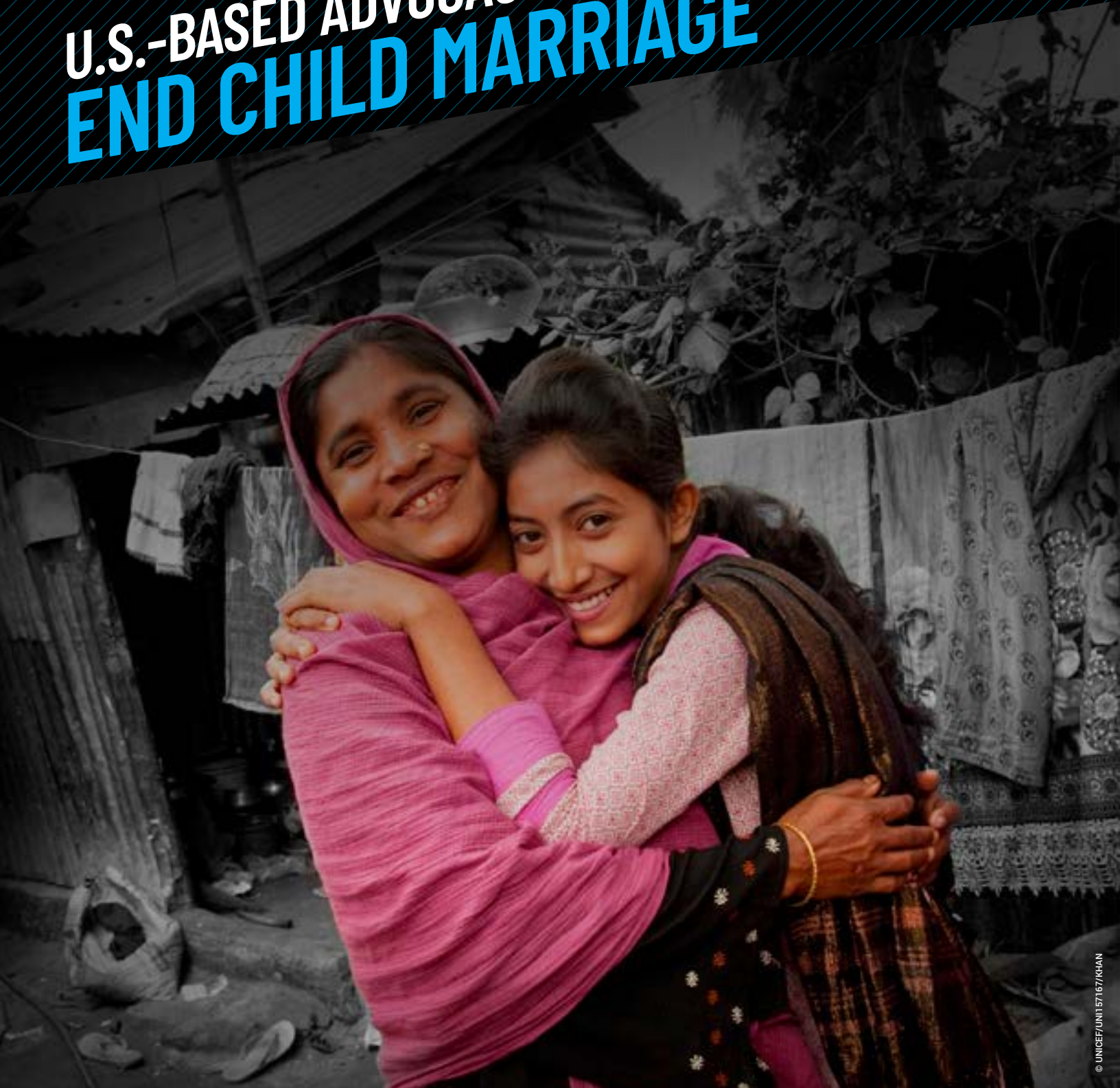




ZONTA
INTERNATIONAL
EMPOWERING WOMEN
THROUGH SERVICE & ADVOCACY

U.S.-BASED ADVOCACY TO END CHILD MARRIAGE



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For more information, visit act.unicefusa.org/childmarriage.

