

Testimony in Support of SB 505
An Act Prohibiting Female Genital Mutilation
February 15, 2019

My thanks to Sen John Kissel for introducing this important legislation, and also to Sens. Winfield, Stafstrom, Rebimbas, Bergstein, Blumenthal and the entire Judiciary Committee for your thoughtful consideration of S.B. 505, criminalizing FGM.

FGM (female genital mutilation) is a barbaric and traumatic practice perpetrated upon young girls between the ages of 4-14, sometimes as young as infants, to ensure they remain virgins until marriage. In the U.S. the **AMA** (American Medical Association), **CDC** (Center for Disease Control), and the **AAP** (American Academy of Pediatrics) have all condemned the practice, clearly stating that it has **no medical benefits**, but it carries high risks of serious medical issues including pain, hemorrhage, shock, infection, death, as well as psychological and emotional issues similar to PTSD and lifelong problems with cysts, recurrent bladder and vaginal infections, complications with pregnancy and childbirth. It destroys a woman's ability to enjoy sex.

Most people have little understanding of FGM which is usually performed in secret by non-professionals without the benefit of either sterilized instruments or anesthesia. It is not "just a little nick" as some would like to categorize it. Little girls are held down by mothers, aunts, grandmothers, screaming in pain and terror while part or all of their external female genitalia are removed. Usually the vagina is narrowed and stitched so it has to be re-opened by a woman's husband (using a razor) to consummate the marriage. It is frequently re-stitched following conception, only to be cut again for the birth of the baby. Some women endure multiple cuttings and stitchings throughout their lives

Looking at FGM globally, the **U.N.**, **WHO** (World Health Organization), **UNICEF**, **UNESCO**, and **UNIFEM** have all recognized FGM as not only a harmful practice but an actual **violation of human rights**. Fifty-nine countries have already criminalized FGM but prosecutions are rare so when immigrants come to the U.S. they bring this horrific practice with them. It's one thing to be sensitive to cultural traditions and honor them, until they violate human rights at which point it is incumbent upon us to intervene and codify the law to protect these children from such atrocious physical abuse. The reported incidence of FGM in the U.S. has quadrupled since 1997 with more than 500,00 estimated to be at risk for FGM or have already been cut!

A federal law criminalizing this practice was passed in 1996 but was declared unconstitutional when used in Michigan as a federal judge declared it too be a local

criminal activity falling under the jurisdiction of each state. At present there are 28 states that have enacted anti-FGM bills. Connecticut can no longer afford to remain silent or ignore this atrocity. **We need to pass our own bill this session.**

I daresay that if this were your daughter or granddaughter who was at risk for this barbaric procedure, you would not hesitate for one minute in passing a comprehensive piece of legislation to protect her. We need a strong bill with stiff penalties and a prohibition against transporting little girls across state borders for the purpose of FGM.

So I challenge you today:

Be courageous

Be Decisive

Be proactive

Be protective of innocent little girls in our state.

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