

Scorecard 1: Protection Gaps

Analysis of Laws on Minimum Marriage Age and Exceptions Permitting Marriage Under Age 18

Includes All Laws Enacted by September 30, 2025

Selected Statutory Weaknesses that Fail to Protect Children

Jurisdiction ¹	No or Low Age Floor (Below Age 16)	Official Proof of Age is <u>Not</u> Always Required	Clerks May Issue Marriage Licenses to Out-of-State, Un-Emancipated Minors	Parental Consent Can Lower the Legal Marriage Age ²	Pregnancy Can Lower the Legal Marriage Age ³	When Parental Consent is Required, Only One Parent Must Consent	Clerks, Not Judges, Can Approve All Underage Marriage Licenses ⁴	Older Minors (Typically Age 16+) Can Marry Without Judicial Approval ⁵	Judges Approving Underage Marriages Do Not Need to Specialize in Family Law or Juvenile Matters ⁶	Judges Approving Underage Marriages Receive Little or No Guidance ⁷
Alabama		X	X	X		X	X	X	N/A	N/A
Alaska		X	X					X	X	X
Arizona		X	X	X		X		X	X	
Arkansas		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
California	X	X	X			X			X	<i>In some cases</i>
Colorado			X							
Connecticut	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
Delaware	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
District of Columbia	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
Florida		X	X	X			X	X	N/A	N/A
Georgia										
Hawaii	(15)	X	X	X				X		X
Idaho		X	X	X		X	X	X	N/A	N/A
Illinois		X	X	X				X	X	

Jurisdiction¹	No or Low Age Floor (Below Age 16)	Official Proof of Age is <u>Not</u> Always Required	Clerks May Issue Marriage Licenses to Out-of-State, Un-Emancipated Minors	Parental Consent Can Lower the Legal Marriage Age ²	Pregnancy Can Lower the Legal Marriage Age ³	When Parental Consent is Required, Only One Parent Must Consent	Clerks, Not Judges, Can Approve All Underage Marriage Licenses ⁴	Older Minors (Typically Age 16+) Can Marry Without Judicial Approval ⁵	Judges Approving Underage Marriages Do Not Need to Specialize in Family Law or Juvenile Matters ⁶	Judges Approving Underage Marriages Receive Little or No Guidance ⁷
Indiana										
Iowa		X	X	X		X			X	
Kansas	(15)	X	X	X		X		X	X	X
Kentucky						X			X	
Louisiana			X							
Maine	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
Maryland		X			X				X	
Massachusetts	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
Michigan	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
Minnesota	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
Mississippi ⁸	X		X	X				X	X	X
Missouri	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
Montana			X			X			X	
Nebraska			X	X		X	X	X	N/A	N/A
Nevada		X				X			X	
New Hampshire	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
New Jersey	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
New Mexico	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X
New York	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
North Carolina		X	X	X		X		X	X	
North Dakota			X	X		X	X	X	N/A	N/A

Jurisdiction¹	No or Low Age Floor (Below Age 16)	Official Proof of Age is <u>Not</u> Always Required	Clerks May Issue Marriage Licenses to Out-of-State, Un-Emancipated Minors	Parental Consent Can Lower the Legal Marriage Age ²	Pregnancy Can Lower the Legal Marriage Age ³	When Parental Consent is Required, Only One Parent Must Consent	Clerks, Not Judges, Can Approve All Underage Marriage Licenses ⁴	Older Minors (Typically Age 16+) Can Marry Without Judicial Approval ⁵	Judges Approving Underage Marriages Do Not Need to Specialize in Family Law or Juvenile Matters ⁶	Judges Approving Underage Marriages Receive Little or No Guidance ⁷
Ohio										
Oklahoma	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Oregon	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
Pennsylvania	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
Rhode Island	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
South Carolina			X	X		X	X	X	N/A	N/A
South Dakota			X	X		X	X	X	N/A	N/A
Tennessee		X	X	X			X	X	N/A	N/A
Texas									X	
Utah ⁹			X			X			X	
Vermont	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
Virginia	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
Washington	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
West Virginia		X	X	X		X	X	X	N/A	N/A
Wisconsin			X	X		X	X	X	N/A	N/A
Wyoming	X	X				X		X	X	X
Total: 51	4: <u>no</u> floor 2: <u>low</u> floor	18	26	20	4	21	10	21	17	8

