



WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senator Mark Spreitzer
FROM: Jillian Slight, managing legislative analyst
DATE: October 17, 2025
SUBJECT: Marriage of minors

You asked us to provide information about marriage of minors in Wisconsin, including data relating to frequency. This memorandum provides a brief background, summarizes current Wisconsin law, and supplies data about marriage of minors in Wisconsin.

Background

Marriage of minors, or “child marriage,” predates the founding of the United States and persists today.¹ Recent reporting has drawn attention to the efforts of groups like Unchained at Last that seek to end the practice and lobby state legislatures to this end.² Specifically, these groups target existing laws that enable minors to marry with the consent of their parents, a practice that advocacy groups allege results in coerced marriages that harm girls especially.³ Scholarship on the subject, though scant, bolsters these claims, identifying correlations between child marriage among girls and poor mental health outcomes, diminished educational opportunities, and higher rates of poverty.⁴

The Tahirih Justice Center, a group lobbying against child marriage, provides a [useful map](#) relating to marriage age requirements in 50 states, last updated in September 2025. The map indicates which states permit a 16- or 17-year-old to marry, as well as which states have no “age

¹ Nicholas Syrett, *American Child Bride: A History of Minors and Marriage in the United States* (Raleigh, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

² Anjali Sui, Dan Nolan, and Chris Amico, “[Child Marriage in America: By the Numbers](#),” PBS Frontline, July 6, 2017, <http://apps.frontline.org>.

³ See, for example, “[Forced Marriage. Arranged Marriage. Child Marriage.](#),” Unchained at Last, accessed Oct. 15, 2025, <http://www.unchainedatlast.org>. See also “[Forced Marriage](#),” Tahirih Justice Center, accessed Oct. 15, 2025, <https://www.tahirih.org>.

⁴ Yann Le Strat, Caroline Dubertret, and Bernard Le Foll, “Child Marriage in the United States and Its Association With Mental Health in Women,” *Pediatrics* 128 (September 2011), 524-530; Alissa Koski and Jody Heymann, “Child Marriage in the United States: How Common Is the Practice, and Which Children Are at Greatest Risk?,” *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 50 (June 2018), 59-65.

floor” (i.e., a minimum age at which a person may marry). It also specifies which states prohibit marriage before age 18 under all circumstances.

Wisconsin law

Wis. Stat. § [765.02 \(1\)](#) states that “every person who has attained 18 years of age may marry if otherwise competent.” Wis. Stat. § [765.02 \(2\)](#) creates an exception for those under the age of 18 by allowing a 16- or 17-year-old to marry “with the written consent of the person’s parents, guardian, custodian . . . , or parent having the actual care, custody and control of the person.” The couple applying for a marriage license must submit this documentation of consent along with other required materials to the county clerk.

Data

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) maintains records of marriages and divorces and compiles related data annually.⁵ Table 1 and chart 1 present data pertaining to the marriage of 16- and 17-year-olds in the state. Overall, these figures confirm national trends indicating a consistent and sustained decline in marriage of minors. Table 2 and chart 2 present data pertaining to the spouses of minors in the state—i.e., how many minors are married to other minors and how many minors are married to adults.

Table 1. Number of marriages in Wisconsin involving a 16- or 17-year old, since 1995.

Year	Sixteen-year-olds	Seventeen-year-olds
2024	8	19
2023	6	14
2022	3	11
2021	8	22
2020	5	13
2019	6	12
2018	9	28
2017	12	24
2016	20	28
2015	16	33
2014	17	50
2013	25	47
2012	30	56
2011	29	66
2010	40	87

⁵ “[Marriages and Divorces](#),” Wis. Dept. of Health Services, accessed Oct. 15, 2025, <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov>.

Year	Sixteen-year-olds	Seventeen-year-olds
2009	61	97
2008	71	117
2007	87	117
2006	79	131
2005	83	143
2004	95	143
2003	110	160
2002	113	168
2001	123	152
2000	121	190
1999	165	190
1998	192	217
1997	166	219
1996	178	242
1995	186	235

Chart 1. Number of marriages in Wisconsin involving a 16- or 17-year old, 1995–2020.

