

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this in support of **HB2422 in Kansas** referred to House Judiciary Committee. I am a survivor of child marriage. I am now 42 years old. I have four children, own a trucking company, and spend my free time life coaching women who have experienced trauma. I hold four college degrees.

I am not going to tell my story in the normal sense. I have learned that it does not matter, only the lessons I have learned and carry with me to help others. I am going to tell you about the long-term effects of an abusive home, human trafficking, and marriage before the age of eighteen.

The most detrimental side effect of child marriage is not getting the chance to make my own choices. By going directly from being a child to being a wife did something to my brain. I was beat for dinner burning. I was made fun of because I did not know when things needed to be done. I tried so hard to be perfect, to not mess up. I was raised in a very conservative religious circle.

I was given in marriage at 14. He tired of me by 15 and began to sell me to his "friends". I felt such shame that I hid this until now. He was going after another 13-year-old by the time I escaped at 16. My parents did not want me back as I was "tainted", "dirty", "made my bed, better lie in it".

Hit number one. Where do these girls go when no one wants them? Or they are only wanted for one thing? I bounced, couched surfed, and learned to bury myself in work. I desired an education. I dreamed of being a nurse or doctor. I began to suffer depression. I was diagnosed with Stockholm Syndrome. I missed him, my parents, my grandparents, my damn life!!

I tried to commit suicide Thanksgiving the year I was 17. The pain of being dirty, not enough, knowing HE wanted me dead made me feel like that the only thing left.

I was admitted to the psych ward for a 72-hour hold. There was no follow up or counseling offered. I dropped out of high school and got my GED. Hit number two, child marriage will always affect a person education. It will always be hard to graduate high school and almost impossible to go to college.

I was dating a boy from high school. I wanted to wait to have sex. He shamed me, "you are already dirty, what difference does it make?" You are probably thinking, why would she stay? Well, that's what the conditioning did to my brain. I did not feel I had the RIGHT to say no. How do you have the right to say no now after being the prize at the poker table? Conditioning people! If you have not experienced this, then for the love of GOD just open your mind for a minute. Our beliefs and attitudes drive our actions. We learn our beliefs and attitudes from our life experiences, our environment, and finally our choices. By 17, I had not had the opportunity to make my own choices.

I became pregnant. The only choice was abortion or marriage. I could not live with myself if I chose abortion, so I chose marriage. It is that freaking simple. Let me paint the picture. You have a "choice". Something that will condemn your soul to hell, (my beliefs at the time from my very conservative upbringings) or being trapped with a person who uses your body and cares nothing for your thoughts or feelings. How was that any different from what I had already experienced in life? I comforted myself with the fact I would have the baby to love.

My parents notarized the papers for me to marry again. Only this time it was legal, registered in the state of Colorado. I stayed married to this abuser for 11 years. I did not leave

when he punched me in the stomach, and I landed in the trash can. I did not say anything to anyone when he hit, grabbed, pushed, etc. I had learned no one cares, no one listens, and by God, no one helps.

I had my son Sept. 24<sup>th</sup>, 1996. Two years later, I became pregnant again. I lost the baby and 5 more. I finally had my second son in Jan. 2001. The post-partum depression was unreal. My husband had planned to have a vasectomy, he did not want another child. My baby had a club foot. He was in a cast for a while. He has always struggled with his health. At 18, he was diagnosed with Marfan's Syndrome. His father bullied him; his brother bullied him. I tried to protect him, and it was a constant walking the tight rope of protection and pissing off my husband.

I felt like I was losing my mind. Many times, I stared at a bottle pills, wishing I could just go to sleep and never wake to this pain again. I still had panic attacks from my human trafficking experiences. My husband hated me. I was despised, pitied, or ignored. I gained weight. I colored my blonde hair black. I cut myself and I carry those scars with a little pride today. They are my battle scars. I cried. My boys witnessed it all. They are now sharing their memories of growing up years.

I woke one night to my husband missing. He was just cheating. Not the end of the world to most people. But to me, it was a hurricane that hit my life and blew away all the pretenses. That night changed my whole life. It was not immediate; it was not pain-free. I found the courage to divorce him and start college. College was my saving grace. I laugh when I think about that first degree. I was the angry, divorcee making every paper and speech about "THAT S.O.B THAT IS HURTING ME AND MY CHILDREN." I kind of feel bad for those professors. The day I walked for graduation, all my professors and support staff stepped forward to hug me,

whisper encouragement, and it gave me such strength to keep going. I still get tears in my eyes when I think about the time they all took to help me. The governor had been told about my story. I graduated while staying in a homeless shelter while leaving another abuser.

I also took parenting classes, domestic violence classes, private therapy, and read every book I could get my hands on. I was officially diagnosed with depression with suicidal tendencies, Stockholm syndrome, borderline personality disorder, Complex PTSD, anxiety, fibromyalgia, and chronic fatigue. Over the next ten years, I have been able to get my health under control, lose the weight, gain perspective, and begin to figure out a way to help others.

No one deserves to have the decision to marry taken from her. That is a right for the two people getting married, period. No parent should have the right to take this from their own child. We all want to think that parents will not harm their children. Unfortunately, we live in a world that is not all our realities. If that is your reality, I am happy for you. That was not my experience. My mother should NEVER have had the "right" to do whatever she wanted to me. The culture needs to change. Parents need to understand that their actions have lifelong affects on their children.

If people are unable to stop this abuse, then it is the duty of this country to close the loophole that allow this. We cannot stop teen pregnancies, human trafficking, and other abuses, we can stop them from trapping young women in marriage with no way out until it is too late in terms of children being born and another generation of hurt.