Territory	No or Low Age Floor (Below Age 16)	Official Proof of Age is <u>Not</u> Always Required	Clerks May Issue Marriage Licenses to Out-of-State, Un-Emancipated Minors	Parental Consent Can Lower the Legal Marriage Age	Pregnancy Can Lower the Legal Marriage Age ¹⁰	When Parental Consent is Required, Only One Parent Must Consent	Clerks, Not Judges, Can Approve All Underage Marriage Licenses	Older Minors (Typically Age 16+) Can Marry Without Judicial Approval	Judges Approving Underage Marriages Do Not Need to Specialize in Family Law or Juvenile Matters ¹¹	Judges Approving Underage Marriages Receive Little or No Guidance ¹²
American Samoa	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
Guam	X	X	X		X	X			X	X
Northern Mariana Islands ¹³	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	N/A	N/A
Puerto Rico ¹⁴		X		X			X	X	X	X
United States Virgin Islands	Not applicable – minimum marriage age is 18, no exceptions									
Total: 5	2: no floor 0: low floor	3	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2

¹ This chart contains information for all 50 U.S. states and the federal district of Washington, D.C. Information on the five U.S. territories is contained in a separate chart, in recognition that each of these territories has a unique legal history that has resulted in larger legal distinctions both among them and between them and U.S. states than exist among states. Any detailed discussion of law in U.S. territory should be

centered on that specific territory's unique legal landscape, and center the needs of the children who live there.

² Kansas (for 16- and 17- year-olds) nominally requires judicial approval as well, but the sole express criteria for the judge's decision is whether there is parental consent. If both parents consent, judicial approval is not required. While Arizona, Florida, and Tennessee require not only parental consent but also set a maximum age difference between the parties, parental consent is the gatekeeper to an exception. Some states in this column also require judicial approval under certain circumstances, but for the majority of minors, parental consent suffices.

³ Pregnancy alone is not sufficient to obtain a marriage license in any of the four states or one territory where it can lower the minimum marriage age; it rather serves as the first step in accessing each state's judicial approval process. The protectiveness of these processes varies dramatically. For example, a minor in Maryland would need to be at least 17 years old, would be appointed an attorney, and would go through a judicial process that includes a number of safeguards intended to evaluate for evidence of force, fraud, or coercion. Pregnant minors in Oklahoma, on the other hand, could in theory marry at any age with the approval of a judge who is given very little statutory guidance on what they must consider when issuing an authorization. The Tahiri Justice Center urges all jurisdictions to remove pregnancy exceptions from their statute, regardless of the relative strength of other process requirements – a child's pregnancy should be considered a red flag for potential abuse and the need for supportive resources, not a reason to grant a marriage license.

⁴ Some states permit court-emancipated minors to marry as the only exception to a minimum marriage age of 18; other states require all minors to get judicial approval to marry, or require judicial approval for some minors under some circumstances. Some states require judicial approval, but the sole express criteria for the judge's decision is whether there is parental consent (*see* n. 1 above). None of those states are given an "x" in this column. Arizona is also not given an "x." Even though the vast majority of minors to whom marriage licenses are issued in Arizona will not see a judge (because there is a simple "parental consent" exception that can be handled by a clerk), Arizona does have an alternative exception to a minimum marriage age of 18 for court-emancipated minors. If a minor's parents were to oppose the minor's marriage, it is possible under those circumstances that the minor would seek to be emancipated by a court in order to be eligible to marry under this alternative exception.

⁵ Alaska's statute sets a floor of 16 and requires minors to obtain judicial approval but contains an exception for minors serving as active duty members of the military, which is an option starting at age 17 if the minor has parental consent. Kansas is given an "x" in this column because, notwithstanding a nominal judicial approval requirement, it can be entirely set aside if both parents consent. Wyoming's statute sets a floor of 16 and requires minors to obtain judicial approval but contains an exception for minors who have the "right to contract" – a process with no

judicial oversight which thus disqualifies the state from receiving an “x” in this column.

