Zonta International, an organization dedicated to advancing the status of women, reports, “Child marriage is a global violation of human rights that can be found in cultures, religions, ethnicities and countries around the world. “

Here in Colorado, it is surprising to learn that child marriage is still an issue for adolescent girls and the depleted opportunities for them to lead an empowered life. Colorado teen girls that marry before 18 represent 4.4% of the 15-17 year old population, with the youngest child being 15 years old. This was 4813 Colorado girls.

**Consequences of under-age marriage include:**

A 70-80% chance of getting divorced.

3 times more likely to be beaten by their spouse than those who marry at 21 or older.

Divorced teen mothers are more likely to end up living in poverty than teen mothers who did not marry.

It is unacceptable in Colorado’s contemporary time, with so many resources and supports available, that a young girl under 18 can be subjected to a marriage she does not have the emotional capacity to understand.

It is a mistake to lock a young girl into a commitment that will lead her to drop out of school and out of any opportunity for a safe, successful life for herself or any children she may have.

It is negligent for Colorado to turn its back on young women of promise who need more resources and education, not less.

It is imperative Colorado strengthens the systems that deliver services to adolescent girls.

Zonta supports changing marriage laws so that the minimum age for marriage is 18 years old – period. No exceptions.

It is critical for Colorado to make this happen.