Advocacy to End Child Marriage Calls to Action for U.S.-Based Members

Change is already happening. The social and political will to end child marriage is stronger than ever – the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage is turning this commitment into accelerated action for girls. If we redouble our efforts, millions of girls will be prevented from becoming child brides.

Their education, health, childhood – their hope for their future will be secured. The Programme is transforming the girls themselves and also their families, societies and countries. Ending child marriage is within our reach – the time to act is now.

While the Global Programme focuses on the 12 countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage, we know that child marriage takes place all around the world, including in the United States. UNICEF USA is working with partners and volunteers to mobilize advocacy against child marriage, and we are calling on Zonta International to join these efforts!

Zonta members in the United States can use this as a guide when advocating on behalf of UNICEF and an end to child marriage.

CALLS TO ACTION

- **LEARN** more about child marriage laws (unchainedatlast.org/laws-to-end-child-marriage) in your own state; become knowledgeable on the issue.
- **TAKE ACTION** to urge your officials (act.unicefusa.org/childmarriage) to support or introduce legislation that would make the minimum age of marriage in your state 18 years old, **with no exceptions**.
- **MEET** with your elected officials to speak up about outdated child marriage laws that put your local youth at risk.
- **INVITE** elected officials to local community events that are focused on child marriage.
- **VISIT** UNICEF USA's Action Center (act.unicefusa.org) to learn more about UNICEF USA's advocacy priorities and how you can take action #ForEveryChild.
- **CONNECT** with your local UNICEF UNITE (unicefunite.org) Advocacy Lead to join forces and advocate together. To be connected to your local Advocacy Lead, email advocacy@unicefusa.org.

UNICEF's Stance

UNICEF's stance on child marriage is that marriage before the age of 18 is a fundamental violation of human rights. Many factors interact to place a girl at risk of marriage, including poverty, the perception that marriage will provide 'protection,' family honor, social norms, customary or religious laws that condone the practice, an inadequate legislative framework and the state of a country's civil registration system. Child marriage often compromises a girl's development by resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, interrupting her schooling, limiting her opportunities for career and vocational advancement and placing her at increased risk of domestic violence. Child marriage also affects boys, but to a lesser degree than girls.

Why reach out to elected officials?

- One of the most impactful ways to advocate to your elected officials is to attend in-person meetings and reach out via letters or petitions. This is a perfect opportunity for constituents to meet their elected officials and discuss policies and legislation that impact issues they care about. *Due to COVID-19, please practice social-distancing guidelines if and when arranging an in-person meeting.*
- Creating these connections is an extremely important aspect of advocacy work, as staffers and elected officials are much more receptive to constituents with whom they have a firm relationship.
- When meeting with a mayor, governor or congressperson, you don't necessarily need to have a specific legislation request. You can also ask your elected officials to introduce child marriage-based legislation or support policies that would combat the human rights violation.

Talking Points

- According to our coalition partner Unchained At Last, some 297,000 children, some as young as 12, were married in the U.S. between 2000 and 2018.
- Some 86% of the children wed were minor girls, on average marrying a man four years older. Some children were wed at an age, or with a spousal age difference, that constitutes statutory rape under their state's laws.
- New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Rhode Island and New York are the only six states in the U.S. that have banned child marriage before 18, with no exceptions.
- Child marriage impacts all communities in the U.S., not just children who live in rural or socio-economically disadvantaged areas.
- As of August 2021, all 44 other states allow people under the age of 18 to marry once they've obtained some combination of a judge's order, parental permission, premarital counseling or proof of pregnancy.
- As of August 2020, 10 states across the country do not set any age floor for marriage by statute and 5 additional states have a particularly low age floor (lower than age 16) according to our coalition partner Tahirih Justice Center.



