

Republic of the Philippines  
**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
Quezon City, Philippines

**EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS**  
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. **3899**



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**INTRODUCED BY REPRESENTATIVE ALFRED VARGAS**

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**AN ACT PROTECTING CHILDREN BY PROHIBITING AND DECLARING  
CHILD MARRIAGE AS ILLEGAL, AND IMPOSING PENALTY THEREOF**

**EXPLANATORY NOTE**

The issue of child marriage has been addressed in numerous international conventions and agreements. For instance, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), states that 'the betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age of marriage'. The Philippines' signing subsequent ratification of CEDAW underlines its commitment to the country's women and girls.

A 2017 UNICEF report on the State of the World's Children disclosed that 15% of Filipino girls were married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and 2% of girls before the age of 15 are married. More worrying is the fact that the country has the 12<sup>th</sup> highest absolute number of child brides around the world, which is estimated to be at 726,000. Some of these brides were discovered to have entered marriage through commercial sex and sex trafficking as well as the infamous mail-order bride industry. The intergenerational nature of poverty exacerbates the problem of child marriage and renders it necessary for these problems to be addressed at its roots.

The problem of child marriage is complicated but not unsolved. Clear legislation, pro- children policies and multi-sectoral programs could address the problem and render the practice of child marriage obsolete.

Thus, the passage of this bill is earnestly sought.

  
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*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines  
in Congress assembled:*

**Section 1. Short title.** This Act shall be known as the "*Girls Not Brides Act of 2019*".

**Section 2. Declaration of State Policy.** The State recognizes the role of women and children in nation-building and shall, therefore, protect and promote their empowerment which entails the abolition of the unequal structures and practices that perpetuate discrimination and inequality.

The State affirms children's rights as part of women's rights and human rights and shall intensify its efforts to fulfill its duties under the UN Convention on the Rights of Child and the Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act to recognize, respect, protect, fulfill, and promote all human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and children, especially the girls, in the economic, social, political, cultural, and other fields.

**Section 3. Affirmation of the Principles of Human Rights of Women and children.** – Human rights are universal and inalienable. Human rights are indivisible. Human rights are inherent to the dignity of every human being regardless of age and gender whether they relate to civil, cultural, economic, political, or social issues.

Child Marriage is an act of child abuse as it debases, degrades and demeans the intrinsic worth and dignity of children under the Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act (RA 7610) It is likewise considered discrimination relating to marriage and family relations sought to be



eliminated by the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The State affirms that the marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses and that betrothal and child marriages shall have no legal effect.

The State, through this law now eliminates child marriage to strictly enforce Article 2-5 of the Family Code provides that marriage is entered into only with the free and full consent of intending spouses who should be at least 18 years of age at the time of marriage.

### **Section 3. DEFINITION OF TERMS:**

- a. Children** – refers to persons below 18 years of age, or those unable to fully take care of themselves or protect themselves or protect themselves from abuse, exploitation or discrimination because of a physical or mental disability or condition as defined by the Special Protection of children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act.
- b. Child Abuse** – refers to any act by deeds or words which debases, degrades or demeans the intrinsic worth and dignity of a child as a human being; or any circumstances which gravely threatens or endangers the life, survival, safety and normal development of Children as defined by the Special Protection of children Against Child abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act.
- c. Child Marriage** – any marriage entered into where one or both parties are below 18 years of age or unable to fully take care or protect themselves because of a physical or mental disability or condition, solemnized in civil, church or in any recognized traditional, cultural or customary manner.
- d. Solemnizing officer** – any person authorized by law as defined in Article 7 of the Family Code or recognized by reason of religion, tradition, culture or custom, to solemnize marriage.
- e. Parents and guardians** – refer to biological parents or those legally adopting parents. Guardians refer to relatives taking custody of the child or minor in the absence of the parents; or anyone to whom a child or minor was given or left for care custody.



**Section 4. Facilitation of child marriage.** Any person, who causes, fixes, facilitates or arranges a child marriage shall be considered as responsible for "Acts of neglect, abuse, cruelty or exploitation, and other conditions prejudicial to the child's development", as punishable under Section 10 of Republic Act No. 7610. This penalty shall also attach to an adult party in a child marriage, who has knowledge of the minor status of the child-spouse.

**Section 5. Solemnization of child marriage.** Any person who officiated and performed the formal rites of child marriage shall be considered as responsible for "Acts of neglect, abuse, cruelty or exploitation, and other conditions prejudicial to the child's development", as punishable under Section 10 of Republic Act No. 7610.

