

R.I.S.E. KENTUCKY COALITION

Reclaim Innocence | Stop Exploitation

HISTORY:

From 2000 through 2015, **nearly 11,000 cases of child marriage** occurred in KY. The youngest was **13, pregnant, and married to a 33 year old man**. In 2018, KY took a historic step towards stopping this form of child abuse by ending child marriage for all minors under 17 under Senate Bill 48. The bill also established that **17 year olds must have judicial oversight** with criteria to be assessed in order to marry - one of those criteria was setting **a cap of 4 years age difference** between the 17 year old and party they would be marrying. The law went into effect **July 14, 2018***.

Unfortunately, we have found some officials are **not honoring the law**. The Office of Vital Statistics **initially refused to provide the name of the counties** where the non-complaint cases occurred. Their refusal was **in violation of the Open Records Act**, which allows for county data to be provided as part of marriage records. This raised concerns over not only a legal obligation for transparency, but also **ethical obligations to the safety** of children in Kentucky.

Furthermore, the Office of Vital Statistics **disclosed they had to review over 2,000 records manually** to confirm the ages as this information was not captured appropriately in their system of record. The issue could not have been addressed if we do not have access to **WHERE** it is occurring and if counties are not documenting records accurately and appropriately.

After going public with the illegal marriages and OVS's initial refusal to comply, the data was provided and now sits with the Attorney General's Office to determine next steps.

CURRENT FINDINGS:

Data from *July 14, 2018** - December 31, 2024:

- Across Kentucky, **141 minors** have been married since the new law took effect.
- **17 of these were non-compliant** with current statutes.
- Some of the non-compliant marriages **violated both child marriage AND age of consent** laws

Examples of Non-Compliance:

- In 2023, a marriage occurred between a **17 and 29 year old**
- Some counties had **multiple violations** of the law
- A total of **6** 16 year olds have been married in this timespan, including in 2024

NEXT STEPS:

The **R.I.S.E. Kentucky Coalition** is comprised of stakeholders across the Commonwealth focused on protecting children from exploitation and ending child marriage.

In the 2026 General Assembly, we **will lobby for legislation that puts an end to child marriage** in our Commonwealth once and for all. We will also continue to follow with the AG's office on the status of holding offenders accountable.

Join us at [RISEcoalition.co](https://risecoalition.co) to stop predators from hiding their offenses behind a marriage license.