

### **Child Marriage in Florida**

The marriage age in Florida is 18, but children as young as 16 may marry with parental "consent" (which often is parental "coercion"), and children *of any age* may marry if they are pregnant or have a child.

Under these dangerous loopholes, more than 16,000 children as young as 13 were married in Florida between 2000 and 2015. More than 80% were girls wed to adult men; in many cases, the marriage covered up what would otherwise be considered statutory rape.

By not specifying a minimum age for marriage, Florida's current laws are similar to those in Iran, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. By allowing a pregnancy exception, which only 10 states still do, Florida puts rape survivors at risk of being forced to marry their rapist - as happened to Florida native Sherry Johnson when she was 11.

Unchained, along with the entire Florida Coalition to End Child Marriage, are pushing to eliminate these archaic loopholes and end child marriage in Florida through pending legislation (SB 140, HB 335 and HB 71). The ever-growing coalition of local, state, national and international groups includes:

- AHA Foundation
- Children's Campaign
- Delores Barr Weaver Policy Center
- Florida Bar's Family Law Section
- Florida International University's Initiative Against Gender Violence
- Human Rights Watch
- **Jewish Women's Foundation of Greater Palm Beaches**
- National Organization for Women - Florida
- Southern Strategy Group
- Survivor Sherry Johnson
- Surly Feminist for the Revolution
- Unchained At Last
- Zonta Club of Pinellas County

## Ending Child Marriage in America

Unchained is the only organization dedicated to helping women and girls in the U.S. to escape forced marriages, and the only organization dedicated to ending forced and child marriage in America. **We lead a [growing national movement](#) to end child marriage across America, not only in Florida.**

Right now, marriage before 18 is legal in all 50 states. Most states set 18 as the minimum age, but laws in every state allow exceptions for those younger than 18 to marry. Laws in 25 states do not specify any minimum marriage age.

Our groundbreaking [research](#) showed that in just the 38 states that track marriage-age data, more than 167,000 children as young as 10 were married between 2000 and 2010 - mostly girls wed to adult men. Based on this data, we estimate that nearly a quarter-million children were married in the U.S. in that decade.

This is an urgent problem for two main reasons. First, children can easily be forced into marriage or forced to stay in a marriage before they become legal adults, which happens at 18 in most states. Children face overwhelming legal and practical barriers if they try to leave home, access a shelter, retain an attorney or bring a legal action. The girls who reach out to us for help typically end up trying to kill themselves when they learn of their limited options.

Second, the lifelong impacts of marriage before 18 on girls' health, education and economic opportunities and overall quality of life are devastating enough that the U.S. State Department considers marriage before 18 a "human rights abuse."

We're seeing [progress](#). Bills like the ones in Florida that we've helped to write and/or are helping to pass, that would end or reduce child marriage, have been introduced in multiple states. So far, though, no state has passed a bill to end all marriage before 18, without exceptions