



Family Violence Law Center

470 27th Street, Oakland, CA 94612

An Open Letter to Governor Newsom: Marriage Should Be a Choice For All; Sign AB 2534 and AB 1267 Today

Dear Governor Newsom,

What did it feel like to fall in love with your wife? What emotions ran through you when you promised to love, honor, and cherish her, freely and willingly? I bet those are some of your best memories. I have thought about those moments a lot, because I never had them.

I was 19 when I was forced into a marriage I did not choose. Nothing about that day was an option for me. I wore a blue and red beaded dress someone else picked. I never looked at the person beside me and said, *yes, this is who I want to spend my life with*.

Back then, I thought my experience was something I would have to live with. I didn't know the law could, or should, have protected me. When you signed [AB 1134](#)¹ last year, you recognized something survivors have always known: forced marriage does not stop being forced, simply because a marriage certificate has been signed. Trauma does not operate on a timer. When you signed that law, survivors of forced marriage exhaled for the first time in years.

Now, with [AB 2534](#)² on your desk, you have another chance to prove what we can do when lawmakers listen to survivors about ways California law is falling short. This bill, introduced by Assemblymember Ash Kalra, would allow a person who is currently in, or at risk of being placed in a forced marriage, to seek a protective order and stop the marriage before it takes place.

This matters because coercion rarely begins at the altar. A passport may already have been taken. Threats may have been made. The person may have been isolated from friends, school, or work and terrified about what will happen if they say no. The law shouldn't wait for the wedding to happen before it intervenes.

You also have [AB 1267](#)³ awaiting your signature. Introduced by Assemblymember Gail Pellerin, this bill bans child marriage entirely.

¹This bill would, commencing January 1, 2027, authorize a court to grant permission, upon a showing of good cause, for a party to proceed with a petition for nullity of marriage that is filed beyond the relevant filing period if the party's consent to the marriage was obtained by force. The bill would require the Judicial Council to modify or develop the forms necessary to implement those provisions. https://calmatters.digitaldemocracy.org/bills/ca_202520260ab1134

²The bill would provide that conduct undertaken to compel, attempt to compel, prepare for, or facilitate a forced marriage constitutes disturbing the peace of the other party, as specified. The bill would authorize a court to grant relief regardless of whether a marriage has occurred or whether a purported marriage would be legally valid in this state or any other jurisdiction. https://calmatters.digitaldemocracy.org/bills/ca_202520260ab2534

³This bill would repeal the authorization for a person under 18 years of age to be issued a marriage license or to establish a domestic partnership, thereby prohibiting a person under 18 years of age from being issued a marriage license or from establishing a domestic partnership. https://calmatters.digitaldemocracy.org/bills/ca_202520260ab1267



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It recognizes that allowing children to enter into a binding contract—one that often leads to physical sexual, and financial abuse they struggle to recover from as adults—amounts to state-sanctioned child abuse.

Some people say that 16- or 17-year-olds should be allowed to marry under certain circumstances. But I keep coming back to one question: why should any child enter into a legal commitment that can shape the rest of their life? There are things we should never ask children to carry, and marriage is one of them.

Governor, I am not asking you to sign these bills because of what happened to me. I am asking you to sign them because of what could happen to someone else.

There are young people in California today who are afraid to say no. There are parents who think they have the right to make this decision for their children. There are survivors who do not yet have the words to describe what is happening to them. They deserve a law that sees them and will protect them, today.

When you signed AB 1134, you showed survivors that our stories can change the law and help people. With AB 2534 and AB 1267, you can give other survivors the same empowerment and even stronger protections.

Governor Newsom, you got to fall in love and choose your wife. You got to ask her to marry you, and she got to say yes. That should not be a privilege reserved for some people. It should be the starting point for every marriage.

Signing AB 1134 was the first step. Keep California moving forward and sign AB 2534 and AB 1267 today. Ensure every Californian can have the thing that makes marriage worth celebrating: **the freedom to choose.**

Sincerely,

Sadia Khan