⁶ “N/A” in this table may mean simply that Tahirih’s specific critiques of states’ judicial approval processes do not apply to that jurisdiction because all marriage license applications involving minors can be approved by a clerk. Put another way, “N/A” states may still be problematic with respect to judicial approval processes—insofar as they have no such processes at all. Likewise, states with no “x” in the last two columns of this table may still be problematic with respect to judicial approval processes because those processes only apply to younger minors (leaving older minors without the benefit of any judicial inquiry whatsoever), because judges have no statutory limit on how young a child can be permitted to marry, or for other reasons. In this way, all columns of this table must be read and evaluated together, and in conjunction with Tahirih’s other statutory analyses, in order to fully understand the true nature of negligence vs. vigilance in that state’s minimum marriage age laws.

⁷ *See* n. 1 above re: states in which judicial approval is only to verify parental consent. In California, too, if a minor is age 17 and has a high school diploma, judicial approval serves only to verify parental consent, though the judicial approval requirement is more detailed for all other minors.

⁸ Mississippi is the only state with a statute that expressly sets different exceptions to the minimum marriage age based on gender. This leaves girls more vulnerable to forced marriages than boys. One U.S. territory, the Northern Mariana Islands, also sets different exceptions based on gender.

⁹ Judicial approval can be granted in Utah either by a juvenile court, or by a “court commissioner” — an appointed, quasi-judicial officer. Utah is given an “x” in the column about specialized judges because it is unclear what special expertise such court commissioners would have and because, while they must be admitted to practice law in Utah, they are not judges.

¹⁰ *See* n. 2 above.

¹¹ *See* n. 6 above.

¹² *See* n. 1 above.

¹³ The law in Northern Mariana Islands differs depending on whether the parties marrying are citizens of the Trust Territory. For marriages involving two citizens, there are no statutory requirements beyond the marriage being “salinized in accordance with recognized customs,” *See* 8 N. Mar. I. Code §1205. As with other states and territories, we have only evaluated the statute of the Northern Marianas Islands. Just as some states may have additional legal protections built into case law, the Northern Marianas Islands may have other protections built into these customs. This is, however, beyond the scope of our analysis. The law also provides different protections depending on a person’s sex. *See* above n.7.

¹⁴ Puerto Rico sets a minimum marriage age of 18 but has a higher age of majority at age 21. Because the marriage age remains lower than the age of majority, underage marriage is still legal in Puerto Rico. It is important to note, however, that Puerto Rican law on age of majority differs significantly from that of many U.S. states and minors are granted more rights as they approach age 21 including, for example, the ability to manage their own money or to sign contracts. For a more detailed discussion of Puerto Rican Civil Code, see Luis Muñiz-Argüelles, *The 2020 Revision of the Puerto Rican Civil Code: A Brief Explanation of Major Changes*, 15 J. Civ. L. Stud. (2023). Available at: <https://digitalcommons.law.lsu.edu/jcls/vol15/iss1/6>.

Scorecard 2: Statutory Safeguards

Analysis of Laws on Minimum Marriage Age and Exceptions Permitting Marriage Under Age 18

Includes All Laws Enacted by September 30, 2025

Selected Statutory Provisions that Protect Children¹

Jurisdiction ²	Minimum Marriage Age of 16	Minimum Marriage Age of 17	There is a Maximum Age Difference	Official Proof of Age is Expressly Required in All Instances	Clear That Judges Can Only Approve Marriages of In-State Minors	All Un-Emancipated Minors Must Get Judicial Approval to Marry	There is Always a Waiting Period Before Issuing a Marriage License to a Minor	Minor is Given Info on their Rights, and Resources for Domestic Violence
Alabama	✓				N/A	Judge never involved		
Alaska	✓					Judicial approval required for minors not serving as active-duty military ³		
Arizona	✓		≤ 3 years		✓	Court order of emancipation only required if there is no parental consent ⁴		
Arkansas	✓					Judicial approval required only if one or both parties is age 16 ⁵	✓ 5 days	
California	No floor					✓	In some cases ⁶	✓
Colorado	✓			✓		✓		
Connecticut	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions							
Delaware	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions							

