGE 2015.pdf](http://www.worldpolicycenter.org/sites/default/files/WORLD_FACT_SHEET_LEGAL_PROTECTION_AGAINST_CHILD_MARRIAGE_2015.pdf)
5. <http://www.dispatch.com/news/20170911/ohios-child-marriage-laws-outdated-advocate-says>