



**Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Judiciary
In Support of H.1709/S.937 An Act to end child marriage in Massachusetts
By Palma McLaughlin, LWVMA Specialist on Children and Family Issues
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts represents 47 local Leagues across the state, from Cape Cod to the Berkshires. We ask you to support H.1709/S.937 An Act to end child marriage in Massachusetts and establish 18 as the minimum age to be married in Massachusetts.

Currently, there is no minimum age for marriage in Massachusetts. This situation allows minors (mostly female) to be “married off” despite being legally unable to consent. This includes relationships that would be considered statutory rape or child molestation but for the marriage. Because they are still minors, these children do not have the legal right to file for divorce. It is akin to human trafficking of children. Further, because they are minors, they cannot independently file for a restraining order in the case of domestic violence.

Since 1997, when the League of Women Voters was granted Special Consultative Status to the United Nations, the League has been advocating for an end to child marriage around the world. Internationally, child marriage is considered a form of gender-based violence, in the same category as forced labor and human trafficking.

The League supports policies and programs at all levels of the community and government that promote the well-being, encourage the full development, and ensure the safety of all children and we urge you to report out favorably H.1709/S.937 An Act to end child marriage in Massachusetts.

Thank you for your consideration.