Jurisdiction ²	Minimum Marriage Age of 16	Minimum Marriage Age of 17	There is a Maximum Age Difference	Official Proof of Age is Expressly Required in All Instances	Clear That Judges Can Only Approve Marriages of In-State Minors	All Un-Emancipated Minors Must Get Judicial Approval to Marry	There is Always a Waiting Period Before Issuing a Marriage License to a Minor	Minor is Given Info on their Rights, and Resources for Domestic Violence
District of Columbia	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions							
Florida		✓	≤ 2 years		N/A	Judge never involved		
Georgia ⁷		✓	≤ 4 years	✓	✓	✓	✓ 15 days	✓
Hawaii	15				✓	Judicial approval required only if minor is age 15		
Idaho	✓		< 3 years		N/A	Judge never involved		
Illinois	✓					Judicial approval required only if there is no parental consent		
Indiana	✓		≤ 4 years	✓	✓	✓	✓ 15 days	
Iowa	✓					✓		
Kansas	15					Judicial approval required only if minor is age 15 ⁸		
Kentucky		✓	≤ 4 years	✓	✓	✓	✓ 15 days	✓
Louisiana	✓		< 3 years	✓		✓		
Maine	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions							
Maryland		✓			✓	✓	✓ 15 days	✓

Jurisdiction²	Minimum Marriage Age of 16	Minimum Marriage Age of 17	There is a Maximum Age Difference	Official Proof of Age is Expressly Required in All Instances	Clear That Judges Can Only Approve Marriages of In-State Minors	All Un-Emancipated Minors Must Get Judicial Approval to Marry	There is Always a Waiting Period Before Issuing a Marriage License to a Minor	Minor is Given Info on their Rights, and Resources for Domestic Violence
Massachusetts	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions							
Michigan	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions							
Minnesota	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions							
Mississippi	No floor			✓		Judicial approval required only if female is younger than age 15 or male is younger than age 17 ⁹		
Missouri	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions							
Montana	✓			✓		✓		
Nebraska		✓		✓	N/A	Judge never involved		
Nevada		✓	Age difference is considered by judge			✓		
New Hampshire	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions							
New Jersey	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions							
New Mexico	No floor					Judicial approval required only if minor is younger than age 16		
New York	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions							

Jurisdiction²	Minimum Marriage Age of 16	Minimum Marriage Age of 17	There is a Maximum Age Difference	Official Proof of Age is Expressly Required in All Instances	Clear That Judges Can Only Approve Marriages of In-State Minors	All Un-Emancipated Minors Must Get Judicial Approval to Marry	There is Always a Waiting Period Before Issuing a Marriage License to a Minor	Minor is Given Info on their Rights, and Resources for Domestic Violence
North Carolina	✓		≤ 4 years			Judicial approval required only if there is no parental consent ¹⁰		
North Dakota	✓			✓	N/A	Judge never involved		
Ohio		✓	≤ 4 years	✓		✓	✓ 14 days	
Oklahoma	No floor			✓		Judicial approval required only if minor is younger than age 16 ¹¹	✓ 72 hours	
Oregon	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions							
Pennsylvania	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions							
Rhode Island	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions							
South Carolina	✓			✓	N/A	Judge never involved		
South Dakota	✓			✓	N/A	Judge never involved		
Tennessee		✓	< 4 years		N/A	Judge never involved		✓
Texas	✓			✓	✓	✓		
Utah ¹²	✓		≤ 4 years	✓		✓	✓ 72 hours	
Vermont	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions							
Virginia	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions							

Jurisdiction²	Minimum Marriage Age of 16	Minimum Marriage Age of 17	There is a Maximum Age Difference	Official Proof of Age is Expressly Required in All Instances	Clear That Judges Can Only Approve Marriages of In-State Minors	All Un-Emancipated Minors Must Get Judicial Approval to Marry	There is Always a Waiting Period Before Issuing a Marriage License to a Minor	Minor is Given Info on their Rights, and Resources for Domestic Violence
Washington	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions							
West Virginia	✓		≤ 4 years		N/A	Judge never involved		
Wisconsin	✓			✓	N/A	Judge never involved		
Wyoming	✓				✓	Judicial approval required for nearly all minors, with exception for those granted the right to contract ¹³		
Total: 51	20	8	12	16	8	13	8	5

Territory	Minimum Marriage Age of 16	Minimum Marriage Age of 17	Minimum Marriage Age of 18, but Still Under Age of Majority ¹⁴	There is a Maximum Age Difference	Official Proof of Age is Expressly Required in All Instances	Clear That Judges Can Only Approve Marriages of In-State Minors	All Un-Emancipated Minors Must Get Judicial Approval to Marry	There is Always a Waiting Period Before Issuing a Marriage License to a Minor	Minor is Given Info on their Rights, and Resources for Domestic Violence
American Samoa	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions								
Guam	No floor						✓		
Northern Mariana Islands ¹⁵	No floor								
Puerto Rico			✓						
United States Virgin Islands	Not applicable – minimum age is 18, no exceptions								
Total: 5	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0

