



Maryland FGM Legislation Sample Support Letter

Sample Subject:

Protect Maryland Girls from Female Genital Mutilation: Pass a Bill that Bans Taking Girls Outside State Lines for the Procedure and Strengthen Criminal Penalties

Sample Text:

I am writing to urge you to pass a bill that would strengthen female genital mutilation (FGM) legislation in Maryland by making it a crime to remove a girl from the state to undergo FGM, and that would increase the penalty for FGM from up to 5 years imprisonment and/or a \$5,000 fine to 20 years imprisonment and/or a \$10,000 fine. Girls in the U.S. are being trafficked across state lines to undergo FGM in states that have no existing anti-FGM legislation. Families on the fence about whether or not to cut their girls use harsh existing legislation as an excuse to give to family or community members who may be pressuring them as to why they won't go forward with the procedure. For these reasons, we know that specifically banning taking a girl across state lines for the procedure, and putting in place significant penalties, are important steps in protecting girls from this human rights abuse. In enacting this legislation, we send an important message that female genital mutilation is a serious crime and will not be tolerated in Maryland.

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. FGM has significant and lasting medical consequences for victims. Immediately following the procedure, girls are at risk for severe pain, shock, bleeding, bacterial infection, and injury to nearby tissue. In the long term, girls and women who have suffered this procedure are at risk for recurrent bladder and urinary tract infections, cysts, infertility, and complications during intercourse and childbirth.

The threat of female genital mutilation is a reality for a significant number of girls in the United States. While many think of this as a custom that only occurs in foreign countries, research conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found in 2016 that approximately 513,000 women and girls in the U.S. had either been subjected to female genital mutilation or were at risk. More than 31,820 women and girls are estimated to be at risk in the state of Maryland alone, making it 5th in the nation for highest numbers of at-risk females.

Enacting such a law in Maryland would have a significant deterrent effect and would send a strong message that this conduct is not acceptable in our state.

I therefore urge you to pass legislation that would criminalize removing a minor from the state of Maryland for FGM and impose harsher penalties on those who violate the human rights of girls in this way.