



**Testimony of the
Commission on Women, Children & Seniors
Commission on Equity & Opportunity
Submitted to the Judiciary Committee
February 15, 2019**

RE: S.B. 505; An Act Prohibiting Female Genital Mutilation

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Ranking and other distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Commissions on Women, Children & Seniors and Equity & Opportunity (CWCS) on the above referenced bill.

My name is Steven Hernández, Executive Director of the Commissions.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is sometimes referred to in the literature as female circumcision, but this practice is not comparable to male circumcision at all. This practice involves the removal of or damage to normally functioning sexual organs and is a form of gender-based violence.

The CDC estimates that there are 513,000 women and girls in the US who have suffered from or are at risk of FGM. Connecticut needs to combat these staggering numbers by joining 28 other US states in banning FGM.

According to the World Health Organization, FGM has no health benefits. Moreover, the removal of or damage to healthy genital tissue interferes with the natural functioning of the body and may cause several immediate and long-term health consequences. Girls and women who have undergone FGM are therefore at risk of suffering from its complications throughout their lives. In addition to adverse physical effects, damaging psychological impacts and trauma can occur as a result of even minimally-invasive forms of FGM.

FGM violates a series of well-established human rights principles, including the principles of equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex, and the right to freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, as well as the rights of the child. Some consider FGM to be a

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religious or cultural practice, and while it is important to respect different cultural backgrounds and religious beliefs, our Constitutional rights protect each of us from violence, abuse, or oppression. FGM is not particular to any religious group, nor prescribed by any faith. Though FGM has been practiced by some religious sects, there is no major religion that requires FGM.

Our nearby states, New York, New Jersey, and New Hampshire have all passed legislation prohibiting FGM. These three states have very similar legislation, however, they all dive deeper into the issue by also prohibiting the removal or trafficking of girls to other states or countries in order to subject them to this harmful practice. We recommend that you consider adding similar provisions.

CWCS/CEO supports efforts to prohibit FGM in Connecticut. Thank you for your attention, and we look forward to working with you on this issue.