



STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

CHRISTOPHER T. SUNUNU
Governor

January 24, 2018

Dear Representative Rice and Members of the House Children and Family Law Committee,

I'm writing to you and the members of the House Children and Family Law commission to express my support of House Bills 1586 and 1587. Virtually everyone agrees that the marriage of a 13-year-old child is unconscionable. **It is long past time for us to take affirmative action to prevent child marriage.**

House Bill 1587 will raise the minimum marriage age to 16 for both boys and girls, while House Bill 1586 will prohibit judges from authorizing marriages in which sex between the parties would constitute sexual assault. These bills are about protecting our children. As the father of a young daughter and two young sons, I can tell you first hand that children do not have the lived experiences to make an important lifelong decision such as marriage. My experience and the experiences of parents across the Granite State are supported by science, the teenage brain is not fully developed and teenagers are not at a point in their lives where they are capable of making such a paramount decision.

I am thankful for the work I know the committee will put in to updating this antiquated statute. I encourage you to work toward legislation that creates a no-exceptions floor at age 16 and the requirement of clear and convincing evidence in the best interest of the minor for judicial authorization of the marriages of 16- and 17-year-olds. Family division judges are well equipped to deploy the "best interest of the minor" standard, to ensure that any potential marriages or 16- and 17-year-olds is in the best interest those individuals.

Finally, I want to recognize the effort of an extraordinary young Granite Stater who has worked tirelessly to address this important issue: Cassie Levesque, a lifelong Girl Scout from the Girl Scouts of Green and White Mountains. A few years ago, Cassie learned that child marriage was still prevalent in many communities worldwide, including some in the United States. She researched New Hampshire's marriage laws and found out that girls can be married at just 13 years old, and boys at 14. This is wrong and she has worked hard to advocate protecting children, including spear heading legislation last year. She has remained committed to this case and has

maintained her advocacy throughout the twists and turns of the legislative process over the past year.

Today, I am proud to stand with Cassie and a bipartisan group of legislators in asking that this committee to take an important step to protect our children and finally ban child marriage in New Hampshire.

Sincerely,



Christopher T. Sununu
Governor