¹ **Interpreting this table:** Thirty-six states, three territories, and Washington DC have enacted legal reforms to end or limit child marriage since 2016, when the Tahirih Justice Center sparked the national movement by securing the first law limiting marriage to legal adults, in Virginia. The above table still features relatively few "✓" marks which speaks to how many states' laws still fail to consider, let alone address, the acute child protection concerns raised by child marriage. Moreover, even when a state may receive a few "✓" marks above, its minimum marriage age laws may still fall short of what is needed to protect children from forced marriages and other harm. All columns of this table must be read and evaluated together, and in conjunction with Tahirih's other statutory analyses, in order to fully understand the true nature of negligence vs. vigilance in a given state's minimum marriage age laws. Ultimately, no number of safeguards can replace the only real solution: setting the minimum marriage age to align with a jurisdiction's age of majority (generally 18), no exceptions.

² This chart contains information for all 50 U.S. states and the federal district of Washington, D.C. Information on the five U.S. territories is contained in a separate chart, in recognition that each of these territories has a unique legal history that has resulted in larger legal distinctions both among them and between them and U.S. states than exist among states. Any detailed discussion of law in U.S. territory should be centered on that specific territory's unique legal landscape, and center the needs of the children who live there.

³ The majority of minors in Alaska will go before a judge and be subject to an age difference limitation, and will not be permitted to marry someone more than three years older than themselves. These protections do not apply, however, in the case of a minor serving as an active-duty member of the military. Because U.S. military service is open to 17-year-olds who have parental consent, this provision circumvents the protections otherwise built into Alaska's 2022 reform. Alaska statute also does not provide automatic emancipation to minors who serve in the military, as is the case in some other states, so Alaska cannot be said to require all unemancipated minors to go before a judge.

⁴ Most minors who marry in Arizona will not see a judge, because there is a simple "parental consent" exception that can be processed by a clerk. However, Arizona does have an alternative exception to a minimum marriage age of 18 for court-emancipated minors. Only resident minors can petition an Arizona court for emancipation. Similarly, only resident minors can petition a Texas court for emancipation and thereby access an exception to a minimum marriage age of 18. A minor emancipated by another state court can also qualify for this exception in Arizona and Texas, however.

⁵ Judicial approval can only be obtained at that age in Arkansas if the female is pregnant or has already given birth to a child.

⁶ In California, a waiting period of 30 days between the court order granting judicial approval and the issuance of a marriage license does not apply if the minor is age 17 and has a high school diploma, or if the minor is age 16 or 17 and pregnant.

⁷ Georgia recognizes emancipation “by operation of law” when a minor under age 18 has already been married, or is on active duty with the U.S. armed forces. Such emancipated minors do not need judicial approval to marry, but are still subject to the other minimum marriage age requirements (floor of age 17, 4-year limit on age differences, 15-day waiting period, and premarital education).

⁸ Kansas nominally requires judicial approval as well as parental consent for 16- and 17-year-olds, but if both parents consent, judicial approval is not required.

⁹ Mississippi is the only state with a statute that expressly sets different exceptions to the minimum marriage age based on gender. The state requires judicial approval for girls under age 15, and for boys under age 17, while children over those ages need only parental consent. This leaves girls more vulnerable to forced marriages than boys. One U.S. territory also sets different exceptions based on gender: for marriages involving one or two non-citizens the Northern Marianas sets a minimum marriage age of 18 for boys and 16 for girls.

¹⁰ North Carolina law includes a detailed judicial process that formerly applied to minors aged 14-15 if the female was pregnant or had already given birth to a child and the intended male spouse is the father or putative father. The reform passed in 2021 ended all marriage under age 16 but preserved this process, applying it instead only to 16- and 17-year-olds whose parents did not or could not consent to their marriage.

¹¹ Judicial approval can only be obtained at that age in Oklahoma if the female is pregnant or has already given birth to a child, or in settlement of a suit brought “for seduction or paternity.”

¹² Utah is given a “√” in the column about requiring judicial approval for all minors, even though “judicial approval” can be granted either by a juvenile court, or by a “court commissioner” — an appointed, quasi-judicial officer who must be admitted to practice law in Utah but is not a judge.