**Section 6. Child marriage as public crime.** The prohibited act of child marriage, its facilitation and solemnization are considered public crimes. These acts gravely threaten and endanger the survival and normal development of children and can be initiated by any concerned individual.

**Section 7. Legal Effect of Child Marriage.** Child Marriage is considered as *void ab initio*, hence, the action for annulment of child marriage does not prescribe. The legal effect of Child Marriage insofar as Support, Property Relations and custody shall be governed by Articles 50-55 of the Family Code.

**Section 8. Protective Custody.** A child-party to a child marriage shall be given protective custody in accordance with the provisions of Republic Act No. 7610. The court may likewise issue a protection order to protect her from the facilitators of child marriage, which may include her parents or legal guardians.

**Section 9. Culture-sensitive programs and Services.** There shall be a comprehensive care and welfare program to be formulated by the Department of Social Welfare and Development in coordination with other government agencies identified herein as duty-bearers and with the concerned CSOs and NGOs. This shall be made and initiated by the DSWD within six (6) months from the effectivity of this Code to ensure the over-all support, health and development of the children. The said program shall be culturally-sensitive and shall take into account the specific needs of children of indigenous cultural communities and children in Muslim communities.

**Section 10. Duty-Bearers and Responsibilities.** In order to prevent and eventually end child marriages and protect the children from this form of abuse and exploitation, the following government offices shall be responsible to take the necessary action:



- a. **Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).** – Shall take the lead in the implementation of this Act and create programs that will address the prevalence of child marriage and provide appropriate services to children who were forced to enter into child marriage. It shall ensure the information drive in the marriage as a form of abuse and violence, its impacts and effects, there and guardians; and include the same in its existing programs such as pre-marriage counseling sessions, family development sessions, and parenting effectiveness seminar.
- b. **Council for the Welfare of children (CWC)** – Shall work closely with the DSWD in strengthening policies to prohibit and end child marriage. It shall include the advocacy to prevent child marriage in the Philippine plan of action to end violence against children.
- c. **Department of Justice (DOJ)**- Shall assume responsibility in ensuring that the penal provisions of this Act are carried out and provide access to justice and legal services to those who suffered the sequence of child marriage.
- d. **Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG).** Shall ensure that LGUS are monitoring the implementation of the law by maintaining a Children's Desk in all PNP headquarters and Barangay offices through the Local/Barangay Council for the Protection of Children.
- e. **Department of Education (DepEd)** – Shall include the discussion on the impact and effects of the child marriage in the comprehensive sexuality education curriculum.
- f. **Department of Health (DOH)** – Shall ensure access to health services for the prevention of child marriage and services for boys and girls who experienced child marriage.
- g. **Family And Executive Courts' Judges** – must undergo trainings on the impacts and effects of child marriage to the over-all health and development of children and shall ensure strict application and implementation of the law.
- h. **Philippine Commission on Women (PCW)** - Shall integrate dissemination of the provisions of this Act in programs on public awareness and behavior-change communications.
- i. **Commission on Human Rights (CHR)**- Shall monitor the implementation of this Act as Gender Ombud and through and through its Child Rights Center/Desk.
- j. **National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF)** – Shall include in its program of action the awareness of Muslim communities on the impacts and effects of child marriage in the over-all health and development of children, the provisions of this law; ensure the implementation of this Act; monitor and report cases of child marriages in the Communities of jurisdiction.

- k. **National Commission for Indigenous People (NCIP)**- Shall include in its program of action, national conferences and gatherings the awareness of the indigenous people communities on the impacts and effects of child marriage in the over-all health and development of children, the provisions of this law; ensure the implementation of this Act; monitor and report cases of child marriages in the communities of jurisdiction.

**Sec.11. Implementing Rules and Regulations.** Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Department of Social Welfare, The Department of Education and the Department of Health in coordination with other concerned government agencies and women and children organizations, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act. They shall likewise incorporate the resources for programs and services in their Annual Budget.

**Sec. 12. Repealing Clause.** All other laws, decrees, executive orders, issuances, rules, and regulations or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

**SEC 13. Separability Clause.**– If any part or provision of this Act shall be held unconstitutional or invalid, other provisions hereof which are not affected thereby shall continue to be in full force and effect.

**Sec. 13, Effectivity.** This Act shall take affect fifteen (15) days after is complete publication in the Official Gazette or in at least two (2) national papers of general circulation.

**Approved,**