

EDITOR, NEWS DESK

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**PERAK MARRIAGE INCENTIVE MUST NOT REWARD CHILD MARRIAGE,
SAY CHILDREN COMMISSIONERS**

KUALA LUMPUR (30 AUGUST 2026) - The Children Commissioners (CC), Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM), take note of media reports regarding the Perak State Government's proposal to introduce a RM500 *First-Time Marriage Incentive* for youths aged between 15 and 35, which is proposed for consideration under the Perak State Budget 2027.

The CC acknowledge and appreciate the Perak State Government's intention to assist young people in addressing the financial and social challenges associated with starting a family. However, the CC are of the view that any form of marriage incentive should not include children or individuals below the age of 18.

The CC recognize that a person aged 15 may fall within the definition of "youth" under certain youth development policies or legislation. However, from a child rights perspective and under Section 2 of Child Act 2001, a person below the age of 18 is a child. Being categorised as a "youth" should not therefore diminish nor override the need for children to receive the special protection afforded to them under child rights standards.

The CC are concerned that including children aged 15 to 17 among potential beneficiaries of a marriage incentive could send a policy message that is inconsistent with efforts to prevent and eliminate child marriage. While the intended purpose of the incentive is to ease the financial burden of young couples, providing a financial benefit specifically linked to marriage may indirectly create a perception that marriage during childhood is accepted, supported or encouraged.

Children should not be incentivized to marry

Child marriage can have far-reaching implications for children's rights and well-being, including their education, health, development, safety, autonomy, psychosocial well-being and future opportunities. Consequently, policies and programmes that affect children should be assessed through the lens of the best interests of the child, including consideration of both direct and indirect impact on their lives.

In this regard, the CC call for the principle of the *best interests of the child* to be given primary consideration in the finalisation of any proposal relating to marriage incentives. Children must also be given an opportunity to express their views and have those views be taken into account in matters affecting their lives.

Consistency with the policy on compulsory secondary education

The CC further believe that the proposal should be considered within the context of Malaysia's recent strengthening of its education framework. Malaysia has extended compulsory education to the secondary level through amendments to the Education Act 1996 (Act 550), reflecting the country's commitment to ensuring that children remain in the education system and are not left behind after completing primary education. Upper secondary education covers those aged 16 to 17. The proposed inclusion of individuals aged 15 to 17 in a marriage incentive scheme should therefore be carefully considered, as the same age group remains within the period of secondary education.

The CC are of the view that if the proposed *First-Time Marriage Incentive* proceeds, eligibility should be restricted to individuals aged 18 and above. This would help ensure that the assistance provided is consistent with a child rights-based approach and efforts to prevent child marriage.

**MEDIA STATEMENT
THE OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER OF THE
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF MALAYSIA (SUHAKAM)**

The CC further recommend that social support for children below the age of 18 who are at risk of marriage due to economic hardship should be provided before marriage is even considered. Poverty and low household income have been identified as common drivers contributing to child marriage in Malaysia. Government support and intervention ought to be in place sooner to circumvent consideration of marriage as a potential solution to families' economic deprivation.

Such assistance could be directed towards high-risk families through financial support, measures to ensure that children remain in education, school assistance, access to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), social services and family-based interventions. The objective should be to ensure that children have meaningful alternatives to marriage and are able to continue learning, developing their skills and building their future.

Amend minimum age of marriage

The CC also urge the Perak State Government to consider legislative reform to establish 18 as the minimum age of marriage for both Muslim males and females in Perak. At present, section 8 of the Islamic Family Law Enactment (Perak) 2004 provides for a minimum age of 18 for males and 16 for females, while marriage below those ages may be permitted with the written permission of a Syariah Judge. The CC recommend that the minimum age of marriage be set uniformly at 18 for both males and females.

If a judicial exception mechanism for individuals below the age of 18 is retained, it should be genuinely exceptional, determined by a Syariah Judge and subject to a strict assessment based on the JKSM Standard Operating Procedure for Applications for Under-age Marriage. The assessment should include, among other matters, the child's welfare, education, health, psychological well-being and socioeconomic circumstances.

The CC are of the view that any decision concerning an application for marriage below the age of 18 must be guided by the best interests of the child and to avoid the consideration of marriage as a response to poverty, family pressure, pregnancy, social stigma or other circumstances without first examining whether the child can be adequately protected through alternative interventions.

The appropriate approach is to support adults who wish to build a family while protecting children from being pushed or encouraged into marriage prematurely.

The CC further urge that the proposed age eligibility be reviewed before the proposal is finalised or considered under the Perak State Budget 2027.

The CC stand ready to work with the Perak State Government to ensure that policies and programmes concerning young people are developed through a child rights-based approach, giving due consideration to the best interests of children and ensuring that every child has the opportunity to grow, learn, develop and realise their full potential without being encouraged or pressured to enter into marriage while still a child.

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**Children's Commissioners (CC)
Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM)
30 August 2026**