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CHECKLISTS

Checklist for scheduling the meeting

- ❑ **START:** Submit an in-district meeting request via a form on the legislator's website or by email (check out our example below or refer to this example online ([Jeffries.house.gov/contact/request-a-meeting](https://jeffries.house.gov/contact/request-a-meeting))).
- ❑ **WITHIN TWO WEEKS:** Follow up by email or phone (cc advocacy@unicefusa.org on any communications with government offices).
- ❑ **AFTER THREE WEEKS:** Follow up by phone.
- ❑ **FINISH LINE:** Secure the meeting or prioritize a different office.

Checklist for preparing for the meeting

- ❑ **ONE WEEK OUT:** Confirm meeting attendees; follow-up with the office to confirm meeting details.
- ❑ **THREE DAYS OUT:** Participate in a prep call with the UNICEF USA Advocacy & Engagement Team. Email advocacy@unicefusa.org and let them know you have set up a meeting!
- ❑ **DAY-OF:** Meet as a group 45 minutes prior to answer any final questions (or 15 minutes prior if it is an online meeting).
- ❑ **MEETING:** Rock it out!

Checklist for meeting follow-up

- ❑ **DAY-OF:** Post a thank you message and your group photo on social media (tag @UNICEFUSA and @ZontaUSA). Check below and on our social media guide for a few examples.
- ❑ **WITHIN TWO DAYS:** Send a thank you email or note to staff and elected official.

Social Media Posts

Please check out the Social Media Guide in the **Child Marriage Toolkit** for more global advocacy examples. Below are specific posts related to the issues in the U.S.

- Child marriage is happening right now in the U.S., and that's not okay. Here's what you need to know to help fight this human rights violation: act.unicefusa.org/childmarriage
- FACT: Approximately 297 million children were married in the U.S. from 2000 to 2018. Learn how you can combat child marriage to ensure a child their rights aren't taken away: act.unicefusa.org/childmarriage
- Child marriage is unacceptable in all cases. Find out what you can do to fight this injustice **#EndChildMarriage #18noExceptions** act.unicefusa.org/childmarriage

Tips

- When meeting with government officials and staffers, you do so as a volunteer representative of the organization and should **uphold our commitment to being bipartisan and nonpartisan** in all interactions with government officials. The facts and talking points included should be the basis of the conversation.
- **Be sure to ask for the contact information of the individual with whom you met.** If you happen to meet with the government official personally, at a local, state, or federal level, collect the contact information of the legislative aide that covers that



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specific area of work for the office, or a staffer who may have joined the meeting.

- **Thank the individual for making time to meet with you**, and let that person know that both you, UNICEF USA and Zonta International would like to maintain an ongoing dialogue with him or her on issues affecting UNICEF and the well-being of the world's children. And before you leave, ask for a picture! Be sure to post it to your various social networks.
- **Remember that our message is positive**, helping children around the world survive and thrive. Stick to the positive message.

Meeting Tips

- Begin with a **strong introduction** that includes your name, the organization you represent and the total number of advocates on your team for the meeting.
- **Know your constituency** especially if you belong to the Representative's district! Compile a few local connections you have in the district that may be of interest to the elected official. This could include points about the official's alma mater or a reference to past occupations or work.



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- **State your passion** for Zonta and UNICEF's work and the advocacy issues you will be discussing with the Representative's office at the meeting. For example, how long have you been a member of Zonta? Are you involved with issues affecting children outside of Zonta in your community/school/workplace? How long have you been supporting UNICEF's work? Why is Zonta partnering with UNICEF USA?
- Offer up a personal anecdote. **Telling your own story** can be an incredibly powerful tool to shape your experience at a Congressional meeting. To be most persuasive, ensure you have a clearly defined beginning, middle and end. Thank the representative for their past work on the issue and stress the urgent need for further action. Practice makes perfect!
- Include pertinent **statistics, successes, and other key points** as needed about Zonta and UNICEF's role and work on the issue. You don't have to be an expert and we don't expect you to memorize everything but do refrain from reading off a script. Use this time to communicate the great impact UNICEF and Zonta have and how it relates to your advocacy priorities.
- **Make the request.** This is perhaps the most important part of your meeting! Ensure you have a clear request that states what kind of further action you would like the elected official to take on the issue.

