



MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
**WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM**

BILL NUMBER: <b>SB 767</b>		DATE: <b>4/24/2024</b>	
COMMITTEE: <b>Government Efficiency and Downsizing</b>			
<b>TESTIFYING:</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES			
<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>ALEX GOYETTE</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: <b>TAHIRIH JUSTICE CENTER</b>		TITLE: <b>PUBLIC POLICY MANAGER</b>	
ADDRESS: <b>6400 ARLINGTON BLVD, SUITE 400</b>			
CITY: <b>FALLS CHURCH</b>		STATE: <b>VA</b>	ZIP: <b>22042</b>
EMAIL: <b>alexg@tahirih.org</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>4/23/2024 3:10 PM</b>

**THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.**

Chair Murphy, Vice Chair Van Schoiack, Ranking Minority Member Bangert, and Distinguished Committee Members: The Tahirih Justice Center (Tahirih) is a national legal advocacy and direct services organization, founded in 1997, that has assisted over 25,000 survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and other abuses. Tahirih has unique legal and policy expertise in forced and child marriage as U.S. problems. Through Tahirih's Forced Marriage Initiative, launched in 2011, we have worked on several hundred cases involving women and girls nationwide from all backgrounds. Tahirih has also compiled extensive research on child marriage in the United States, including a 50-state statutory compilation, an in-depth report that compares and analyzes all states' minimum marriage age laws and exceptions, a compilation of stories from survivors' of child marriage in the United States, and a policy brief reflecting on progress made in the national movement to end child marriage since 2016. We submit this testimony in strong support of SB 767. This important measure would update current law which allows individuals under the age of 18 to be married with parental consent and would set a minimum age for marriage at 18 without exceptions. Unfortunately, the current law does not do enough to protect Missouri's children. SB 767 would take a simple but powerful step to protect all of Missouri's children from the devastating harms of child marriage by making the legal minimum marriage age the same as the legal age of adulthood (age 18). The reforms proposed by SB 767 will accomplish three critical commonsense objectives—preventing forced marriages of children; ensuring that both parties to a marriage are fully empowered to protect themselves from abuse; and preventing early marriages that put children at acute risk of immediate and lifelong harm. Forced marriages can happen in America for many reasons. They can arise in families and communities where parents expect to control the marriage choices of their children, and where marrying young is thenorm. Some individuals are pushed to marry to prevent or address sex or pregnancy outside of marriage, or as a cover-up for rape or sexual abuse. Sometimes, an abusive dating partner will threaten or coerce an individual into marriage. In other cases, sexual predators can target, “groom,” and then pressure vulnerable minors to marry them in order to further isolate and control them and to have round-the-clock access to them without fear of accountability or prosecution. Children can also be compelled to marry when poor, abusive, or neglectful parents try to offload them onto others. Some parents even seek to gain financially from such arrangements. While both adults and children can face forced marriages, children are especially susceptible to coercion, and particularly disempowered to advocate for themselves because of their legal status as minors. Many “escape routes” available to adults are closed, or much more challenging to access, for minors. Even when minors do make a report, it may get them nowhere, or even make matters worse for them. In Tahirih's experience across the country, child protective services typically fails to investigate forced marriage allegations, considering it outside their mandate, or does not take appropriate action. This can subject

