

**Testimony in OPPOSITION to HB 4299
Presented to the Michigan House Committee on Judiciary**

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Chair Breen, Vice Chairs Edwards and Fink, and Distinguished Committee Members:

The Tahirih Justice Center (Tahirih) is a national legal advocacy and direct services organization, founded in 1997, that has assisted over 25,000 survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence.

Tahirih has unique legal and policy expertise in forced and child marriage in the United States. Through Tahirih's Forced Marriage Initiative, launched in 2011, we have worked on several hundred cases of forced marriage across the country. We have also compiled extensive research on child marriage in the United States, including a 50-state statutory compilation, an in-depth report that compares and analyzes all states' minimum marriage age laws and exceptions, a compilation of stories from survivors of child marriage in the United States, and a policy brief reflecting on progress made in the national movement to end child marriage since 2016.ⁱ

We submit this testimony in opposition to HB 4299.

The legislation removes language that allows a marriage license to be used as evidence of age or emancipation for the purpose of renting a room in an hotel or bed and breakfast.

While removing this language may make sense when thinking only about minors in a future Michigan that has ended child marriage, many of the forced marriage cases that Tahirih works on involve an interstate dynamic.

In many of our cases, children married in one state may leave an abusive home and cross state lines to seek safety. While we strive to establish our own clients in shelters that specifically serve survivors of violence, for many people the most expedient option may be a hotel room. Our concern is that even if Michigan ends child marriage, minors still face the prospect of forced child marriage in surrounding states and may need to escape abuse and stay the night in a Michigan hotel. To do this, they may need to use

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their marriage license as proof of emancipation. We would not want to see Michigan close this pathway to safety by removing the ability of that minor, who has already faced the harms of child marriage in another state, to safely and legally rent a room in Michigan.

For this reason we are asking the Judiciary committee to vote against HB 4299, while strongly supporting the suite of other measures to end child marriage in the state.

We respectfully urge the Committee to oppose HB 4299.

We have submitted separate testimony on related legislation: supporting HB 4293-4298 and 4300, and supporting both HB 4301 and HB 4302 with minor amendments.

ⁱ A full copy of Tahirih's 50-state report, along with other resources, is available at www.tahirih.org/childmarriagepolicy.