

## New PA Law Sets Minimum Age for Marriage

On May 8, 2020, Governor Wolf signed into law HB 360, which sets Pennsylvania's minimum age for marriage at 18. In so doing, Pennsylvania joins just two other states, Delaware and New Jersey, in adopting a hard limit of 18 years of age; by hard limit, I mean no exceptions. Like many other states, under prior Pennsylvania law, a child between 16 and 18 could marry with parental consent, and a child under 16 could marry with court approval. Previously, therefore, Pennsylvania had no age minimum for marriage.

The passage of the new law is seen as a victory for the protection of children in Pennsylvania. Without the new age minimum, children, usually girls, could be forced into arranged marriages with adult men with almost no legal recourse.

Child marriage is seen as a global problem and a violation of human rights rooted in gender inequality. Girls who enter into marriages at young ages suffer disproportionately higher incidences of early pregnancy, social isolation and mental health issues, interruption of educational and employment opportunities and physical and psychological abuse. There are also immigration issues when an arranged marriage between a young girl, who is an American citizen, is used to gain resident alien status for a foreign national seeking entry into the United States.

While the tradition of child marriage has diminished significantly in western cultures, it still remains in certain Asian and African cultures. As immigration from these areas continues into Pennsylvania, it has become an issue here as well. Both Houses of the Pennsylvania Legislature should be applauded for unanimously approving HB 360 and Governor Wolf for quickly signing the Bill into law.