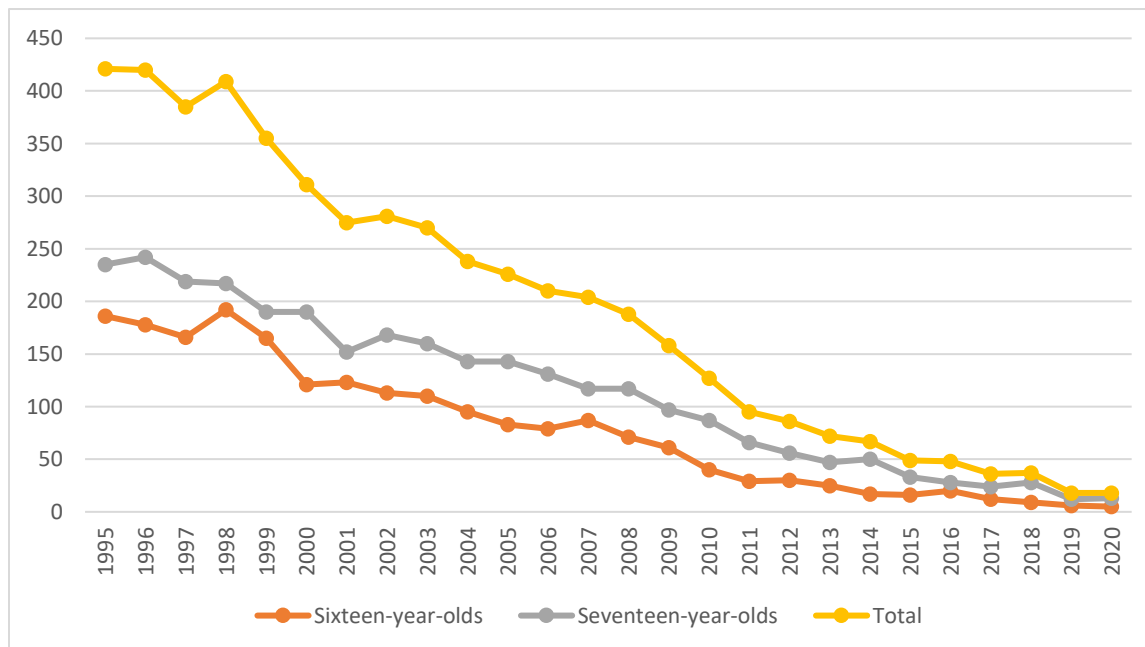
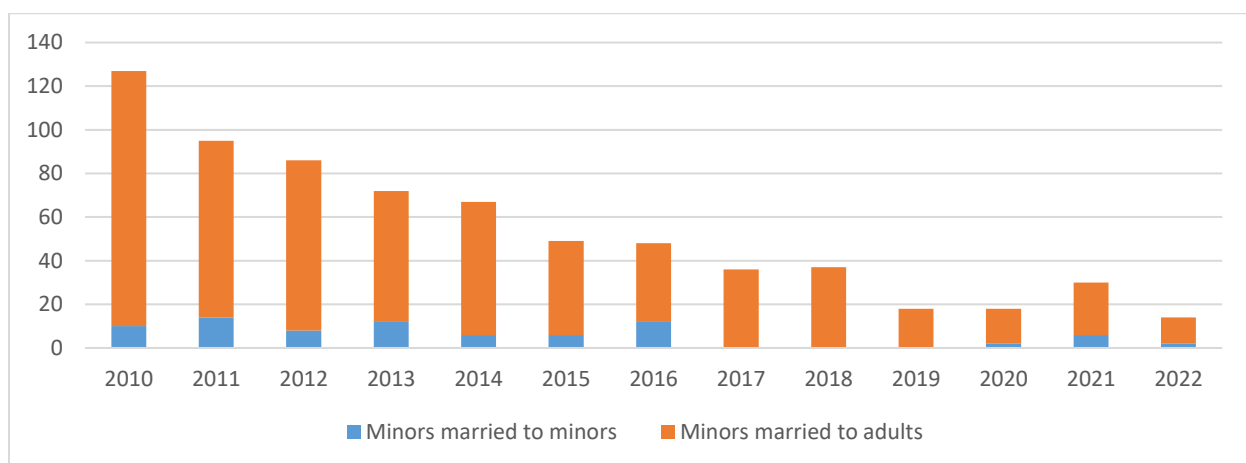


Table 2. Minors married to other minors and adults in Wisconsin, 2010–2022.