¹³ Wyoming’s statute sets a floor of 16 and requires minors to obtain judicial approval, but contains an exception for minors who have the “right to contract” – a process with no judicial oversight which thus disqualifies the state from receiving an “x” in this column.

¹⁴ Puerto Rico sets a minimum marriage age of 18, but has a higher age of majority at age 21. Because the marriage age remains lower than the age of majority, underage marriage is still legal in Puerto Rico. It is important to note, however, that Puerto Rican law on age of majority differs significantly from that of many U.S. states and minors are granted more rights incrementally as they approach age 21 including, for example,

the ability to manage their own money or to sign contracts. For a more detailed discussion of Puerto Rican Civil Code, see Luis Muñiz-Argüelles, *The 2020 Revision of the Puerto Rican Civil Code: A Brief Explanation of Major Changes*, 15 J. Civ. L. Stud. (2023). Available at: <https://digitalcommons.law.lsu.edu/jcls/vol15/iss1/6> [Fix spacing issue between 14 and 15]

¹⁵ Northern Marianas Islands marriage law differs depending on whether the parties to be wed are citizens of the Trust Territory or not. No minimum marriage age is indicated in statute for marriages between two citizens, and no protections are in place for minors. The marriage must only be "solemnized in accordance with recognized customs." For a marriage in which either or both parties are noncitizens, there is a minimum marriage age of 16 for girls and 18 for boys and any minor must have consent from at least one parent or guardian.

Scorecard 3: Statutory Safeguards in Judicial Oversight

Analysis of Laws on Minimum Marriage Age and Exceptions Permitting Marriage Under Age 18
in Jurisdictions with Universal Judicial Oversight

Includes All Laws Enacted by September 30, 2025

Selected Statutory Provisions that Protect Children¹

State ²	Procedural Safeguards Are Followed							Substantive Criteria Are Considered					"Best Interest" Cannot Be Shown Based Solely On ³		Judge Can Take Other Steps to Protect and/or Empower Minor ⁴	
	Decision Made by Family or Juvenile Court	Inquiry into Facts Authorized or Required ⁵	Judge Must Hold Hearing and Issue Written Findings	Minor Appointed Counsel ⁶	Judge Must Interview Minor Privately ⁷	Heightened Standard of Proof ⁸	Judge Must Consider Several Detailed Criteria	Maturity and/or Capacity of Minor ⁹	Whether Marriage is Voluntary ¹⁰	Criminal Records, Protection Orders, and/or History of Abuse ¹¹	Age Difference Between Parties	Best Interest of Minor	Pregnancy or Birth of Child	Parental Consent	Judge Expressly Authorized to Issue Other Orders ¹²	Minor Emancipated Before Marriage ¹³
California		✓			✓				✓							
Colorado	✓	✓		✓				✓				✓	✓			
Georgia	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Indiana	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Iowa								✓				✓	✓			
Kentucky		✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Louisiana	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Maryland		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Montana								✓				✓	✓			
Nevada						✓		✓			✓	✓	✓			
Ohio	✓			✓				✓	✓		✓	✓				✓
Texas				✓				✓				✓				✓
Utah ¹⁴									✓		✓	✓			✓	

State ²	Procedural Safeguards Are Followed							Substantive Criteria Are Considered					“Best Interest” Cannot Be Shown Based Solely On ³		Judge Can Take Other Steps to Protect and/or Empower Minor ⁴	
	Decision Made by Family or Juvenile Court	Inquiry into Facts Authorized or Required ⁵	Judge Must Hold Hearing <u>and</u> Issue Written Findings	Minor Appointed Counsel ⁶	Judge Must Interview Minor Privately ⁷	Heightened Standard of Proof ⁸	Judge Must Consider Several Detailed Criteria	Maturity and/or Capacity of Minor ⁹	Whether Marriage is Voluntary ¹⁰	Criminal Records, Protection Orders, and/or History of Abuse ¹¹	Age Difference Between Parties	Best Interest of Minor	Pregnancy or Birth of Child	Parental Consent	Judge Expressly Authorized to Issue Other Orders ¹²	Minor Emancipated Before Marriage ¹³
Total States: 13	2	7	2	6	5	1	5	11	8	5	7	2	8	3	3	5

