



PUBLIC STATEMENT BY TIM HAMMOND
Executive Director, Genital Autonomy Legal Defense and Education Fund (GALDEF)

at the filing of the legal challenge to Oregon statute Section 163.207 prohibiting genital mutilation
of only female minors (FGM) – Portland, Oregon – March 31, 2025

Oregon's FGM law is one of many statutes dealing with Offenses Against Persons, such as rape, sexual abuse and harassment, spousal and child abuse, theft, and even murder, all of which are gender-neutral. The FGM statute however is the only one that is sex-specific.

Since FGM was already prosecutable under existing assault laws, and very few females in Oregon were at risk of FGM, the new law was completely unnecessary and served primarily as a statement of values.

While we all value the need to protect girls from genital cutting, this law created two new discriminatory rights. The first was an explicitly positive right to genital integrity, applicable only to females. The second was a tacitly negative right, the right to be left alone, but again, applicable only to females and not male or intersex children.

As someone who as a youth fought for the Equal Rights Amendment, I find the current FGM law to be an affront to gender equality.

Now...this isn't a competition over who suffers more, women or men. But let's be honest: genital mutilation is not happening to adult women and men, it's happening to the most vulnerable among us – babies and children – who should all be protected equally.

On this ...many women ...feminists ...and FGM survivors agree.

In 1979, anti-FGM pioneer Fran Hosken wrote the following about bodily integrity, saying:

“Human rights are indivisible, they apply to every society and culture and every continent. We cannot differentiate between black and white, rich and poor, or between male and female, if the concept of human rights is to mean anything at all.”

In 1993, author/filmmaker Alice Walker, talking on National Public Radio about her FGM film, *Warrior Marks*, said of male circumcision:

“I think it is a mutilation. ... we have to ... think about what's being done from the point of view of the person to whom it's happening, namely the children.”

In 1997 feminist pioneer Gloria Steinem spoke about the common ground shared by female and male genital mutilation, saying:

“I stand with many brothers in eliminating that practice too.”

Even circumcised women themselves have opposed male genital mutilation, including filmmaker Soraya Mire, politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali and more recently medical anthropologist Fuambai Ahmadu, who wrote:

“Concern for the rights of the child in this instance should not be gender- or sex- specific.”

Brian Earp, the world’s foremost authority on the ethics of genital mutilation, agrees:

“When it comes to minors and nonmedical genital operations, considerations about whether this is allowed to continue must be taken together and include both genders, ...without special privileges being accorded to one sex over another.”

Judges have even weighed in. The Federal anti-FGM statute was adopted in 1996, but the first attempted prosecution only occurred in 2018, against a Muslim doctor who performed minor nicking of the vulvas of her Muslim child-patients. Before ruling that law to be unconstitutional on Federalist grounds, Judge Bernard Friedman noted:

“As laudable as the prohibition of a particular type of abuse of girls may be, it does not logically further the goal of protecting children on a nondiscriminatory basis.”

Consider this also: Most doctors in the world would never agree to harm a healthy child by cutting into his normal genitals ...and almost all medical associations in the world discourage or condemn newborn circumcision as being UNethical.

In fact, the prime directive of medicine, the Hippocratic Oath, authored by the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates, states: ***I will do no harm or injustice to my patients.*** If Hippocrates were alive today and walked into a U.S. hospital, he’d be shocked and disgusted to see physicians surgically altering the normal genitals of baby boys. He’d be further incensed to learn that those same physicians are knowingly acting as agents of a social custom and excusing their unethical behavior while hiding behind the shield of medicine.

Both MGM and FGM alter the normal anatomy of children without the consent of the individual. Both are indefensible. Newborn circumcision rests on the absurd premise that the only mammal that is born wrong and is in need of immediate surgical correction is the human male. Why does the American medical community define circumcision as preventive medicine? To avoid recognizing it as male genital mutilation. FGM-specific laws further legitimize male circumcision and obscure the fact that it too is genital mutilation.

Circumcision is not health care. It's a custom, just like female genital mutilation, in which doctors should play no role. It’s time for Americans to wake up to the fact that the bodily integrity of all children, regardless of sex, deserves protection from non-medically indicated genital cutting.

The core legal issues here are bodily autonomy and gender equality. Dr. Natalia Kanem of the United Nations Population Fund expressed it this way:

“Bodily autonomy means my body is for me; my body is my own. It’s about power, and it’s about agency. It’s about choice, and it’s about dignity. Bodily autonomy is the foundation for gender equality, and above all, it’s a fundamental right.”

Genital mutilation in the U.S. might affect up to 500,000 females, but it's no exaggeration to say America faces a genital mutilation crisis that we know affects over one and a quarter million newborns every year. That's 3,000 baby boys a day, one every 26 seconds. Under our for-profit corporate medical system, this needless and destructive surgery is at least a \$625 million dollar a year industry in physician fees alone.

For a moment let's set aside sex and imagine that the genital mutilation law was based on the race of the victims. What if it had prohibited genital mutilation of only Black people, leaving Latinos, Asians and Caucasians unprotected? Wouldn't that be discriminatory and worthy of a constitutional challenge?