Year	Minors married to other minors	Minors married to adults
2022	2	12

Year	Minors married to other minors	Minors married to adults
2021	6	24
2020	2	16
2019	0	18
2018	0	37
2017	0	36
2016	12	36
2015	6	43
2014	6	61
2013	12	60
2012	8	78
2011	14	81
2010	10	117

Chart 2. Minors married to other minors and adults in Wisconsin, 2010–2022.



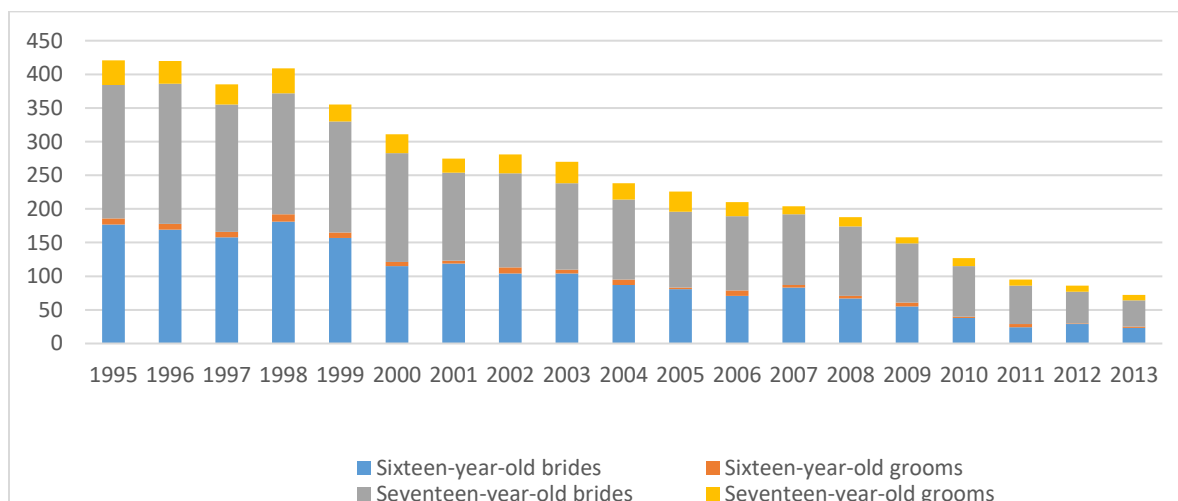
Prior to 2014, DHS categorized persons marrying not only by age, but also by gender. Table 3 and chart 3 present marriage by minors, categorized by gender, between 1995 and 2013. These figures confirm a nationwide tendency for girls to marry as minors more frequently than boys.

Table 3. Gender of 16- and 17-year-olds married in Wisconsin, 1995–2013.

Year	Sixteen-year-old brides	Sixteen-year-old grooms	Seventeen-year-old brides	Seventeen-year-old grooms
2013	23	2	39	8
2012	29	1	47	9
2011	24	5	57	9

Year	Sixteen-year-old brides	Sixteen-year-old grooms	Seventeen-year-old brides	Seventeen-year-old grooms
2010	38	2	75	12
2009	55	6	88	9
2008	67	4	103	14
2007	83	4	105	12
2006	71	8	110	21
2005	81	2	113	30
2004	87	8	119	24
2003	104	6	128	32
2002	104	9	140	28
2001	119	4	131	21
2000	115	6	162	28
1999	157	8	165	25
1998	181	11	180	37
1997	158	8	189	30
1996	169	9	208	34
1995	177	9	198	37

Chart 3. Gender of 16- and 17-year-olds married in Wisconsin, 1995–2013.



I hope this information is helpful. If you have any follow-up questions or additional research requests, please contact me at jillian.slaight@legis.wisconsin.gov or (608) 504-5884.