

**Testimony in Support of SB548**  
**Presented to the Oregon House Committee on Judiciary | May 6, 2025**

Chair Kropf, Vice Chair Wallan, Vice Chair Chotzen and Distinguished Committee Members:

My name is Marilyn Smith and, as a child-marriage survivor, I am pleased that you are considering the passage of SB548 to end the child-marriage loophole that would allow one parent to enter a 17-year-old into marriage with written consent. The U.S. Department of State has declared that marriage before 18 is a human rights abuse, and today you have the opportunity to put an end to that abuse in Oregon by passing SB548.

Ideally, parents would make decisions based on what's best for their children. Unfortunately, that doesn't always happen. Many children in under-age marriages are abused, isolated, forfeit their education, face long-term risks to their health, live a life of poverty, and ultimately end up divorced. Clearly not the best for the citizens of Oregon.

When my husband and I were 16 years old, our mothers decided we should marry. This was solely a convenience for them and we were not included in the decision that would affect the rest of our lives. My husband was immediately pulled from school to work on the farm. He worked seven days a week for two years and was never paid. I endured hostility, anguish, and trauma—the majority of which occurred during the tender age of 17. We wanted to leave but had no where to go. When we finally turned 18 and were old enough to get a place of our own, I watched his step-father point a loaded rifle at him and tell him he wasn't going anywhere. My husband said, "Go ahead and shoot." That's how bad it was, that a teenager would rather be shot than have to stay there. But this time we were legally adults *and we left!*

No child should have to experience what we did. Our mothers made a terrible decision and we have always resented them for it. The trauma created by these women is generational, as they became our children's grandmothers. Our children have lived their lives with the knowledge of the unnecessary harm inflicted on their parents in their youth. What should have been the happiest day of our life is remembered instead with pain and regret not only by us, but also our children, and even our grandchildren.

It's time for the law to change. Please pass SB548 to protect the rights and safety of all minors, even those who are 17 years old.

Sincerely,

Marilyn Smith  
Child-marriage survivor  
Johnson City, Tennessee