



## TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO SB 273

SUBMITTED TO GOVERNOR BROWN ON AUGUST 30, 2018

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Dear Governor Brown,

The AHA Foundation wishes to be recorded in strong opposition to California Senate Bill 273 and ask you to veto this bill. While SB 273 does take steps to begin to quantify child marriage in the state, an important step, it leaves countless vulnerable children at risk of forced and child marriage.

While the current minimum marriage age in California is 18, the state allows for two major exceptions: children of any age can marry with parental consent or judicial approval. Within the current legal framework, there is no minimum age below which a judge cannot approve a marriage.

Child marriage severely limits opportunities to health, education, and economic freedom. It also increases risk of domestic violence. Given these factors, one case of forced or child marriage is one too many. SB 273 maintains mechanisms that allow for potentially thousands of cases to slip through the cracks and is not the common-sense solution that California needs to protect children from forced and child marriage.

Children who have not yet reached the age of majority can easily be forced or coerced into marriage or trapped in an abusive marriage. Minors being coerced into marriage may fear familial violence should they refuse to comply, or they may be physically or emotionally manipulated into accepting an unwanted marriage. Minors may also not have the resources to find a way out of the situation. They face significant legal and practical barriers if they try to leave home, enter a domestic violence shelter, retain an attorney, file a legal action, etc.

Please **VETO SB 273** and urge the California legislature to put forward a new bill next session that reserves marriage, a serious legal contract, for those who have reached the age of majority. Ending child marriage is vital in California and must be done for all children, with no exceptions.

### **About the AHA Foundation**

AHA Foundation is a 501(c)3 non-profit founded by women's rights activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali. The AHA Foundation is the leading organization working to end honor violence that shames, hurts or kills thousands of women and girls in the U.S. each year, and puts millions more at risk. Honor violence is typically seen in the form of physical or emotional abuse, sexual assault, rape or kidnapping, but it also includes female genital mutilation and forced marriage. We ensure that women and girls of all races, cultures, religions and beliefs who are facing honor violence have a way out, and that survivors get the help they need to thrive.

Since inception 10 years ago, the focus of the Foundation's programs includes: 1) compiling data on these crimes, which are not currently tracked by U.S. law enforcement or government agencies, 2) publishing reports and articles and organizing conferences about the continued oppression of women and girls in the U.S. committed in the name of religion and culture, 3) lobbying and outreach to expand and strengthen state and national legislation for the protection of women and girls, 4) training of law enforcement and service providers, and 5) connecting women and girls in crisis to appropriate services.