

**Laura Lanese**

**State Representative, District 23**

**Sponsor Testimony for House Bill 511**

**November 29, 2018**

**Before the Senate Judiciary Committee**

Chairman Bacon, Vice Chair Dolan, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary 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 changing the age of marriage in Ohio to 18 years old and creating a minimum of age 17 for when minors may marry with approval from the juvenile court. House Bill 511 also bars an age difference greater than 4 years if the minor is 17.

Under current Ohio law, females are free to marry at age 16 or 17 if consent is given from each parent, guardian, or person whose consent is required. Their male counterparts may not marry unless the female is pregnant with or has delivered their child, consent is given from each parent whose consent is required, and the juvenile court grants consent. These same parameters apply for 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 in Ohio as well. In the course of researching this bill, we came across dozens of first-hand accounts of young girls being coerced into unwanted marriages, marrying men over ten years their senior, and experiencing years of both physical and emotional abuse. 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. House Bill 511 attempts to combat these numbers by keeping young girls from having to make life-altering decisions before they are mature enough to do so.

One point that I would like to make clear is 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.

Additionally, should a juvenile court determine that a 17 year old exhibits the same level of maturity as those 18 and older, they have the ability to emancipate the child; allowing them to enter into the marriage freely.

Even in a perfect world, there are extra barriers that child marriages face. Minors are barred from engaging in many routine activities. They are prohibited from voting, 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. Many of these are activities that they will need to engage in when setting up their homes. HB 511 seeks to protect our children and set Ohio families up for success.

House Bill 511 passed the House with a vote of 90-2 and received no opposition testimony. Thank you again for allowing us to testify on House Bill 511. We would be happy to answer any questions at this time.