Territory	Procedural Safeguards Are Followed							Substantive Criteria Are Considered					“Best Interest” Cannot Be Shown Based Solely On		Judge Can Take Other Steps to Protect and/or Empower Minor	
	Decision Made by Family or Juvenile Court	Inquiry into Facts Authorized or Required	Judge Must Hold Hearing <u>and</u> Issue Written Findings	Minor Appointed Counsel	Judge Must Interview Minor Privately	Heightened Standard of Proof	Judge Must Consider Several Detailed Criteria	Maturity and/or Capacity of Minor	Whether Marriage is Voluntary	Criminal Records, Protection Orders, and/or History of Abuse	Age Difference Between Parties	Best Interest of Minor	Pregnancy or Birth of Child	Parental Consent	Judge Expressly Authorized to Issue Other Orders	Minor Emancipated Before Marriage
Guam																
Total Territories: 1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

¹ **How to interpret this table:** Thirty-six states, three territories, and Washington DC have enacted legal reforms to end or limit child marriage since 2016, when Tahirih Justice Center sparked the national movement by securing the first law limiting marriage to legal adults, in Virginia. All columns of this table must be read and evaluated together, and in conjunction with Tahirih’s other statutory analyses, in order to fully understand the true nature of negligence vs. vigilance in a given state’s minimum marriage age laws. Note that even if a state receives several “v” marks above, by virtue of inclusion in this chart at all the state’s minimum marriage age laws should be read as falling short of complete protection. Ultimately, no number of safeguards can replace the only real solution: setting the minimum marriage age to align with a state’s age of majority (generally 18), no exceptions.

This table only includes jurisdictions that require all un-emancipated minors to get judicial approval to marry: 13 states and 1 territory. Jurisdictions may be excluded for positive reasons – banning child marriage entirely – or negative ones – allowing at least some minors to marry without any judicial oversight.

North Carolina, for example, is not included despite the fact that the state outlines a detailed judicial approval process with several measures meant to serve as safeguards, like the appointment of a guardian ad litem to investigate the circumstances and to represent the minor’s best interests; it is excluded because those protections can be bypassed simply by obtaining parental consent to the marriage. As another example, Kansas is not included because with the consent of both parents, the judicial approval requirement can be entirely set aside. Alaska is excluded because state law provides a path to marriage with no judicial approval process for minors serving as active-duty members of the military, but does not consider this service to be automatically emancipatory as it is in other states. While Alaska’s 2022 reform would send most minors before a judge, this exception precludes us from including Alaska in this table. Wyoming is excluded because their statute requires judicial approval for most minors, but includes an exception for minors who have the “right to contract,” a process which does not involve judicial oversight. Tahirih urges states with judicial approval exceptions to ban child marriage entirely, and where that is not immediately possible to ensure that judicial approval exceptions apply to all un-emancipated minors, of whatever age and in all circumstances.

² This chart contains information for all U.S. states that allow minors to marry, but require all marriages of a minor to be approved by a judge. Information on the one U.S. territory that does this, Guam, is contained in a separate chart in recognition that each territory has a unique legal history that has resulted in distinct legal systems that may vary in important ways from those of a U.S. state. Any detailed discussion of law in a U.S. territory should be centered on that specific territory’s unique legal landscape and center the needs of the children who live there.

³ There are additional states that, by inference to the totality of circumstances that must be considered, also do not permit a “best interests” inquiry to rest on whether there is a pregnancy or parental consent. However, the states recognized in these columns expressly address pregnancy and/or parental consent and clarify that they cannot alone be sufficient evidence of a minor’s best interests.

⁴ As noted in Appendix B-1, after recent legislative reforms in California, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Maryland, minors in those states are also now provided with information on their rights and on resources available to victims of domestic violence and other abuse in their state; in Florida, all parties applying to marry are directed to information on the rights and responsibilities of parties to a marriage.

⁵ This column is meant to recognize greater diligence than a vague, general call for a judicial inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the marriage. Still, we have been generous in granting “v” marks in this column as some states have fairly limited inquiries beyond the courtroom and the immediate proceeding. For example, in California, Family Court Services interviews the parties and prepares a report. Other states require more expansive inquiries. Colorado appoints a guardian ad litem and requires an investigation and report to guide the judge’s decision-making. We also granted “v” marks in this column for states with detailed in-courtroom inquiries. In Georgia, for example, judicial approval to marry is made part of an emancipation proceeding. In addition to other extensive criteria related to both determinations, Georgia requires affidavits from individuals such as teachers, counselors or social workers who have personal knowledge of the minor’s circumstances and believe emancipation to be in the minor’s best interests. Again, though, some states with detailed inquiries were excluded from this chart because judicial approval (and thus the inquiries) is only required in some cases: for example, in North Carolina, a guardian ad litem investigation and report are required only when a minor has not obtained parental consent to the marriage.

