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CLM CELEBRATES THE END OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN MASSACHUSETTS

Budget language banning marriage under age 18 is a win for the Commonwealth's children

BOSTON, MA – The Children's League of Massachusetts (CLM) is celebrating the ban on child marriage included in the FY2023 budget language, part of a years-long effort led by the national organization Unchained at Last and the Massachusetts Coalition to End Child Marriage, of which CLM has been an active member. Advocacy efforts led by the coalition included three "chain-in" events in Boston, where advocates wore bridal gowns and chains to protest laws allowing child marriage. The budget language adopted immediately prevents any child under the age of 18 from entering into a marriage in Massachusetts, without exceptions.

The adopted budget language banning child marriage also creates important protections for children under the age of 18 who are currently trapped in a marriage. Previously, regulations prevented a married minor child from seeking domestic violence protection from an abusive spouse or filing for their own annulment or divorce. The signed budget now ensures that "any minor who is married may avail themselves of all legal remedies and relief that would otherwise be available if they were not a minor" including initiating proceedings for divorce and seeking protective orders.

Since 2016 CLM and our allies in the Massachusetts Coalition to End Child Marriage worked closely with Representative Kay Khan (D-11th Middlesex), Senator Harriette Chandler (D-Worcester) and other bipartisan legislative champions to end child marriage in the Commonwealth.

Representative Khan, the lead sponsor of the legislation in the House and a passionate champion, remarked: *"An Act to end child marriage in Massachusetts is a great step forward that will protect young women and girls from entering into a marriage contract before the age of 18, the age of majority. Children have limited legal capacity, and early marriage undermines a child's health, education and future economic opportunities. Minors who marry in their teens experience the highest rate of intimate partner violence.*

It has been my great honor to lead the charge, along with Senate President Emerita Chandler in partnership with many of my colleagues, in ending child marriage in Massachusetts, considered a human rights abuse by our own US State Department.

I would like to express my gratitude to Governor Baker, Speaker Mariano, Senate President Spilka, House Ways & Means Chair Michlewitz, Senate Ways & Means Chair Rodriques, House Judiciary Chair Day, Senate Judiciary Chair Eldridge, Minority Leader Jones, and Leader Donato, along with many advocates, organizations, including Unchained At Last, with a special shoutout to the Children's League of Massachusetts who were incredibly dedicated champions throughout the six years it took to complete the passage of the bill."



Senator Chandler shared her thoughts as well: *“I am incredibly proud that the Massachusetts Legislature has adopted policies to end child marriage in the Commonwealth. These new laws will protect young people from harm and abuse. I am especially grateful for the partnership of my co-sponsor Representative Khan, and for the leadership of both branches of the Legislature and the Governor for passing these policies.”*

CLM joins Rep. Khan in thanking the many partners who contributed to this win: *“[We are] grateful for the work of the Massachusetts Caucus of Women Legislators, the Progressive Caucus, the Women’s Bar Association, Zonta International, Zonta Malden, UNICEF USA, Chelsea Clinton, the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, the Working Group to End Child Marriage, the Coalition to End Child Marriage and so many others who were great allies in this cause.”*

Massachusetts is the seventh U.S. state to ban this human rights abuse. Previously, parents could enter a child of any age into marriage in Massachusetts, without any input from the child. Between 2000 and 2018, 1,246 children as young as 13 were married in Massachusetts, and 83% of these cases were underage girls wed to adult men. Research shows that child marriage destroys girls’ health, education and economic opportunities, while also allowing an adult to circumvent statutory rape laws through marriage to the victim.

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The Children’s League of Massachusetts (CLM) is a statewide non-profit association of private and public organizations and individuals that collectively advocate for public policies and quality services that are in the best interest of children, youth, and families in the Commonwealth. It is through public education and advocacy that the Children’s League promotes the availability, accessibility, and quality of these needed services