a girl to retaliation for reaching out, causing her to rescind her appeal for help and making it more difficult for advocates to work with her as perpetrators monitor her more closely or may expedite the marriage. In addition to addressing these concerns about forced marriages of children, SB 767 will ensure that both parties to genuine marriages will be on equal legal footing with each other, rather than leaving a minor party at such a harsh disadvantage in the relationship. Of equal importance, the bill will also spare girls from the domino effects of marrying under the age of 18, which can dramatically heighten their vulnerability to abuse. Up to 80% of marriages involving someone under 18 ends in divorce. And we know from U.S. based research that the devastating truth is that teen mothers who marry and later divorce can be made worse-off long-term—more than twice as likely to live in future poverty—than teen mothers who do not marry. Most states now recognize that a pregnant teen may need lots of different resources and loving community support, but marrying is unfortunately likely to do more harm than good. Women who marry as teens are more likely to have more children overall and to do so more quickly, to drop out of school, to have fewer work opportunities, and to wind up poor. They also experience more medical and mental health problems, both short- and long-term. All this can increase their dependence and limit their options in the event of domestic violence or divorce. This harsh reality has even compelled religious leaders in multiple states to come out in support of legislation to end child marriage in the U.S. given the power of such legislation to prevent the trafficking and exploitation of children as well as the negative consequences of divorce. Father Reginald Whitt of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Washington, and Wilmington (Maryland Catholic Conference) shared powerful testimony when he stated: “In fact, we can think of no circumstance under which the Church would encourage a person under the age of 18 to marry... It has been the constant teaching of the Catholic Church that marriage is a ‘...covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses...’ The Church believes that this “covenant” is not the result of a happenstance meeting or pure chance, but rather, the result of God working in the lives of two people, bringing them together for a divine purpose according to the Almighty’s divine plan for them. [This] is a critically important measure in preventing the tragedy of young women being coerced or exploited through a marriage imposed on them against their will. It is also an important measure in preventing young people from mistakenly entering one of the most serious commitments of their lives, only to later suffer the negative consequences that the breakup of that marriage would likely have on both the partners and any children born of the marriage.” In sum, there are significant child-protection concerns inherent to every child marriage and Missouri’s current marriage age law does not do enough to prevent these harms. There is a rapidly growing national movement to overhaul antiquated minimum marriage age laws that put children at risk. Since 2016, twelve states have ended child marriage entirely: Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Rhode Island, New York, Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut, Michigan, Washington, and Virginia. Several other states also have pending bills that, like SB 767, would ban all marriages under the age of 18. Missouri should assert its place as a leader in this historic movement by taking swift action now to advance this bill. We respectfully urge the Committee to support SB 767 to end child marriage in Missouri.



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>ARNIE C."HONEST-ABE" DIENOFF-STATE PUBLIC ADVOCATE</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: <b>arniedienoff@mail.com</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>4/24/2024 11:18 PM</b>
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I am in Support of this Bill. This is a good thing to allow Children be Children and enjoy their High School and Educational Experience, before becoming a Legal Adult. Any one under the age of 18 is a youngster as they are growing and learning their way and direction of life's path.



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>REGISTERED LOBBYIST:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>BECCA POWELL</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>610-291-5696</b>	
REPRESENTING: <b>UNCHAINED AT LAST</b>		TITLE:	
ADDRESS: <b>201 LENOX AVENUE, #189</b>			
CITY: <b>WESTFIELD</b>		STATE: <b>NJ</b>	ZIP: <b>07090</b>
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: <b>4/24/2024 12:00 AM</b>	
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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>DON CHRISTENSEN</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: <b>admin@unchainedatlast.org</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>4/22/2024 4:12 PM</b>

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**Testimony in Support of SB767: Ending Child Marriage Presented to the Missouri House Government Efficiency & Downsizing Committee**



