

**STATEMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL LAW COMMUNITY
OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA BAR ON THE “CHILD MARRIAGE
PROHIBITION AMENDMENT ACT OF 2024,” DC B25-0955**

The International Law Community of the District of Columbia Bar (the “Community”) supports the “Child Marriage Prohibition Amendment Act of 2024” which, if enacted, would end child marriage in the District of Columbia. The proposed legislation falls within the Community’s special expertise over international legal issues dealing with human rights. The Community submits the following public statement:¹

The Community has learned that Councilmember and Chairwoman of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety of the District of Columbia Council, Brooke Pinto, together with Councilmembers Nadeau, R. White, Gray, Parker, Frumin, Lewis-George, Henderson, and Bonds, introduced the Child Marriage Prohibition Amendment Act of 2024, [DC B25-0955](#). This proposed legislation seeks to set eighteen as the minimum legal age for marriage and to prohibit the marriage of individuals under the age of eighteen with no exceptions.

Child marriage is recognized as a human rights violation, and 193 United Nations member countries, including the United States, have pledged to eliminate it by 2030. This commitment aligns with the Sustainable Development Agenda and its interdependent Goals and targets, with inclusion of target 5.3.² The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments.

The United Nations Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on December 17, 2018, A/RES/73/153, recognizes that child, early, and all forms of forced marriage violate, abuse or impair human rights and are related to other human rights violations, affecting disproportionately women and girls; and underscores the human rights obligations and commitments of States to promote and protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls and to prevent and eliminate the practice of child, early and forced marriage. Although it recognizes that some progress has been made over the years, it also asserts that it is not enough to reach the goal to eradicate these practices by 2030.³ Consequently, among other things, the resolution asks the States to adopt comprehensive measures to prevent and eliminate them, and urges them to enact and enforce legislation and policies to end these practices.

¹ The views expressed herein are presented on behalf of the International Law Community, a voluntary association of individuals, most but not necessarily all of whom are members of the D.C. Bar. The D.C. Bar itself made no monetary contribution to fund the preparation or submission of this statement. Moreover, the views expressed herein have been neither approved nor endorsed by the D.C. Bar, its Board of Governors, or its general membership.

² See [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(un.org\)](#)

³ See [n1844623.pdf \(un.org\)](#)

The United Nations Report of the Secretary General on the Issue of child, early, and forced marriage recommends several policy-related measures and calls upon the States and relevant stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive approach to legislation to address child marriage, including by setting the minimum age for marriage at 18 years.⁴

The Department of State considers a forced marriage to be a violation of basic human rights. It also considers the forced marriage of a minor to be a form of child abuse since the child will presumably be subjected to non-consensual sex.⁵

Moreover, child marriage is not only a human rights violation per se, but often conceals terrible offenses such as sexual exploitation and human trafficking. According to the Tahirih Justice Center, the many negative impacts of child marriage include the following:⁶

1. Child brides are three times more likely to be victims of domestic violence.
2. Girls who marry under age 19 are fifty percent more likely to drop out of high school & four times less likely to graduate college.
3. They are more likely to experience mood and anxiety disorders, like major depression. Antisocial personality disorder prevalence is about three times higher.
4. Seventy to eighty percent of such marriages end in divorce, According to one study based on census data, twenty-three percent of children who marry are separated or divorced by the time they turn eighteen.
5. Child marriage also increases the likelihood of long-term poverty.

The current law in the District of Columbia sets the marriage age at 18; however, it allows minors, sixteen years old, to marry with the consent of a parent or guardian.

Legislation enacted in neighboring states such as Maryland, which increased the marriage age to 17 with additional restrictions, and Virginia, Delaware, and Pennsylvania, which have completely banned child marriage, has led to a significant rise in the number of child marriages in the District of Columbia as stated by Councilmember Brooke Pinto, based on data provided by Unchained at Last.⁷

Child marriage has been banned in thirteen of the fifty states within the last eight years, but more work needs to be done in that direction. The goal is to ban child marriage in the District of Columbia to protect the human rights of minors.

⁴[n2019792.pdf \(un.org\)](#)

⁵See [7 FAM 1740 FORCED MARRIAGE OF MINORS \(state.gov\)](#)

⁶See [Child-Marriage-Impacts-One-Page-updated-5.8.-2020-REGULAR-PRINT.pdf \(tahirih.org\)](#)

⁷Letter dated September 16, 2024, [DC B25-0955](#)

The Community is committed to the rule of law and human rights protections are an essential pillar of the rule of law. Child marriage is a human rights abuse and a form of child abuse. Consequently, the Community supports the elimination of child marriage.

Accordingly, we recommend that the District of Columbia Council vote for DC B25-0955.

This public statement was approved by the Community's Steering Committee by a unanimous vote of its elected members. For further information please contact: Community Steering Committee Member and public statement contact James R. Newland at james.newland@dentons.com or author of the public statement Lourdes Venes at louvenes@aol.com.

Respectfully submitted,

International Law Community
District of Columbia Bar