

Human Rights Watch

Children's Rights

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/20/us-new-york-governor-signs-anti-child-marriage-law>

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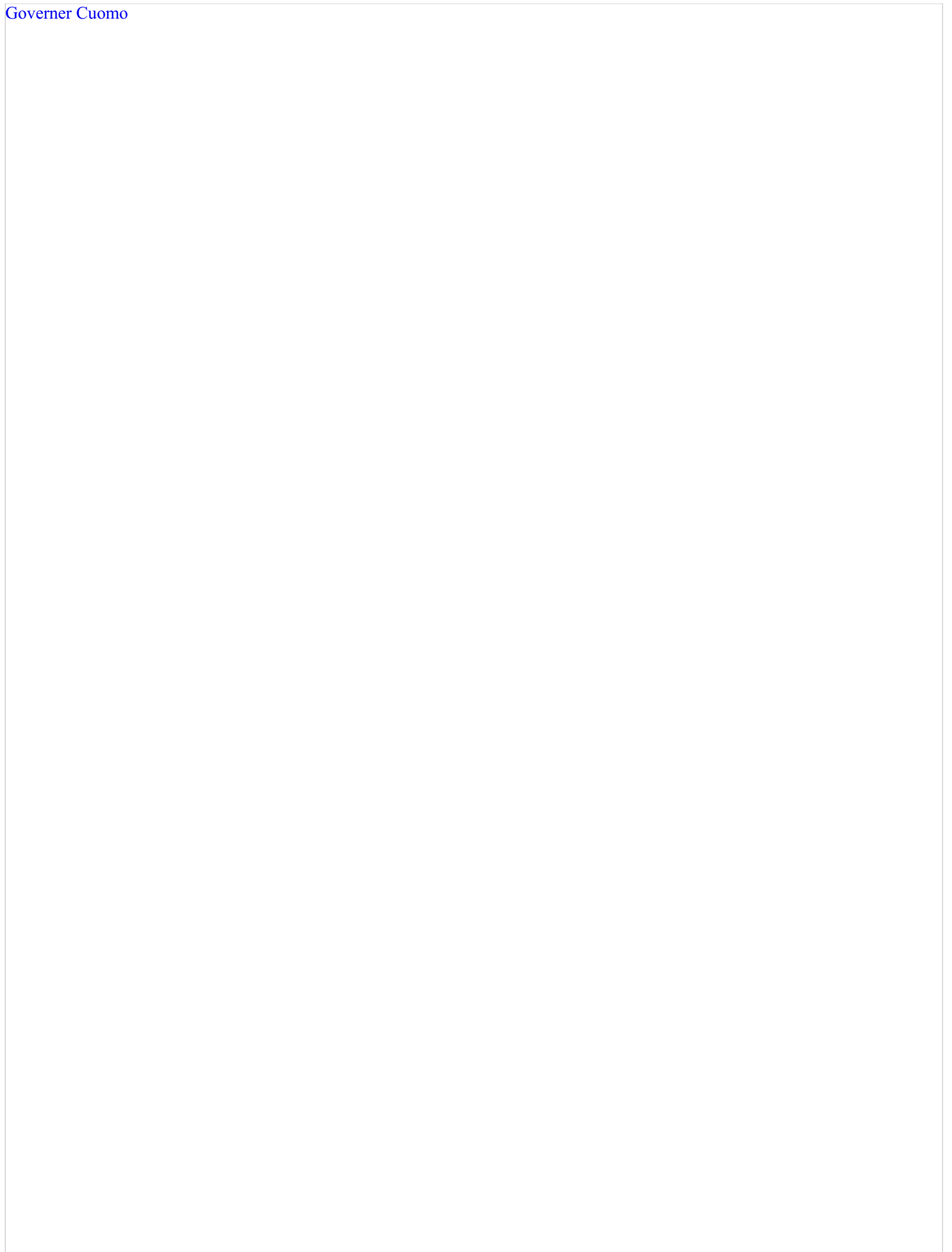
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(New York) New York State has taken an important step toward [ending child marriage](#), as Governor Andrew Cuomo on June 20, 2017 signed legislation to dramatically reduce the circumstances under which children can marry, Human Rights Watch said today. Between 2001 to 2010, 3,850 children under 18 married in New York State.

