

U.S. Sen. Johnson: Joins U.S. Sens. Ernst, Cotton to introduce legislation to combat child marriage immigration loophole

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WASHINGTON – Following the release of a Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee [majority staff report on how current U.S. immigration laws encourage child marriages](#) earlier this year, U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, and U.S. Sens. Joni Ernst (R-Iowa) and Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) introduced legislation to close a loophole in our immigration laws that can be exploited to enable child marriages. The bill prohibits spousal and fiancé immigration benefits if one of the applying parties is under the age of 18.

“A visa to enter the United States is a privilege, and this straightforward reform will help close a loophole that can lead to the abuse and exploitation of children,” Sen. Johnson said. **“I hope my colleagues will join me to advance this commonsense legislation.”**

“Child marriage is a serious problem which puts young girls, in particular, at risk,” Sen. Ernst said. **“With more than 8,600 such marriages granted over a ten year period, we must address this massive loophole in our immigration system with common sense solutions, and that’s exactly what**

our legislation does: require both parties be 18 years-old in order to obtain spousal immigration benefits.”

“Child marriage, almost always between a male adult and a female minor, can rob young girls of their education, personal development, and physical and mental health,” said Sen. Cotton. **“Unfortunately, U.S. law currently grants immigration benefits to individuals seeking adult-minor unions. Our immigration laws shouldn’t be used to encourage child marriage, and our bill would put an end to this exploitative practice.”**

Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.) is the author of the companion version of the bill in the House of Representatives:

“The committee’s eye-opening report shows the gruesome reality that people manipulate our immigration system to enter into child marriages,” Rep. Sensenbrenner said. **“I’m proud to lead the effort in the House to stop the exploitation of children through our immigration laws and am grateful to Senator Johnson for his work uncovering this disturbing information.”**

Key findings from the staff report that spurred this legislation include:

- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) approved immigration petitions for 8,686 spouses and fiancés in marriages involving minors from FY2007 to FY2017. In 95 percent of the cases, the younger person was a girl.
- USCIS awarded petitions to people with significant age differences, including a 71-year-old U.S. citizen’s petition for a 17-year-old spouse from Guatemala and a 14-year-old’s petition for a 48-year-old spouse from Jamaica.
- USCIS approved 149 petitions involving a minor with an adult spouse or fiancé who was more than 40 years old.
- USCIS awarded green cards to 4,749 minors in the United States on spousal or fiancé visas, allowing them to adjust status to become lawful permanent residents from FY2007 to FY2017.

Presently, under the Immigration and Nationality Act (“INA”), a U.S. child may petition for a visa for a spouse or fiancé living in another country, and a U.S. adult may petition for a visa for a minor spouse or fiancé living abroad. The committee’s recent report found that from 2007 to 2017 there were more than 5,500 cases of adults petitioning for a spouse or fiancé visa for a minor, and nearly 3,000 cases of

a minor petitioning for a spouse or fiancé visa for an adult.

The bill text can be found [here](#).