



for every child

**Testimony in Support of HB 2422: Eliminating Marriage Before Age 18
Presented to the Kansas House Federal and State Affairs Committee
March 25, 2021**

Distinguished Committee Members: On behalf of UNICEF USA, I am writing in support of HB 2422, to make 18 years old the minimum age of marriage in Kansas, with no exceptions. UNICEF USA is a national nonprofit organization that supports UNICEF's mission and global work to save and improve children's lives around the world.

In my work at UNICEF USA, I am constantly reminded how important it is that children under 18 years old have the right to be children. Too many children lose that right, for too many reasons. One of those reasons is child marriage. Worldwide, more than 700 million women and girls alive today were married before their 18th birthday. Some of them are right here in the United States, including Kansas. In fact, estimates are that more than 3,000 children were married in Kansas between 2000 and 2018 – 81% were girls wed to adult men.

Globally, UNICEF calls child marriage a harmful practice and a violation of child rights, and believes that marriage under age 18 should be prohibited in all circumstances.

Child marriage invariably has negative impacts on children. It leads to separation from family and friends, lack of freedom to interact with peers and participate in community activities, and decreased opportunities for education and economic participation. Because child marriage often results in child pregnancy, girls married at a young age face serious health risks. Teenage girls are much more likely to die in pregnancy and childbirth than women in their twenties. In addition, childhood pregnancy increases risks of nutritional deficiencies for both mother and baby, sometimes resulting in permanent consequences.

These risks are just as real for child marriages in the United States as they are in developing countries. Child marriage is a violation of human rights and comes at a cost society cannot afford. On behalf of UNICEF USA, I urge you to take a stand to protect children and support HB 2422, to prohibit the marriage of children without exceptions. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mark Engman". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light blue circular background that is partially visible from the UNICEF logo above.

Mark Engman
Vice President, Policy & Advocacy