

**Testimony in STRONG SUPPORT of HB2422: Eliminating Marriage Before Age 18
Presented to the Kansas House Federal and State Affairs Committee | March 26, 2021**

Chair Barker and distinguished committee members: Please vote YES on HB2422.

Forty-seven years ago, my mother and future in-laws drove me, my younger sister, and our boyfriends out of state where we were married by a justice of the peace. My sister was 15-years-old and considered too young to marry in our home state. Her boyfriend was a divorced 21-year-old man. My boyfriend and I were both 16-years-old. Oddly enough, he was considered too young to marry in our home state as well but it was legal for me even though we were the same age. So we made the trip to a state where marriage was legal with a parent's signature. We thought we knew what we were doing and this was what we wanted. We were far from prepared for the reality of life we were thrust into after we said "I do." My sister's husband berated her, cheated on her, and drank away his paycheck. Five years later she was divorced with two babies to raise. By the time she was 35-years-old she was a grandmother and on her third marriage. As for me and my husband, we lived with his mother and step-father on a farm. They had him drop out of school with the promise of a regular salary to work there. But the pay never came. His step-father could no longer hide his alcoholism. His mother despised me. The next two years were a living nightmare. I visualized myself walking down the road, suitcase in hand, but where would I go? When we finally turned 18 and said we were leaving, I watched my husband's step-father point a loaded rifle at him and tell him he wasn't going anywhere! Well, we did leave, but we suffered from the trauma for years and life was a constant struggle. This was the world our children were born into. And so, the negative impact of our underage marriage carried on to the next generation.

Marriage is a life-altering decision that should only be made by consenting adults, not by children and not by their parents. Childhood only lasts a few short years. Adulthood will last the rest of their lives.

Thank you for hearing my testimony and for protecting children from underage marriage by voting YES on HB2422.

Sincerely,

Marilyn Smith
Child-marriage survivor
Colorado Springs, Colorado