



# Office of Utah for Rational Sex Offense Laws

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PO BOX 231 • LAYTON, UT 84041-9998  
(801) 871-5215 • COMMUNICATIONS@UTRSOL.ORG

January 23, 2026

Representative Melissa G. Ballard  
Utah House of Representatives  
350 North State, Suite 350  
Salt Lake City, UT 84114  
Via email: mballard@le.utah.gov

## Position Statement on H.B. 103 Underage Marriage Amendments

Dear Representative Ballard,

Utah for Rational Sex Offense Laws (UTRSOL) supports H.B. 103, legislation that represents an important step toward protecting minors from child marriage. The bill narrows legal pathways for underage marriage, introduces criminal penalties for violations, and establishes safeguards against predatory age gaps. These measures are critical in reducing the risks to vulnerable children and provide stronger legal protections than currently exist.

While H.B. 103 reflects a meaningful compromise, UTRSOL advocates for a complete ban on child marriage. A full prohibition offers the strongest protection for children, ensuring that no minor is legally forced or coerced into marriage, even in the face of political or cultural challenges. Child marriage often exposes minors to serious harm, including increased risk of abuse, interrupted education, and long-term physical and mental health consequences. National and state-level research—including work by Unchained At Last—shows that child marriage disproportionately affects young girls and is frequently linked to coercion, exploitation, and systemic inequality.

### **The Scope of Child Marriage in Utah and the United States**

According to research by Unchained At Last, a survivor-led organization dedicated to ending forced and child marriage in the United States, nearly 315,000 children were legally married across the nation between 2000 and 2021. Utah ranks seventh nationally in per-capita rates of child marriage at 0.208%, with an average rate of 3.23 per 1,000 children. This places Utah among the states with the highest rates of child marriage in the country.

The statistics paint a troubling picture. Nationally, 86% of minors who married were girls, most wed to adult men an average of four years older. Unchained At Last's research found that at least 66,415 marriages occurred at an age or with a spousal age difference that should have been considered a sex crime.

## **Conclusion**

UTRSOL believes that no child under 18 should be married, without exception. The organization Unchained At Last and other child protection advocates have successfully lobbied for complete bans in 16 states, demonstrating that comprehensive prohibition is both achievable and necessary. While we continue to advocate for a complete ban on child marriage in Utah, we support H.B. 103 as an essential interim measure that will immediately protect vulnerable children and hold offenders accountable.

UTRSOL urges the legislature to consider these realities and prioritize the protection of all children by advancing legislation that fully prohibits child marriage. H.B. 103 is a positive step, but a complete ban is the most effective and just measure to safeguard the well-being and future of Utah's children.

We respectfully urge your support for HB0103 and stand ready to work with you to further strengthen protections for Utah's children.

Sincerely

Utah for Rational Sex Offense Laws

UTRSOL/lm