

Feb. 14, 2019



Letters

In the 2019 Connecticut General Assembly session, Connecticut legislators and residents will have an opportunity to protect the rights and the health of young girls in Connecticut via three bills on the same subject. State Representatives Kurt Vail (HB 5142) and William Petit (HB 5361) have introduced bills to criminalize FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) at the state level; additionally, Senator John Kissel has also introduced a bill to end FGM (SB 505), which will have a public hearing on Friday, February 15. They and all our CT state legislators need to hear from their constituents that these bills must be passed. Please contact your state legislators and urge them to co-sponsor all these bills. You can also submit testimony on any or all these bills.

The AHA (Ayaan Hirsi Ali) Foundation describes FGM as follows: "*Female genital mutilation (FGM) is any procedure involving the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs and is often performed on girls between the ages of 4 and 14 to ensure their virginity until marriage.*" The effects of the procedure (many of them lifelong) can include: extreme pain; infection; shock; difficulty with menstruating, urination, and/or childbirth; emotional trauma; and even death. Meanwhile, FGM offers absolutely no medical benefits to its victims, and its results are irreversible.

A federal law criminalizing this horrific procedure was passed in 1996, but was recently declared unconstitutional in part because, according to Judge Bernard Friedman, FGM is a "local criminal activity" that falls under the purview of the states. As it stands now, 28 of our states in the U.S. have passed similar legislation; states which have not yet passed their own bill run the risk of having young girls transported there from other states which have criminalized FGM.

This is, in fact, exactly what transpired in the now infamous Michigan case. In a story that broke in April of 2017, girls from Minnesota (which had already criminalized FGM) were brought to Michigan (which had not yet passed legislation against FGM) to have the procedure performed. The Michigan legislature responded immediately by passing the country's toughest anti-FGM bill to date.

Studies by both the CDC (Center for Disease Control) and the Population Reference Bureau estimate that over 500,000 girls

and women in the U.S. are at risk for FGM or have already been subjected to it. Risk factors are age (typically 4-14) and country of origin; three countries with high rates of cutting, for example, are: Somalia, which cuts 98% of their girls; Eritrea 83%; and Gambia 75%. As refugees from these countries and others have been taken in by the U.S., the frequency of reported FGM procedures has approximately quadrupled since 1997.

Global agencies have expressed their concern regarding FGM. The WHO (World Health Organization) states: "*FGM is a violation of the human rights of girls and women,*" while the U.N.'s statement reads: "*Female genital mutilation (FGM) comprises all procedures that involve altering or injuring the female genitalia for non-medical reasons and is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women.*"

Please contact your state legislators and insist that they support these bills for the sake of all the girls who will suffer if such a bill isn't passed into law.

Thank you!

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