

Concerns about the Rep. Ros-Lehtinen Substitute Child Marriage Bill

We sincerely appreciate Rep. Ros-Lehtinen's engagement in the issue of child marriage, and welcome dialogue with her and her staff about the causes, consequences and solutions to child marriage. However, there are several concerns about the substitute child marriage bill proposed by Rep. Ros-Lehtinen: the lack of activities to combat child marriage, lack of research and data collection, as well as prospects for final passage this year are of particular concern.

Due to these concerns, spelled out in more detail below, we cannot support changing S 987 to the version proposed by Rep. Ros-Lehtinen.

Lack of Activities

- The substitute bill removes Sec. 5(e) from the Senate-passed S. 987, a section of the bill that authorizes specific activities to combat child marriage, such as support for girls' primary education, support for community-based activities to address the practice of child marriage, support legal literacy programs to enforce existing laws, and reducing violence against girls. The activities listed in S. 987 are the result of a decade of research on successful implementation efforts, and many have proven successful in raising the age of marriage.
- Without such activities, the bill becomes merely a strategy with no actual implementation. And without implementation of a strategy, the bill will have an extraordinarily limited impact.
- S. 987 authorizes specific activities using existing resources to combat the practice, **therefore no new money is authorized.**
- A comprehensive and coordinated approach is needed to maximize effectiveness and impact, including through integrating child marriage in existing U.S. foreign assistance programs as well as scaling up proven interventions.
- U.S. support for these activities will make current investments in areas such as health, education, and economic development more effective, which would decrease overall costs and needs for these activities over the long-term.

Research and Data Collection

- Bodies of research and data have guided the development of this legislation. Moving forward, continued research, monitoring, and evaluation of current and future investments are needed to ensure the most effective programs are invested in and scaled up for maximum impact.

- Research and data collection are critical to understanding the practice and prevalence, measuring impact, and monitoring the effectiveness of U.S. programming and investments in these areas.

Conclusion

Because we don't have these key elements that are critical for making gains in the lives of girls and the fact that S. 987 garnered unanimous support on Dec 1, 2010, we continue to support efforts to move forward with the more robust version of the bill passed by the Senate.