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>REGISTERED LOBBYIST:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>FRAIDY REISS</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>908-481-4673</b>	
REPRESENTING: <b>UNCHAINED AT LAST</b>		TITLE:	
ADDRESS: <b>208 LENOX AVENUE, #189</b>			
CITY: <b>WESTFIELD</b>		STATE: <b>NJ</b>	ZIP: <b>07090</b>
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: <b>4/24/2024 12:00 AM</b>	
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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>REGISTERED LOBBYIST:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>JESSICA PETRIE</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>573-635-6092</b>	
REPRESENTING: <b>MISSOURI NETWORK AGAINST CHILD ABUSE (FORMERLY KIDS FIRST)</b>		TITLE:	
ADDRESS: <b>PO BOX 1805</b>			
CITY: <b>JEFFERSON CITY</b>		STATE: <b>MO</b>	ZIP: <b>65102</b>
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: <b>4/24/2024 12:00 AM</b>	
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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>MATTHEW HUFFMAN</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>573-634-4167</b>	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: <b>MISSOURI COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC &amp; SEXUAL VIOLENCE</b>		TITLE: <b>CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER</b>	
ADDRESS: <b>217 OSCAR DRIVE, SUITE A</b>			
CITY: <b>JEFFERSON CITY</b>		STATE: <b>MO</b>	ZIP: <b>65101</b>
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: <b>4/24/2024 12:00 AM</b>	
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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>MICHELE HANASH</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>305-902-8158</b>	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: <b>AHA FOUNDATION</b>		TITLE: <b>DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND WOMEN'S PROGRAMS</b>	
ADDRESS: <b>5237 RIVER ROAD, SUITE 333</b>			
CITY: <b>BETHESDA</b>		STATE: <b>MD</b>	ZIP: <b>20816</b>
EMAIL: <b>Michele@theahafoundation.org</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>	SUBMIT DATE: <b>4/24/2024 3:43 PM</b>	
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Chair Wright, Vice Chair McGaugh, and Distinguished Committee Members: AHA Foundation wishes to be recorded in strong support of SB767. AHA Foundation thanks Senator Thompson Rehder and the cosponsors of this bill for their efforts, and the Committee for prioritizing a hearing on this important legislation. While the current marriage age in Missouri is 18, an alarming legal loophole allows a parent to enter a 16- or 17-year-old into marriage with nothing more than a notarized signature. A 2018 law added a "close in age exception", which was a step in the right direction, making it so that parents may no longer marry minors off to an adult over the age of 21. However the current loophole in the law remained. SB767 eliminates this remaining dangerous loophole and ends child marriage in Missouri once and for all. Marriage before age 18 creates a nightmarish legal trap. Even the most mature minor faces overwhelming legal and practical barriers if they try to avoid being forced into marriage. Minors, having not yet reached the age of majority, can easily be forced to marry or trapped in an abusive marriage in which they are forced to stay. Because they have not yet reached the legal age of majority, minors face significant legal and practical barriers if they try to leave home, enter a domestic violence shelter, retain an attorney, or file a legal action independently, even one for divorce. Minors being coerced into marriage may fear familial violence should they refuse to comply, or they may be physically or emotionally manipulated into an unwanted marriage. AHA Foundation has worked with victims facing child marriage from across the U.S. and knows full well that these barriers are grounded in reality. The individual stories we have seen are also supported by data collected by the nonprofit Unchained At Last: 8,238 minors, one as young as 13, were married in Missouri between 2000 and 2021 – including 231 minors wed between 2019 and 2021, under the current law. Additionally, 78% were girls wed to adult men an average of 3.8 years older. Between 2000 and 2018, at least 910 and possibly as many as 1,299 marriages occurred with a spousal age difference that would have met the definition of a sex crime outside of marriage. Finally, around 88% of the minors who married in Missouri before the 2018 law were aged 16 or 17. Accordingly, the 2018 law protected only 12% of those it was intended to protect. Marriage before age 18 is a human rights abuse that destroys nearly every aspect of an American girl's life. Child marriage produces devastating lifelong repercussions for her health, education, economic opportunities and physical safety. Given these harms, one case of child marriage is one too many. If mechanisms are in place that allow for thousands of cases to slip through the cracks, the common sense solution is to enact the necessary law to close these gaps. Missouri should not participate in child marriage. The solution is simple: eliminate the dangerous loopholes in the marriage laws that place the minors of Missouri at risk of exploitation and abuse. AHA Foundation urges you to support, and vote YES to pass, SB767. About AHA Foundation AHA Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit founded by women's rights activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and is the leading organization working to

end honor violence that shames, hurts or kills thousands of women and girls in the U.S. each year, and puts millions more at risk. We ensure that women and girls of all races, cultures, religions, beliefs and backgrounds who are facing honor violence have a way out, and that survivors get the help they need to thrive. Since 2010, the Foundation's programs include: 1) compiling data on these crimes, which are not currently tracked by U.S. law enforcement or government agencies, 2) publishing reports and articles and organizing conferences about the continued oppression of women and girls in the U.S., 3) outreach and education to expand and strengthen state and national legislation for the protection of women and girls, 4) training of law enforcement and service providers, and 5) connecting women and girls in crisis to appropriate services. AHA Foundation has trained over 4,000 frontline service providers on responding to cases of gender based violence, honor violence and forced marriage, and partnered with Crisis Text Line to create America's first honor violence and forced marriage helpline.



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>REBECCA HURST</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:		SUBMIT DATE: <b>4/24/2024 12:00 AM</b>
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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>REGISTERED LOBBYIST:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>JEFFREY A.J. MILLAR</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>363-448-4982</b>	
REPRESENTING: <b>THE LEAD LOBBYISTS</b>		TITLE:	
ADDRESS: <b>PO BOX 1375</b>			
CITY: <b>ST. CHARLES</b>		STATE: <b>MO</b>	ZIP: <b>63302</b>
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: <b>4/24/2024 12:00 AM</b>	

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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>RAELYN STECKER</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
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