

Testimony regarding Raised Bill No. 1069: An Act Concerning Female Genital Mutilation

March 23, 2024

My name is Jo Keogh. I am the Chair of the Guilford Human Rights Commission, and a member of the Connecticut Counseling Association's Public Policy and Legislative Committee. I have been working with female survivors of sexual assault, rape, and child sexual abuse since 2014.

I was contacted on January 13, 2021, by an out-of-state mental health professional who specializes in treating survivors of FGM/C to inquire whether I might be able to provide counseling services to an adolescent girl from Connecticut. I received no identifying information about her, but was told that she had recently fled Connecticut due to increasing pressure from extended family members to undergo FGM/C, and was claiming sanctuary in New York at the time.

Both of the girl's parents supported her decision not to undergo FGM/C, yet felt unable to protect their daughter from the pressure being applied by elder members of their family to have her undergo the procedure.

This adolescent was fortunate enough to have the presence of mind, resources, and out-of-state contacts to leave Connecticut, but other girls may very well not be so lucky. Nor should any underage girl ever be forced to choose between her family, home, and community and her ability to reach adulthood with her genitalia intact.

The study recommended in SB 1069 will not protect Connecticut's girls from being pressured – or worse, forced – to undergo FGM/C. We must pass a law that bans this practice, and holds those that violate (or attempt to violate) this law accountable for their actions.

Respectfully,

Judith "Jo" Keogh
Guilford, CT