⁶ North Carolina also appoints a guardian ad litem (GAL) to investigate and promote the minor’s best interests with respect to a petition to marry — but only minors who have not obtained parental consent to the marriage are required to get judicial approval and thus, they are the only minors who are appointed a GAL.

⁷ In Utah, “any inquiry” may be conducted by the judge in chambers, but this is not the same as requiring the minor to be interviewed separately and privately. In Louisiana the statute directs that “there shall be a separate in camera interview of the prospective spouses,” and while the language does not specify “of each of the prospective spouses,” in context it implies that the parties should be interviewed separately. Joint interviews — whether with parents or a prospective spouse — will not enable a minor to safely disclose abuse, threats, or other coercion she may be facing.

⁸ In Nevada, judicial approval to marry cannot be granted unless the court finds “clear and convincing evidence” that the marriage is in the minor’s best interests. The Nevada statute also directs that such approval can only be granted in “extraordinary circumstances.”

⁹ We have been generous in granting Iowa a “v” mark in this column, given that the statute’s only vague requirement is that the judge find the minor is “capable of assuming the responsibilities of marriage.”

¹⁰ Judges in North Carolina must find that the parties “agree to marry” and judges in Mississippi must find that the parties “desire to marry,” but those states are not included in this table because judicial approval is only required in certain cases.

¹¹ In California, Family Court Services must report known or reasonably suspected child abuse or neglect, presumably based on staff interviews with the minor and/or the minor’s parent(s). This may be helpful, but is not the same level of diligence as the court actually requesting or pulling records of past abuse or neglect by parents or of inter-personal violence by an intended spouse. It is also unclear how any finding of child abuse or neglect is to be weighed by California courts in determining whether to grant or deny a petition for a minor to marry.

¹² In Kentucky and Indiana, judges are authorized to make any other orders that the court deems appropriate for the minor’s protection and to impose any other condition on the grant of the petition that the court determines is reasonable under the circumstances; and in Utah, judges may require the minor to continue to attend school and “any other conditions that the court deems reasonable under the circumstances.” In Louisiana, the judge is not expressly authorized to issue other orders (e.g., such as an order of protection), but is required to report to law enforcement or child protective services “any evidence of human trafficking, sexual assault, domestic violence, coercion, or undue influence” and, upon such a finding, deny the petition to marry.

Judges in California, Utah and Indiana may order a minor and an intended spouse to participate in premarital counseling; however, California is not given a “√” mark in this column because such counseling, depending on whether it is taken by both parties together and whether it is provided by clergy or a professionally licensed counselor, can increase the pressure on a minor to marry rather than give her objective information about the risks of marrying young.

¹³ Recent legislative reforms in Colorado did not require that a minor be fully emancipated alongside a grant of judicial approval to marry, but they did clarify that married minors have some important rights, including the right to file legal motions and petitions on the minor’s own behalf. Maryland’s recent reform clarified that married minors are emancipated for the purpose of obtaining a divorce, but does not grant any additional rights beyond that. Also, in Texas the nature of the “judicial approval” proceeding is a judicial grant of emancipation based on demonstrated maturity and capacity. A court-emancipated minor may marry in Texas, but the court does not grant judicial approval to marry as such, nor vet the intended marriage or spouse.

Tahirih urges states who require judicial approval for marriage to emancipate the minor prior to marriage as a final failsafe to empower the minor to avoid a forced marriage that the court may not have detected because the minor was too afraid or uncertain of the consequences to herself or others to disclose it in the proceeding. Emancipation that is granted only after marriage comes too late for a minor who needed the legal rights of an adult to take self-help steps (like leaving home, or staying with a friend or in a confidential shelter) to protect herself from entering that marriage in the first place.

¹⁴ Judicial approval can be granted in Utah either by a juvenile court, or by a “court commissioner” — an appointed, quasi-judicial officer. Utah is not given an “√” in the column about specialized judges because it is unclear whether or what special expertise such court commissioners would have, and because, while they must be admitted to practice law in Utah, they are not judges.