Outreach Letter

One of the first calls to action you and your Zonta club can take is to send a personal letter in the mail or in an email to your local representatives and/or senator. Use the first letter/email below as a template and make sure all your club members sign it!

Sample Email to Offices

If you and your club are looking to meet face to face with your local representative and/or senator, use the second letter/email template below as a guide.

Thank You Email to Offices

Once you have met with your elected officials it is a nice gesture to send them a thank you note, as well as a friendly reminder on what was discussed and any next steps that should be taken. The third letter/email is an example that you can use as a guide.



Dear **[insert elected official/staffer name]**,

Worldwide, more than 650 million women and girls alive today were married before their 18th birthday. Some of them are right here in the United States.

The United Nations and UNICEF call child marriage a harmful practice and a violation of child rights and believe that marriage under age 18 should be prohibited in all circumstances. The risks are just as real for child marriages in the U.S. as they are in developing countries.

In all cases, child marriage has negative impacts on children. It leads to separation from family and friends, lack of freedom to interact with peers and participate in community activities, and decreased opportunities for education and economic participation. Because child marriage often results in child pregnancy, girls married at a young age face serious health risks. Teenage girls are much more likely to die in pregnancy and childbirth than women in their twenties. In addition, childhood pregnancy increases risks of nutritional deficiencies for both mother and baby, with permanent consequences.

For the sake of protecting children from abuse and protecting their futures, I believe that every single U.S. state must take legislative steps to ban child marriage.

We are calling on you, our elected officials, to support legislation that bans child marriage, with no possible exceptions.

Signature,

[Insert name(s)]



Dear **[insert elected official/staffer name]**,

I am contacting you today to schedule a meeting with **[Member of Congress/ Staffer/Mayor/Governor Name]** on **[Day of the Week]**, **[Month]** **[Day]** to discuss the detrimental practice of child marriage in the United States.

I kindly request that this meeting be scheduled in the **morning/afternoon** at the **congressman/woman's** office in the district.

I am a constituent of **[Representative/Senator]** and will be leading a group of Zonta International members and UNICEF supporters from the area. As a Zontian and supporter of UNICEF USA, I believe in putting children first. Over the course of 75 years, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has helped save more children's lives than any other humanitarian organization in the world. Zonta International and UNICEF USA have been partners in this work for almost 50 years.

In our meeting with **[elected official name here]**, we hope to discuss the **[senator's/representative's]** support for legislation that would ban child marriage and allow no exceptions. In the event that the official is unavailable to meet, our group would gladly meet with an available staff member. You can follow up with me at **[email address]** and/or **[###-###-####]**. I look forward to being in touch with you.

Thank you for your time.

Best wishes,

[Insert name(s)]



Dear **[insert elected official/staffer name]**,

It was a great pleasure meeting with you **[or your office]** as a supporter of Zonta International and UNICEF USA on **[Day of the Week], [Month] [Day], [Year]**.

In our visit, we discussed the ongoing work of Zonta International and UNICEF USA and their advocacy around issues of child marriage in the United States. Specifically, we emphasized the importance of banning child marriage across all states, with no legal exceptions. Zonta International and UNICEF USA supporters firmly believe this will protect children who are at risk of being married before their 18th birthday. Changing these outdated laws will allow Zonta International and UNICEF to continue to put vulnerable children first, acting on behalf of their well-being and protection across the globe.

Again, we'd like to thank you for meeting with us as Zonta International and UNICEF USA supporters regarding this critical issue. We look forward to staying in touch throughout the year. Please do not hesitate to contact me at **[email address]** or **[###-###-####]** if I can be of any assistance or if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

[Insert name(s)]