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Press Release

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Gay Rights Advocates March Against Male Genital Mutilation

Movement to ban medically unnecessary infant male circumcision is highlighted at the nation's largest gay event.

SAN FRANCISCO, California – In a show of support for male sexual rights, twenty activists marched against the controversial practice of infant circumcision during the 36th Annual LGBT Pride Parade in San Francisco on Sunday. The participants carried banners, handed out information, and wore black t-shirts reading “Stop Male Genital Mutilation”. The parade contingent was greeted with cheers by onlookers who lined up to watch the procession.

The Male Genital Mutilation Pride Parade contingent was sponsored by MGMBill.org, a San Diego, California, based group seeking to amend current federal and state female genital mutilation laws to be gender neutral. Michael Keith, the coordinator of the contingent, said that legislators need to take action to protect infant boys from being circumcised for medically unnecessary reasons. “We’re here to do more than just educate the public”, said Keith. “We’re also here to tell lawmakers that we demand action. It has been nearly a decade since the enactment of U.S. laws that protect girls from genital cutting, and during that time more than 10 million American boys have had their penises forcefully mutilated by circumcision. It is long overdue for Congress and state legislatures to enact similar legislation that protects males.”

Although reports of female circumcision have been virtually nonexistent in the United States since Congress enacted the Female Genital Mutilation Prohibition Act in 1997, male circumcision continues to be performed on nearly 60% of all newborn boys for cultural and religious reasons. Circumcision amputates the foreskin from a baby boy’s penis, resulting in reduced sexual feeling and response. The practice has also been shown to cause long term posttraumatic stress disorder and emotional damage similar to that experienced by victims of female circumcision.

David Wilton, a marcher in the Male Genital Mutilation contingent, said circumcision of infant boys is a general human rights issue as well as a gay rights issue. “Genital integrity of children is a fundamental human right, but it is also an important part of the gays rights movement because it will allow men to decide for themselves as adults whether or not they want to undergo circumcision. Gay and straight men alike will never have true sexual freedom so long as one person is allowed to amputate part of another man’s sex organs without his consent.” Wilton is an active member of the Bay Area Intactivists Group, a regional group working to educate doctors, parents, and the general public about the damage caused by circumcision.

Dan Strandjord, who traveled from his home in Chicago, Illinois, to participate in the parade, also put the emphasis on human rights. “I’ve traveled to more than 70 countries around the world and have seen various mutilations of children done in the name of custom, tradition, or religion. How can we expect other countries to respect human rights if we don’t? Why do we accept male circumcision? Current federal and state female genital mutilation laws violate the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution because they don’t include equal protection for boys, and legislators have a responsibility to correct this inequality by enacting the MGM Bill proposals. If they don’t act soon, then it is only a matter of time until existing female circumcision laws are ruled unconstitutional by the courts and American doctors can circumcise girls again.”

Strandjord is a longtime intactivist who is well known by students and faculty in and around the University of Chicago campus. He pointed out that the University of Chicago performed female circumcisions until at least the 1940s, and earlier this month he attended a circumcision trial in Chicago as an observer for the national intactivist movement. The trial pits a mother who wants to have her 8-year old son circumcised against the wishes of the boy’s father, who refuses to allow the circumcision on grounds that it will cause long term sexual and emotional damage. The couple is divorced, but both parents have legal decision making authority on medical care for their son.

The San Francisco Pride Celebration draws over one million attendees each year, and is the largest gay pride event in the United States. In a separate gathering on the same day, genital integrity advocates also marched in the Heritage of Pride Parade in New York City to raise awareness about the harmful effects of infant circumcision.