

## McCollum legislation fights child marriage

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Pictured: Congresswoman Betty McCollum and Ambassador Melanne Verveer visit Grameen and BRAC projects at Shingair village, Manikganj earlier this year.

Washington, DC –Congresswoman Betty McCollum (D-MN) and Congressman Aaron Schock (R-IL) have once again introduced legislation to stem the devastating impact of child marriage on young girls in developing countries. An estimated 10 million girls are married before the age of 18 each year, some as young as 7. The McCollum-Schock International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act, H.R. 6087, promotes and protects the rights of girls in the developing world.

H.R. 6087 declares child marriage to be a human rights abuse, establishes a strategy to prevent child marriage and promote the empowerment of girls, integrates the issue of preventing child marriage into existing US development programs, and requires that relevant agencies collect and make available data on the rates of child marriage and its impact on meeting key development goals.

"Child marriage condemns tens of millions of young girls in developing countries to a life of poverty and suffering," said Congresswoman McCollum. "The United States must be a leader in ending this human rights abuse. The Senate has done its job. Now it is up to the House to pass this bill."

"This is a tragedy that is happening on an epic scale around the world, and this issue doesn't

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receive the attention in the U.S. that it deserves," said Congressman Aaron Schock. "On my trip with CARE to Ethiopia two years ago, I saw first-hand how child marriage devastates young girls physically and emotionally, and destroys any future economic opportunity they once possessed. Girls whose bodies are not yet fully grown having babies frequently causes fistulas, which is a vicious medical problem that leads to incontinence and other horrific problems at a very young age. Children having babies accelerates the cycle of poverty and instability. This crisis has moral, economic and national security consequences for our country."

Companion legislation passed the U.S. Senate recently led by Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME).

Earlier this year, Congresswoman McCollum traveled to Bangladesh to assess U.S.-funded initiatives that impact the health, education, and economic security of women and girls, especially efforts to prevent child marriage. She was joined on the trip by Ambassador Melanne Verveer, U.S. Ambassador-at-large for Global Women's Issues. Millions of girls in Bangladesh are vulnerable to child marriage. While in Bangladesh, Congresswoman McCollum met with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Mohamed Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank, and visited the [Asian University for Women](#) in Chittagong to meet with young female leaders pursuing college degrees.

In September 2010, Congressman Aaron Schock traveled with CARE on a learning tour to Ethiopia. The trip focused on the issue of maternal health, and the issue of child marriage was often raised at many of the sites visited. In some parts of the country, over half the girls are married by the age of 15 and they are expected to have children the following year. Schock met many young girls, some as young as nine, who fled marriage and were trying to survive in Addis Ababa. During the visit, Schock visited a program at a community center called Biruh Tefsu, meaning "Brighter Future" in Ahmaric in Addis Ababa. As of 2010, this program has helped more than 15,000 girls from the ages of 7 to 24 by providing health information (topics include HIV prevention, sexual exploitation and abuse). Many of these girls had fled from rural areas to the city to avoid an arranged marriage. Schock also visited the surgical ward of Hamlin Fistula Hospital. He later mentioned his visit on the House floor – [see video](#) .

The hospital, which has been operating for nearly four decades, has treated over 30,000 women -- many of them girls -- who had received operations on their fistulas, a birth canal injury

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often caused by obstructed labor. The hospital provides free fistula repair surgery to about 2,500 women each year.