Governor Cuomo



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July 20th 2017, Governor Cuomo signsanti-child marriage law. 2017 Edward Herbert.

Under the previous law, the minimum age for marriage in New York was 18, but the law allowed children of 16 and 17 to marry with parental approval, and children of 14 and 15 to marry with permission from a judge and their parents. The vast majority of US states permit marriage under age 18 under some circumstances. In 27 US states, there is no limit to how young a child can marry if a judge authorizes the marriage.

Child marriage is a dirty secret in the US, and other states should follow New Yorks example by enacting laws to help end this harmful practice, said [Heather Barr](#), senior womens rights researcher at Human Rights Watch. US state laws permitting child marriage are out of

step with the rest of the world since even countries with high rates of child marriage are recognizing the harm it causes and taking steps to prevent these marriages.

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Heather Barr

Senior Women's Rights Researcher

A version of the law, A.5524 and S.4407, was originally introduced in the New York State Assembly in 2016, and reintroduced in 2017. It prohibits all marriages before the age of 17 and permits 17-year-olds to marry only with a judge's permission. Human Rights Watch worked with the organizations Unchained at Last, Tahirih Justice Center, Sanctuary for Families, and the National Organization for Women to urge New York lawmakers to pass the bill. A law curtailing child marriage in Virginia came into effect in June 2016, the governor of Texas signed an anti-child marriage bill last week, and similar legislation has been introduced in California, Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

Human Rights Watch has done extensive research on [child marriage](#) around the world, interviewing hundreds of married children in countries including [Afghanistan](#), [Bangladesh](#), [Malawi](#), [Nepal](#), [South Sudan](#), [Tanzania](#), [Yemen](#), and [Zimbabwe](#). Human Rights Watch has also advocated for an end to child marriage in other countries, including [Indonesia](#), [Iran](#), [Iraq](#), [Malaysia](#), [Nigeria](#), [Pakistan](#), and [Saudi Arabia](#). Of these countries, only Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen have laws that would permit a 14-year-old to marry.

Child marriage occurs in every region of the world and globally, one out of every four girls marries before age 18, and 15 million girls under 18 marry each year once every two seconds. The overwhelming majority of married children are girls, most of whom marry spouses who are older than they are in some cases much older.

A growing body of research demonstrates that child marriage is associated with, and in some cases causes, severe harm, wherever married children live. A 2010 study found that girls or young women in the US who married before age 19 were 50 percent more likely to drop out of high school than their unmarried counterparts, and only 25 percent as likely to complete college. Girls who marry as early teens, before age 16, in the US are 31 percent more likely to end up in poverty later in life.

Researchers have found significant associations between child marriage and mental and physical health disorders. Research from other countries shows a correlation between child marriage and domestic violence. Married girls often find it more difficult than married women to escape an abusive or unhappy marriage, and to get services such as shelter and legal assistance.

Children who marry sometimes are pressed or forced to do so by their parents. The previous New York requirement for parental consent provided no protection in such situations.

Under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which went into effect in January 2016, countries around the world, including the US, agreed to a target of ending all child marriage by 2030. Countries including Germany, Malawi, Nepal, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden have recently revised their laws in an effort to reduce child marriage. Many other countries have developed or are developing national action plans for ending child marriage by 2030.

The research is clear: child marriage is deeply harmful to the children and their families, and there is growing global consensus that 18 should be the minimum age for marriage, Barr said. The US, through its foreign aid programs, has been a leader in urging an end to child marriage in other regions, including Africa and Asia, but shockingly, virtually all US states still allow it.

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