Today, on the occasion of the filing of this historic legal challenge, I'm pleased to share this recently published observation – maybe even call it a warning – from my colleagues at the Brussels Collaboration on Bodily Integrity, comprised of more than 120 international experts from medicine, law, ethics, women's groups, and human rights organizations:

“[A]s a matter of justice, inclusivity, and gender equality in medical-ethical policy ...clinicians should not be permitted to perform any nonvoluntary genital cutting or surgery in prepubescent minors, irrespective of the latter's sex traits...[T]he hard-won protections that have been put in place for girls...will not be secure against objections and countervailing pressures as long as nonvoluntary, nontherapeutic, nonreligious penile circumcision of newborns continues in healthcare settings.”

This is why I invite all stakeholders to join our efforts to recognize that genital mutilation laws must adopt gender neutral language to protect children's basic human right to bodily integrity, regardless of sex, so they can grow up to decide for themselves how much of their genitals they get to keep.

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EXHIBIT A to PUBLIC STATEMENT BY TIM HAMMOND – MARCH 31, 2025
FEMINIST QUOTES ON MALE GENITAL MUTILATION

1979: Early anti-FGM campaigner and author, Fran Hosken, wrote [*The Hosken Report: Genital and Sexual Mutilation of Females*]

“Human rights are indivisible, they apply to every society and culture and every continent. We cannot differentiate between black and white, rich and poor, or between male and female, if the concept of human rights is to mean anything at all.”

1989: Hanny Lightfoot-Klein, author of the 1989 landmark book on FGM, *Prisoners of Ritual*, wrote:

“The reasons given for female circumcision in Africa and for routine male circumcision in the U.S. are essentially the same. Both falsely tout the positive health benefits of the procedures. Both promise cleanliness and the absence of “bad” genital odors, as well as greater attractiveness and acceptability of the sex organs. The affected individuals in both cultures have come to view these procedures as something that was done for them and not to them.”

1993: In an interview on National Public Radio about her anti-FGM movie *Warrior Marks*, author and filmmaker Alice Walker said of male circumcision:

“I think it is a mutilation. ...In all of it we have to try to think about what is being done from the point of view of the person to whom it is happening, namely the children.”

1994: Congresswoman Pat Schroeder, the lead sponsor of Federal legislation to prohibit genital mutilation of female minors, wrote the following in a letter to a constituent who questioned why her legislation did not include protection for male children, Using the term MGM for male genital mutilation, Schroeder responded:

“MGM is no longer considered a medically necessary procedure, and is painful for male infants. It will require grassroots work in your local area, however, to raise people's awareness of the problems associated with MGM. The struggle to draw attention to FGM and to create the critical mass necessary to legislate against it was a long and difficult one, MGM will require similar efforts.”

1995: Somali filmmaker Soraya Mire, endorsed the 1995 documentary *Whose Body, Whose Rights?* by saying:

“The painful cries of little boys being circumcised remind me of my own painful experience of female genital mutilation. It is the norm in my culture to mutilate girls, as it is in the U.S. for boys. It really terrifies me to know this.”

1997: pioneering feminist, Gloria Steinem, remarked in an address before the 92nd Street Young Women and Men's Hebrew Association:

“I would like to remind us that we all share patriarchy, which is the pillar of almost every current political system, capitalist or socialist. And it has a rock bottom requirement, the control of women's bodies as the most basic means of production, the means of reproduction. ... These patriarchal controls limit men's sexuality too. That's why men are asked symbolically to submit the sexual part of themselves and their sons to patriarchal authority,

which seems to be the origin of male circumcision, a practice that, even as advocates admit, is medically unnecessary 90% of the time. Speaking for myself, I stand with many brothers in eliminating that practice too."

2012: Circumcised Somali-born Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali, stated the following in an interview for a 2012 film about male genital mutilation:

"I think that male circumcision is worse than an incision [nicking] of the girl. With boys, a lot of skin is removed."

[Mom, Why did you Circumcise Me? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5kaEEckXmU&rco=1>]

2017: Circumcised Sierra Leonean-American activist, Fuambai Ahmadu, wrote:

"Concern for the rights of the child in this instance should not be gender- or sex- specific. Either there is a ban on all genital modifications on minors or certain operations ought to be permitted on children, irrespective of sex. ...Multiculturalism as expressed through the extension of individual freedom and equality to all and across all groups in a pluralistic society (no special protection and no special privileges) is the best thing for group preservation, for feminism, and for all liberal societies."

[Fuambai Ahmadu. Equality, Not Special Protection: Multiculturalism, Feminism, and Female Circumcision in Western Liberal Democracies. In Universalism not Uniformity (Cassaniti JL and Menon U, eds.). University of Chicago Press, 2017:214-236]

2016: Ethicist Brian Earp writing on medically unnecessary childhood genital mutilation customs:

"When it comes to minors and nonmedical genital operations, considerations about whether this is allowed to continue have to be taken together and include both genders, all ethnic groups whether dominant or minority, without special privileges being accorded to one sex over another or one cultural group over another because of assumptions made by members of dominant groups about the inherent superiority of their own sex, religion, or cultural heritage."

[Earp, Brian. 2016. "Between Moral Relativism and Moral Hypocrisy: Reframing the Debate on 'FGM.'" *Kennedy Institute of Ethics* 26 (2):105–144]

2022: Dr. Natalia Kanem. Executive Director/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA):

"Bodily autonomy means my body is for me; my body is my own. It's about power, and it's about agency. It's about choice, and it's about dignity. Bodily autonomy is the foundation for gender equality, and above all, it's a fundamental right."

[Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), keynote on "Bodily Autonomy – a fundamental right" at 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, 16 March 2022.]