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Press Release

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Support Grows for Ban on Male Circumcision

Bill proposals to regulate male circumcision now circulating in Congress and fifteen U.S. state legislatures.

SAN DIEGO, California – John Soemer from New Jersey remembers the moment when he learned that a part of his penis was missing as if it were yesterday. “I am now 61 years old, but I was in fifth grade when I first found out I was circumcised,” recalled John. “I had seen an intact friend’s penis when he relieved himself while we were out fishing, and when I asked him why his looked so different, he told me what had been done to me. Back then neither one of us knew the proper name for any of those parts, so he called his foreskin his ‘funskin’. That gave me enough of an idea that I was missing out on something, and left me feeling very cheated.”

John is not the only circumcised man who feels that he was robbed of his right to an intact body. While thousands of men are taking up foreskin restoration to reverse some of their circumcision damage, others are working with human rights groups to stop circumcision from being forced onto infants and children. Today, John and a group of activists from fifteen states joined this movement when they participated in the Third Annual USA MGM (Male Genital Mutilation) Bill Submission. Together they submitted letters and bill proposals via fax, email, postal mail, and hand delivery to more than 2,700 federal and state legislators in a single day – up from 660 legislators the year before. The proposed legislation, written by San Diego based MGMBill.org, would make current U.S. female genital mutilation laws gender neutral so that boys are legally protected from circumcision the same way that girls are protected.

Matthew Hess, President of MGMBill.org, said that infant circumcision is sexual assault. “Male circumcision permanently damages male sexual function, and it is done forcefully, without the consent of the child. Just as cutting off any part of a baby girl’s genital anatomy would be considered a criminal act, amputation of a boy’s foreskin for medically unnecessary reasons should be treated as a crime of equal stature. If a fully informed adult wants to undergo circumcision for cosmetic, religious, or other personal reasons, then that is a decision he can make after he turns eighteen.”

Chaz Antonelli of Quincy, Massachusetts, took a day off from work to hand out copies of the MGM Bill proposal to legislators at the State House in Boston. Like most American men born in the 1960’s, Chaz was routinely circumcised as an infant in a hospital. “As a newborn baby, I could not protect myself from being circumcised,” said Chaz. “While I support an adult’s right to alter his or her own genitals if that is their preference, forcing circumcision onto a helpless child is a clear human rights violation. I’m here today because I want Massachusetts to be the first U.S. state to ban routine infant male circumcision.”

Male circumcision legislation is also becoming a topic of discussion in several European parliaments. Sweden became the first developed country in modern times to regulate and restrict male circumcision on human rights grounds in 2001, and in 2003 the Denmark National Council for Children called on lawmakers to ban the practice for the benefit of the children. In 2004, well-known Dutch Member of Parliament Ayaan Hirsi Ali called on fellow legislators to enact a similar ban, and she recently stated on a Dutch television documentary that male circumcision is “a form of mutilation” and that “the consequences can be worse for boys than for girls” when compared to some common types of female circumcision.

In addition to all 540 members of Congress, state legislatures that received MGM Bill proposals from their local residents today included California, Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, and Virginia.